

A FEW SMALL GREEN APPLES"

GOODNESS

Who among us would lay claim to possessing the fruit of the Spirit called Goodness, when this is defined as Jesus did in the Gospel of Matthew (19:16-17): "And behold, one came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." In another place our Lord responded when he himself was called "good" by saying God alone is good. If we then take the above scriptural definitions to heart, we would have to be as good as God, able always to keep, in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, all of the commandments. This would be of course be "impossibly" good and none of us would measure up to such lofty standards. My own belief is that Jesus was simply bursting bubbles of those who asked such questions, who already prided themselves for being "piously good". He knows what we are made of a nature that he himself shared through his incarnation. Therefore, he knows that the Goodness within us that shows itself in love and service in the world has its source and spark from God. As with all fruits of the Spirit this Goodness is a gift, one that becomes giving to others. All of us have some of God's Goodness. We know we're not as Good as God, but what Goodness flows from our hearts is of Godliness, its source. A very few of us may even radiate this virtue and quality of Goodness, as shining examples of the fruit of the Spirit.

It may embarrass her but I must share that my wife is one of the best examples of this character that I know. We met when I started college in the fall of 1957. She was already a

sophomore and a popular "who's who on campus" candidate, cheerleader and class officer. Not only was I then a lowly freshman, but also a shy one who belonged to that special category of veterans on the GI Bill, i.e.; those "older students". We both had jobs in the college dining hall as a way of paying for our meal expenses. When our children later asked us about it we always said that we literally met over the garbage cart. Betty would bring me plates, which I would scrape and stack for transport to the dishwashers. She actually had the more elevated and prestigious job of "faculty waitress". This meant she personally served the handful of single faculty members who ate meals in the dining hall. Her job did not call for her to remain and help those of us working the student tables, but in kindness she always stayed on to assist, and we were a "team" in the process. We workers also ate together before the general feeding, and so formed a community of our own. Thus we became friends in this work place setting.

My friend (and only future wife-to-be) led a very full and active social life on campus. It concerned her that I did not. Not only was I shy, but at first, before my benefits finally kicked in from Uncle Sam, I also couldn't afford to date. She did not know that, but out of friendship and concern she I tried her hardest to fix me up on dates with a couple of our co-workers. It was one of those situations where if she had been willing to go out with me I would gladly have found a way to afford it. (She had no idea about this!) The point is her concern was very genuine and consistent with her concern and caring for others in general. Betty was the kind of sweet and caring person that led others to confide in her, even seeking her out. She really was the most popular girl in class, homecoming queen and everybody's sweetheart. And we remained good friends all through our

three years in college together. I did have a couple of girlfriends during those college days, and some real ups and downs in the relationships, and she was one of two persons who listened and helped me through this. She knew that I really valued our special friendship.

This relationship became more than friendship a year after our graduation. I had been able to complete my undergraduate degree in three years so we had both graduated in 1960. I went on to seminary, fulfilling that part of my dream and goals. We accidentally (or providentially?) bumped into each other when both of us returned to the college campus in June of 1961 for the graduation and class reunion. Her best friend (female) and my best friend (male) were both in that class and we were there for them. Meanwhile I'd decided in a free moment to go over to the girl's dorm and see if "my old flame" was around, just to visit. As I walked through the dorm reception area to buzz her room, I literally walked into Betty. We started talking, and I invited her to have a cup of coffee at the college cafeteria, and thus never did contact my old girl friend. We ended up paired together for the festivities of graduation. She was very interested in my progress in seminary and I in hers as a new teacher. But something else was going on too. We dated that month, then I went off to my summer seminary assignment as a church camp counselor and we wrote to each other daily. In the three weeks then after camp, and before returning to seminary, a whirlwind courtship ended up in our formal engagement. When my Bishop gave us permission to be married for my last year of seminary it was in good part because my wife-to-be had convinced him that her salary as a teacher would provide the financial means to help me complete seminary. The Bishop had promised help that he could not deliver. Betty was absolutely serious and desirous of seeing

that together, we could see this goal completed. I'd always believed God would provide a way when things got tough, and she was it.

Perhaps the best testimony to this innate sense of Goodness in my wife was wonderful the way she handled a problem in my family in those first years of our marriage. My mother's alcoholism had reached a point where she could not even care for herself. She had remarried and her husband was in prison for a third D.U.I. conviction. As an only child, she had taken my grandmother in when the latter's savings were depleted and she could no longer afford a nursing home. My grandmother was 86 years old and suffering the affects of Parkinson's Disease, with palsy and weight loss a problem. My mother could not properly take care of her. My siblings were not in a position to take care of her. I felt in my heart that someone in the family should, so that meant me. But how could I reasonably ask Betty, when we had a baby three months old and would be moving into a house with practically no furniture. On top of that, my first assignment was to organize a new mission church in the small town of Rochelle, plus work three days a week in campus ministry at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. That meant that I would be busy and on the road three days a week. To take in my elderly grandmother was a lot to ask, but finally ask I did. Betty responded positively, as if she were just waiting to be asked (she probably was). We moved to that first church job and our new house with a baby, and an infirm grandmother. Betty had to bathe her. She cut up her food and made a special apron with a large pocket, kind of like a kangaroo pouch. Grandma still brought the food to her mouth with a shaking hand, thus preserving her pride and independence. It was in some ways like having a second baby, but grandma loved her and knew she was loved and cared for in those last years other life. In our

second year our son Chad was born, so there was more work, but never a complaint. Meanwhile, as a clergy wife Betty also took part in all of parish life, and so it ever has been. There is no such thing as a "perfect clergy wife" simply because every single one is different. Each is what each is, and that is as it should be. There are however a few people, like myself, who think that my wife really has been through all these years a model and example of what a "Good Clergy Wife" is. She has taught church school, sung in the choir, served in all of the ladies guilds, helped with funeral luncheons, baked more coffee cakes than you could count, been a listener to all, and kept this clergyman sane and in good health. Most of all though, the quality that permeates all of the above, all that she is and does is that fruit of the Spirit called Goodness. The best tribute I can pay her is to borrow these words of St. Paul from Philippians (1:3-5), "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you, making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now."

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Goodness

timeless
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