

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Lost and Found

There is a drawer in the sacristy that holds a hundred stories. Open it some time and watch a world unfold. There are rosaries, some losing their color, counted by unknown hands. There are thick glasses, for eyes that need help to pray. There are ancient prayer books, small and concise, their leather covers cracked with age, their pages beginning to fall loose. Some have holy cards tucked inside. Some have pictures inside: There's a young man standing by his car or a group gathered around a cake. A few of the books are in Latin. Others have faded notations written inside in pencil, in a foreign language—personal reminders that, like everything else in that drawer, are now missing.

Welcome to the parish's lost and found.

Invariably, after Sunday Mass, an usher will bring back something that ends up in that drawer. An umbrella, a baby bottle, a purse, glasses, even a wallet. Most items get picked up later that day. But some are never claimed, and sit there, quietly gathering dust.

It is the things that seem to be most needed, and most precious, that end up being misplaced. How do people get by without their glasses or asthma inhalers? How could someone leave behind something that's so clearly a vital part of a life? You'll also find in there baseball caps and children's storybooks and, once in a while, a camera or car keys. It's amazing what we allow to slip through our fingers.

Why is it that so much of what we have ends up being taken for granted, neglected, lost? It happens in friendships and marriages, between parents and children.

It happens, too, in our faith. Christianity requires attention. It demands something. As Chesterton famously put it: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." Living "The Way" requires things that we humans inherently shun: sacrifice, humility, martyrdom, pain. No wonder so many of us end up misplacing our faith.

The Gospel promises that it is worth the effort to hold onto our belief, to keep it from slipping through our fingers. But it takes attention, care, practice.

Practice. There's a reason, I think, why we "practice" Catholicism. It is something that needs to be done, again and again, like scales on a piano. It needs to be perfected. There is a habit to it—the "Habit of Being," as Flannery O'Connor so artfully put it. It's a habit worth getting into.

Try it sometime. Practice that habit. Practice prayer. Practice love. Practice reverence. Practice silence, and simplicity, and fervor. Practice finding God in the details of daily life—in the office, on the subway, over the kitchen sink.

Even, perhaps, practice it in church. Practice keeping track of the thousand small details that together form our faith, and that touch our lives with grace.

Paying attention to those things, I think, can keep faith from ending up in a dark wooden drawer, lost and waiting to be found.

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