

Dear Friends,

I hope that your weekend went well. Much of it was grey and drizzly. But as I write this now, it is 3:22 p.m. on Sunday afternoon. The sky is blue again and the sun is shining and has been for the better part of an hour now.

I've been fighting the urge to write you about a dream I had Saturday morning. I guess I'm losing that fight because I'm starting to write about it now. In fact, it was more a nightmare than a dream.

It wasn't a nightmare about the end of the world. It wasn't a nightmare about the Coronavirus. It was a nightmare about me.

In the dream I was visiting my last parish, the Church of Saint Peter. Whether I had been invited by the pastor or just showed up wasn't clear. What was clear was that in the dream I had a critical spirit. The once little white clapboard country church had been enlarged and renovated in an ornate rococo style that I thought looked awful, and I was *quietly* expressing my ardent disapproval to anyone who would listen. As I watched the dream unfold I was saddened by the *proud*, critical spirit I was seeing in myself.

As the dream went on I watched myself looking around *me* to see how many people were noticing and recognizing *me* and rushing over to acknowledge *me*. But I left that parish twelve years ago and there were a lot of new people there who didn't recognize *me* at all. In fact, there was no rush at all by anyone to see *me*.

Then I saw Saint Peter's current pastor walking toward *me*. I guess there was going to be a Mass and I was going to concelebrate it with him. I was hoping he would ask *me* preach the homily, but at the same time I seemed to be feigning indifference, pretending that it didn't matter to *me*, that I was *not* hoping he would ask *me* to preach, except that it did matter to *me*. I was behaving hypocritically. Then, just as I began to surmise that I wasn't going to be invited to preach I... woke up. Thank God.

Talk about a wake-up call from **God**.

Pride never looked more frightening to me then when I saw it in that early morning dream. *Pride* never looked more disfiguring to me then when I saw it in myself. Later in the morning, when I offered Mass in my rectory quarters, I was struck to the heart by the Entrance Antiphon of the Mass:

The waves of death rose about me; the pains of the netherworld surrounded me.

In my anguish I called to the Lord, and from His holy temple He heard my voice.

The antiphon seemed to describe how I felt awaking from that blessed nightmare that left me feeling frightened, chastened and humbled, all hopefully for the better.

Thinking about it now, I suspect that the dream was, in part, a natural reaction to a book I began reading shortly after Bishop Burbidge suspended the celebration of Masses in public. *Humility of Heart* is the title of the book; its author was Padre Gaetano Maria da Bergamo, an 18th century Italian priest. I intend to read this book over and over again for the rest of my life. I must; I need to.

As a sample, consider the following; it is the first paragraph of the first page of the book:

IN Paradise there are many Saints who never gave alms on earth; their poverty justified them. There are many Saints who never mortified their bodies by fasting, or wearing hair shirts: their bodily infirmities excused them. There are many Saints who were not virgins: their vocation was otherwise. But in Paradise there is no Saint who was not humble.

Our Lord once said, *Learn of me, for I am meek, and humble of heart.* (Matt 11:29). I want to learn; I don't want to suffer another nightmare like Saturday's ever again.

This morning, as I was considering this letter, I remembered something again from my life as a boy on Campbell Avenue. So many of the games we played back then focused on 29 cent rubber *Spaldine* balls; for the rest, we used our imaginations. I even made up a game of my own, a great game for summer nights called *Martians!*

At the end of the day we played *Army*, most of all, over and over again. Back then my two favorite T.V. shows were *Combat* and *Gallant Men*. I should have liked *Gallant Men* better because in that show our *GI's* were fighting the Nazis in *Italy*, to which I could relate. But I preferred *Combat* with Vic Morrow, even though in that show our *GI's* were fighting the Nazis in *France*, to which I could not relate. By the way, I never asked anyone back then, but I always wondered what *GI* stood for. One day I just figured *GI* probably stood for *Good Italians!* I'm not kidding!

What does all this have to do with humility, Father?

You see, when we played *Army* we got to throw dirt bombs that would *explode* on all the trees and sidewalks, and with each brown clump thrown we'd yell, *Hit the Dirt* and fell to the ground; you had to do this when you got *killed* too, a humbling experience. *Hit the Dirt*; stay close to the *humus* (the root word of *humilitas* from which we derive our English words, *human* and *humility*).

Remember you are dust, and to dust you will return. I want to remember, and *I will* remember. *I will it.* My eternal life in Heaven with Jesus and the Saints depends on it.

I will strive to become the humble pastor God is calling me to be, that I need me to be, and that you deserve me to be, but this will not be accomplished in a day. Humility eludes me, but it mustn't any longer. I don't know how much longer I have Dr. Birx!

In closing, please, please remember that I carry you with me to the altar of God each day when I offer Mass, taking your cares and concerns, your fears and anxieties, and everything I can think of that you might be carrying, worrying or praying about. Rest assured; I take you with me.

Now I send you my blessing through the air! Until I see you again, I am still

Your grateful pastor,

Father DeMartino