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Communion, coffee and a sausage biscuit

Patty Mccarty | May. 27, 2009

(Pat Marrin)

I slip my hands into the wrist straps of my new Nordic walking sticks and head for a chapel a few blocks from the house that has held my life for 40 years. The morning is full of blue sky, sunshine and chilly March breezes.

Yellow and white daffodils sway in almost every yard. Yellow blossoms like stringy four-pointed stars cling to slim forsythia branches. Delicate white blooms of Bradford pear trees seem to have come out overnight.

Mothers are driving their kids to the big Catholic grade school nearby. A boy twists in his seat to look at me, probably wondering why that old lady is pumping ski poles when there?s not a flake of snow in sight. He watches me. I watch the forsythia.

I stride past the church, the school, the new gymnasium, a small parking lot nearly full of teachers? cars and enter the door at the back of the chapel. A few years back, this was a Methodist church. Now it?s the five-days-a-week home to a community of worshipers who are old enough and free enough to value spending a little time most days with their creator and redeemer.

I am the first one here, except for the man who has been working his way to heaven for years by being available whenever a priest needs a server for a weekday Mass.

Next comes the pastor who greets me and says he?s glad I ?made it out.?

?It?s a lovely way to start the day,? I say.

?We have a good group,? he says.

He goes to the small vesting room. The door is open and I can see him slide into his alb and then a flowing white and gold chasuble. Must be a special day.

About 20 people, scattered in pews, stand to greet the priest and server. The priest says it?s the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin, just nine months till Christmas.

I?m glad I?m here. I love these unlikely Marian feasts. How good that the first time we meet this girl, she?s deep in conversation with an important angel, probably in her mama?s kitchen.

The chapel faces east with two stained glass windows high above the altar. Sunlight streams through the predominant golden glass and the bits of rose, green and blue glass -- perhaps a shining such as the young Mary saw that day in Galilee. In such light one could believe almost anything and agree to it.

The priest reads the Gospel, and toward the end I smile. Perhaps Gabriel (Gabrielle?) was chosen for this mission because the angel had a wee tendency toward gossip and could hardly wait to whisper the bit about that nice old lady Elizabeth -- old enough to be Mary?s grandma. She?s going to have a baby too.

Soon we eat the bread that is Jesus and sip the wine of God?s love and ease on back to our pews, carrying the wonder of the universe in our hearts and our mouths.

The priest dismisses us and we go in peace. Some of us go in peace to the fast food restaurant a block and a half away. There everyone has coffee, some with a cinnamon bun. I have a sausage biscuit. With coffee, it costs less than $2. Sometimes the pastor joins us, but today he?s off to the big church where he?s hearing the schoolchildren?s confessions.

This remnant of the congregation assembles at two neighboring tables where we discuss the day?s errands and the new retirement community going up on the edge of the neighborhood. We compare its offerings with the apartment of a mutual friend who moved to a retirement place a bit farther away. We talk about who has a brother and who used to have a brother and how to know when it?s time to stop driving.

Someone says, ?We?ve got seven conversations going here. Nobody?s listening.?

We smile, but that comment doesn?t slow us down much. We?ve each got a story and just so much time to tell it. And tomorrow may be another day.

Patty McCarty, now retired, was for many years NCR*?s copyeditor.*

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