

"The Storyteller"

Homily of December 19, 2004

by Father Brian Joyce

Advent and Christmas, these winter holidays and holy days, are the time for stories and storytellers. At this time of year, I can't help but remember Margo Schorno who served as our associate pastor for twelve years until her death in 1999. She was a storyteller par excellence and brought story after story into our liturgies and into our lives. There was Rosie and Michael, the Story of the Rag Coat, the Tale of the Three Trees, Brother Eagle and Sister Sky at Thanksgiving, "Mama, Do You Love Me?" on Mothers' Day, as well as "I'll Love You Forever." At Christmas, along with her famous Christmas Crib Parade, she introduced us to the Polar Express long before Tom Hanks had ever heard of it. She told us the tale of the luminarias, of Mary's Donkey and the Donkey's Dream, of the little boy who led the Three Wise Men, and many, many more.

Just a few short days, really a few short hours, before her death, weakened by leukemia and chemotherapy, her senses well dulled by exhaustion and morphine, while two parishoners, Barbara Doane and Jill Harcke were with her, she suddenly sat bolt upright and demanded, "Who's going to remember the stories? ... Someone has to remember the stories." "We will. We all will," they assured her. Then she had them go through the pantomime of an impromptu liturgy. "Hold the book up high," she told Barbara. "We want the Son to be able to see you.... We want the Son to be able to see you." Barbara later explained to me that, by "the Son," she meant Jesus. It's interesting that, when Jesus told His own story, that's what He called Himself, "the Son.... the Son of Man." He calls Himself "the Son of Man" over and over again dozens of times, on dozens of occasions. But Bible scholars tell us "Son of Man" is not really an accurate translation. What he was really saying was "the Human One.... I am the Human One."

What does that mean, coming from the Divine Son of God, coming from Emmanuel, "God with us?" What does it mean when Jesus calls Himself "the Human One?" It means, first of all, that He is saying that He is one of us, in solidarity with the whole human race, that His journey, His way, His story is very much part and parcel of our story and always will be. Secondly, it means that Jesus is a model, a pattern for what it means to be truly human. To follow Jesus is to become fully human; to ignore His life and story is to be less than human, less than we are called to be, than we are meant to be, and than we are able to be. Thirdly, it suggests that the main concern of Jesus is to help us to live a fully human life.

The fact that Jesus calls Himself "the Human One" tells us that the way to become close to God is not to try to escape the world with its issues and problems, but to live fully authentic human lives. A good number of religious people and religions have made the mistake of undervaluing and

dismissing our lives on earth as simply a test to see whether we deserve to get into heaven. Instead, Jesus, the Human One, invites us to live fully human lives as He did by committing ourselves to values of justice, respect, personal integrity, care of the earth, care of the needy, and so on.

It's amazing how often we can miss that, forget that, but good storytellers do not. That detail that there is no room in the inn, that report that the innocent get slaughtered around him, that recollection of the Flight into Egypt, fleeing from abusive authority, and that scene with the grown Jesus telling the powerful that only the truth will set them free, and other stories from the "Poor Little Match Girl" to the empty-handed drummer boy call us to look around, to notice one another, to be gifts to one another. They tell us that in our empty moments, our hurts and hardship and suffering are not just hurdles to get behind us but are the very places where we find Emmanuel. God is with us in our personal stories.

Christmas is not the big deal. Easter is the big feast, by far the most important event, where Christ achieves victory over death for us. But Christmas with its stories reminds us that the Son is with us, the "Human One," light for us in our darkness, hope for our world. May your Christmas story and your own personal stories through the years be firmly rooted in God, our Light in the darkness, Hope for our world.

As an addend, we include a poem written by Barbara Doane in December, 2004, in memory of Margo, the Storyteller.

Who Will Remember the Stories?

"Who will remember the stories?" she said
As she sat up tall on her death bed.
"Someone must keep the stories alive!"
"I will. We all will," we replied.

We still remember each one today
At Christmas and Easter and every other day,
Stories on slides or acted out
Gathering people from all about.

Stories in Church, stories outside,
Stories of Mary's long donkey ride,
Stories of fish and penguins and birds,
Stories that tell us to spread God's word.

Yes, we remember and will never forget.
Yes, Margo, we do, so do not fret.
In fact, as time passes, we not only recall
Old stories, but new ones are made by all.

For one of the greatest gifts received from you
Was a love to create stories. So what do we do?
We remember them; we read them; we create them too.
And we do all of this because of you!