



Thoughts on the Journey

Suanne Gettings—Pastoral Associate—May 26, 2019

In my family, as I was growing up, we had a number of surrogate aunts and uncles. They were mostly dear friends of my parents who were too close for us to call them 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.' So, out of respect for our elders, they were given the honorary titles of endearment: 'aunt' or 'uncle'. There was Clair & Russ, Rosie, Alice, Kent, Mary, and Jim to name a few. These were people who were distinctive members of our family and important influences in our lives as we were growing up. They were frequent guests at our dinner table, regulars at our celebrations, and folks who brought joy every time they pulled in the driveway. Regardless of what our family was going through, they were rocks of support as were my parents to them and their families. As I look back on each one of them today, I am grateful for the love and kindness that they, not only extended to my parents, but to all nine of their children as well. However, there were several standouts in this group: Fr. Porter, Fr. Boyle, and Uncle Butch. Even though the priests were never called 'uncle', for obvious reasons, they still had uncle status in our family. Uncle Butch, however, held a distinct role for reasons I will explain.

Uncle Butch Kauffman was a high school friend to both my parents. I think he even dated my mother for awhile in their early twenties. After high-school, he joined the Marines and became a career military officer. Because of his tours of duty, we didn't see him much, but he was a bigger-than-life legend because of the stories about him that my Mom and Dad shared with us. Uncle Butch didn't have much family to speak of because of his career, so our family was his go-to whenever he was home on leave. When he came, he always brought little gifts from places he visited in the world and his stories came to life when he would tell them.

Sometime during the Vietnam war, Uncle Butch came home without his legs. He didn't die in the sense that he was physically gone, but this loss he suffered had profound consequences on his life as he knew it. He went from a life of serving our country and fighting for our freedoms, to a life of total confinement in a veterans home in Ft. Thom-

as, Kentucky, which was just across the river from Cincinnati where our family lived.

To my parents credit, they would dress us up in our Sunday finest and we would go to visit Uncle Butch on a regular basis. This once strong man with a tall military stance, was now strapped in a wheelchair of dependence. As a child I remember the sights and smells of that place, but what I remember more was the resilience of this dear man we called 'uncle'. Once Uncle Butch adjusted to his new-normal, his anger dissipated, his laughter returned, along with his trust in God, which he spoke of often. He would give us turns riding on his lap in his wheelchair and proudly show us off to the other veterans. Uncle Butch had rock-star status in our hearts until the complications from his injuries eventually took his life. One of the last things he made for me, was a leather clutch bag for my water colors and brushes; I treasure it to this day.

In John's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples before he ascends, that he will send us an Advocate, the Holy Spirit. Jesus also told them,

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”

Somewhere between suffering a tragic loss and his natural death, Uncle Butch had to surrender to the enemy of *fear* and embrace our God who gave him the strength to live real courage in the face of severe testing. The same holds true for family and friends who have lost those they love in the line of duty and live with the aftermath. We memorialize these fallen heroes once a year, but these loved ones who have lost them, preserve their memory close to their hearts every day.

On this Memorial Day, we give thanks to those who gave their lives for our freedom. We also give thanks to our Father in heaven who gives them peace... not as the world gives peace, but rather the perfect peace that only God can give.