

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

The Joy of Travel

You never know when God will throw you an unexpected surprise—you know, the kind that is clearly designed to test your patience or, perhaps, your sanity. Once my wife and I got a couple of those while traveling to Washington over Thanksgiving.

The first surprise was at the airport: bag charges. Every. Bag. Checked. Ka-ching. The last time we had flown they let you check one for free. No more. The two bags we checked ended up costing us almost as much as another round trip fare. For that price, the bags should have earned frequent flier miles and gotten free pretzels.

After we landed in DC, we went to Avis where I'd reserved my usual standard-sized car. I was surprised to arrive at the counter and learn that they didn't have it. In fact, they didn't have any cars. At all. The clerk told me that I could wait an hour or two, for the possibility of a car arriving from Dulles. "Or," the clerk told us, "you could take one of those," and she nodded to what was, so help me, a massive white cruise ship on wheels. It was a 12-passenger mini-van.

Since we had a Thanksgiving dinner to get to, and it was getting late, waiting another couple hours wasn't an option.

I should mention here that there were only two of us who'd be using this thing. And, of course, there's this: I'm not a driver. Really. I don't own a car. Oh, I have a license, and can find the pedals and turn the wheel, but I'm a subway and taxi guy. The prospect of driving a 12-passenger van did not fill my heart with glee. Neither did the fact that while I stood there in the Avis garage, staring at this thing, my wife couldn't stop laughing. She became downright hysterical several minutes later, when she discovered that the front seat was so high, she couldn't get in on her own. I actually had to give her a boost to get her into the thing.

By the time I had started the van and found the heater, she was wiping tears from her eyes. I wasn't laughing. The van was so massive, and the seats so high, my ears popped.

Those who were in the van—well, that would be just one other person, the laughing deacon's wife, along with two irritatingly expensive bags-with-wheels that kept rolling around the huge, empty space—will attest that I spent a fair amount of my time on the Washington Beltway screaming. Every time we neared a bridge or an overpass, I could swear we were going to hit it, and I'd scream like a banshee: "Duck!!"

And the deacon's wife, of course, thought this was a riot.

Long story short: we survived our trip, and had a nice time. We made it home in one piece. We had one more terrifying moment at the end of the trip, when I had to drive under a low-hanging metal bar to return the van. Ignoring the honking Avis renters behind me, I made my wife get out and see if it would actually fit. (It did, but barely.)

I'm not quite sure what God was up to when He put me behind the wheel of that van. Maybe He was telling me that my next career will be as captain of the QE2. I don't know.

But I did know this: I wasn't looking forward to a return trip at Christmas.

I realized that traveling just isn't as much fun as it used to be.

Unless, of course, you're my wife.

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