

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Don't Look Back

Do you have that fall feeling yet?

As we head into fall, doctors and sociologists are telling us it's time to start feeling blue. Fall, they tell us, is the season of drudgery. It's a time for getting back to business. It's when we bolt the windows and change the tires and winterize the tractor. It's the season for homework and dead leaves and—at its gloomiest, in late October—stale candy.

Liturgically, in the life of the Church, we are deep into Ordinary Time. Holidays and holy days are few and far between. Advent is still months away. Christmas is a faint gleam in the darkening skies. And besides: Who wants to think about Christmas this soon?

My mistakes made me who I am today.

This is a time of year, I think, when the very ordinariness of life can consume us, and depress us. We feel bogged down. And no wonder: In the days to come we will wear heavier clothes, and the layers will make everyone look fat. (At least it's a kind of shared misery. No one is spared the season of layering, with all those plump pads of down.)

Surfing through the Internet, I found one bit of sage advice for those of us stuck in the depressing doorway to fall. A columnist offered three little words: *Don't look back*. The author advised people suffering from autumn ennui to celebrate every season, embrace every moment, and look forward to what will be coming in November and December (notably: pumpkin pie and eggnog ... two more things to blame for making us all look fat).

There is a simple wisdom in that, I think. *Don't look back*.

It's no coincidence that, in one of the most famous episodes of the Bible, a woman looks back and is transformed into salt. Glancing over our shoulders at the past can sap the sweetness from life and turn all of us salty. The fact is, we are all products of where we've been and what we've done. We carry the dust of our lives on the soles of our shoes.

Years ago, I worked on a television profile of Madonna, and the interviewer asked her: "Do you have any regrets?" She replied, without even a pause: "No. My mistakes made me who I am today." One can argue and disagree about just who or what, exactly, Madonna is today—but she had a good point. To elaborate on that: I think that if you don't keep looking forward, you'll never see where you're going.

In other words, when fall is in the air, it's fruitless to feel nostalgic about summer. It doesn't do much good to pine for the past.

We are hurtling, anyway, toward the deepest and darkest season of the year, winter, when time is fractured and night overtakes day—when an old year dies and a new one is born. The weeks ahead are a preparation for that, ordinary days in Ordinary Time, when we can quietly take stock, amid the first frost and the last of the leaves.

Fall can make us feel sad. It can breed melancholy as thick and gnarled as a wool sweater. But only if we let it. So heed this advice: Don't look back.

You may be astonished at what lies ahead.

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