

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Taking the Stairs

Far too often, we all tend to take the easy way. An example is my reluctance to take the stairs, instead of the elevator, even though my doctor thinks that would be a good idea for my heart.

Then the elevator in our building broke down. And for a little over 24 hours, I was forced to take the stairs. It was nice. Once. Maybe twice. But, honestly, I prefer the elevator.

We live on the sixth floor, so when a little thing like an elevator malfunction occurs, you tend to think twice before running to the deli for a quart of milk or a pint of Chubby Hubby (insert your own fat deacon joke here.) But taking the stairs offered me more than just a nice cardio workout and a chance to burn off a few stray calories. It also gave me a rare opportunity to see what's up while going up.

On the second floor, I could smell that someone was cooking bacon. In one of the hallways, the carpet was stained by what appeared to be splashes of bleach. I also spotted neighbors I usually never see and said hello to them and then wondered to myself, "Do they really live here? They didn't seem very friendly. Could they be carrying explosives in their underwear?"

Wandering from floor to floor, I heard TV shows, movies, rock music, children, laughter. I smelled fish and mothballs. I felt as if I was trespassing in a strange land. This was all, to me, uncharted territory.

But the brief experience made me wonder: How much of our lives do we miss by not taking the stairs? What do we bypass by doing what is faster, easier, more expedient?

Our ancestors came here by ship, on a journey that sometimes took months. They plowed rocky fields with horses, crossed prairies on wagons and built budding metropolises with little more than their bare

hands and a determined glare. They took their time, when time was more precious and their lives were much shorter; I suspect they were forced to notice more, dawdle less and take nothing for granted.

If you look back even further into history, scholars tell us that the early disciples spread the Gospel almost entirely by foot. Paul, we're told, traveled around the Mediterranean by boat, but logged most of his mileage by pure sandal-power, walking from town to town, synagogue to synagogue. Maybe that colored his preaching and tested his patience; maybe it also served to strengthen his ankles and embolden his faith.

Maybe it helped give early Christianity—literally—legs.

When you discover how far he traveled and the sacrifices he made, you realize that something powerful was compelling him on, and fueling similar travels by other early Christians, all eager to spread The Word, very often at the risk of death.

Would any of us today be that tenacious and persistent? Please. I have a hard enough time when the elevator stalls.

I don't know if I'll try harder to take the stairs regularly in the New Year. It's the sort of resolution I know I'd be prone to break.

But I do think I'll resolve this year to keep my eyes and ears open. To look for things that I might miss and to listen for things I might otherwise ignore. There's something to be gained, I think, from taking time and—at least metaphorically—taking the stairs.

I just hope I don't have to do it too often....

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