

# THE PASTOR'S POST

## COUSIN TONY...REJOICING NOW

Dear Parish Family:

Let me begin with a joke.

*A priest and a taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them. "Come with me," said St Peter to the taxi driver. The taxi driver did as he was told and followed St Peter to a mansion. It had anything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an olympic size pool. "Wow, thank you," said the taxi driver. Next, St Peter led the priest to a rugged old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set. "Wait, I think you are a little mixed up," said the priest. "Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all, I was a priest, went to church every day, and preached God's word." "Yes, that's true. But during your sermons people slept. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed."*

My cousin Tony told me that joke on Easter Sunday at our Easter family brunch. Tony was an older man who raised five amazing children, was in love with his wife who passed away a few years ago and always found a way to bring joy and laughter to it all (and he could do a mean rendition of "Sweet Caroline" too!). Tony passed away a few days after Easter, suddenly and unexpectedly. While an older man, this was still a shock to our family.

Every time we gathered as a family, he would have a joke or two he thought I should share. "Here...use this in your next homily." The joke I wrote above was the last joke he told me and, of course, I used it in the homily at his funeral Mass. I would be afraid he would haunt me if I did not!

I do not know everything about the history of Cousin Tony's life. He served in the air force, worked at Rikers as an assistant warden, raised five amazing kids, cared for, nurtured and supported extended family, like me, not to mention the incredible love of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I don't imagine all of this was easy. I remember his incredible care for his wife as the realities of aging and the human condition took hold. At least when I saw him, there was always a sense of joy, always a reason for hope.

Cousin Tony, like Pope Francis, lived for Easter. It is hard to live for Easter and not be a person of joy. There will be lots of evaluations of the legacy of Pope Francis in the years to come. From his beginning, though, he called us always to a spirit of joy. His first major writing to the Church was called, "The Joy of the Gospel" calling us never to live like Catholics who look like we celebrate Lent without an Easter! This is not who we are called to be!

I think, too, of the apostles these days as we pray with the Acts of the Apostles in the first reading at Mass. After being jailed, beaten, mocked, and ridiculed, "they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name" (Acts 5:41). Even though life was hard, their reason for rejoicing was nothing in this world. It was their deep belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Life is different when we live our lives as a people of Easter!

So, is there any place in your life that could use a "Cousin Tony" joke to bring a smile to your face? Is there any place where you seem to always be a "sourpuss" as Pope Francis reminded us? OK. We probably all have some places of struggle. At Mass, during the collect prayer (opening prayer), we pray, "May your people...joyful now...look forward with confident hope."

Let us put our prayer into action. Perhaps this week we will take it to the risen and glorified Christ, even taking time to pray before the statue of the risen Jesus in the Church, and ask him to lift our spirits so that we too can rejoice here and now. Then, one day, like the cab driver, and hopefully cousin Tony, you will meet an amazing mansion in heaven! Reasons to rejoice now, for sure!

Please pray for me. I promise the same.



*Featherman*