

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Seeing Jesus at Disney World

Don't laugh. Spending several days visiting Disney World has become an annual ritual. My wife and I first went there in 1996, for a one-time vacation, to celebrate our tenth wedding anniversary. We didn't expect to fall in love with the place, or feel so unashamedly giddy about it. But, to our unexpected amazement, the place captivated us, and we've been going back ever since.

Before we left, a priest in Baltimore who reads my blog wrote to me, wishing me a happy vacation and said, "Let us know if you see Jesus there."

Well, yes. As a matter of fact, I did.

Jesus was there at the Winn-Dixie, where a middle-aged gal in blue jeans and a torn t-shirt noticed that we were tourists (did our t-shirts give us away?) and cheerfully offered us her shopping membership number so that we could save a whopping sixty cents on our purchase of frozen pizza and bottled water.

He was there at our hotel, where a little boy of about seven was walking back to his room with his parents and grandparents after an exciting night at the pool and he took his grandfather's hand and said, very sincerely, "Grampa, thank you for taking us to the arcade." And the grandfather answered, very sincerely, "You're very welcome."

He was there at the water park, where mothers and fathers and kids waded into the water and climbed into inner tubes and held hands and giggled as the tubes meandered around the "lazy river" while the music system cranked out Beach Boys music.

He was there at the end of a long and humid day when my wife and I climbed into a hammock at one of the resorts and looked at kids building sand castles and we wiggled our feet and wondered if there's a corner of heaven just like this.

He was there in the sense of enchantment in the nightly fireworks over Cinderella Castle, when Jiminy Cricket tells us to wish upon a star, and we look up and see millions of them exploding above us.

He was there in the Illumi Nations fireworks show at Epcot—which, I told my wife, is Disney's version of the Easter Vigil. It begins with a blast of fire and proceeds to tell the entire story of creation, from Day One until now, in all its joy and excitement and glittering hope. "We go on," the show's anthem insists. Yes. We do. And isn't that a wonder? I've probably seen that fireworks show two dozen times and it never fails to bring me to tears.

He was there in the thousand acts of thoughtfulness that are part of the Disney tradition. One morning, I went to the front desk of our hotel and asked if they knew, off-hand, the hours for one of their competitors, SeaWorld. Instead of looking shocked, the gal smiled and clicked her computer. She printed out not only the hours, but the show times and directions.

He was there in the sense of ongoing creation and re-creation (and recreation) that has made the Disney experience so unique and, yes, magical. From fountains that dance, to trash cans that talk, it is all a marvel to behold, and a gift to be grateful for.

Oh: I know. It's all about making money. Of course. What isn't these days? And it's gotten so expensive you might as well just turn over all the contents of your wallet when you pass through the turnstile.

But there is something unashamedly, unabashedly good about a place that exists, first and foremost, to give joy, particularly for families.

C. S. Lewis said that joy is the business of heaven.

Which perhaps makes the business of Disney World all the more remarkable and, in its own way, heavenly.

Yes, I had glimpses of Jesus at Disney World.

And I suspect many other people do, every day—whether they realize it or not.

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