

## A FEW SMALL GREEN APPLES GREEN APPLE PIE

I had a good friend throughout my boyhood years. He lived a block away from our house. We started playing together when we were four years old and remained friends all the way through our senior year in high school. We usually played together with a larger group of boys which included our younger brothers. However, Johnny and I also often just talked together quietly, spending time away from our "neighborhood gang". Occasionally the subject was a deep one. Normally it was on something pertaining to the moment. For example, one summer day after playing hard and getting warm from it we decided to rest for a while under the shade of an apple tree in his neighbors' yard. The tree had a particular kind of green apple on it and there were a few small green apples on the ground. Being curious, I asked my friend if these were any good to eat. He informed me that they were all right, but a bit sour. He went on to explain to me that the best way to eat this kind of apple was to put salt on it. Then he went home and filled a paper napkin with salt (I'm sure that his mother didn't know what he was doing) and brought this out for us. I discovered that my friend was right about it and that these green apples tasted pretty good when sprinkled with a bit of salt. We both paid for eating a few too many, with a good stomach ache the next day, but at the time they seemed good to eat. When we had had enough I went on to ask Johnny what such sour apples were really good for. He told me that his mother used them to make a great apple pie, and he went on in such great detail about how good this pie was that it made both of our mouths water to think about it. I never had the pleasure of actually tasting her pie, but I know that I must have really missed something.

Thank God, which I mean literally, I have been blessed with many delicious "green-apple pies" in metaphorical and spiritual sense. I want to conclude my thoughts on the fruits of the Spirit with few examples of what I mean. As I now look back at what I've written for "A Few Small Green Apples" it is clear that my life has touched others. In doing so

this has brought joys and unexpected rewards to me, as delicious as any "dream pie" could ever be.

The first that came to mind actually happened on three different occasions. For about six years I was very active in the Chrysalis work in our area. This is the Protestant version of T.E.C., Teens Encounter Christ, the teen level of the Cursillo spiritual movement. In serving as the Spiritual Director on three separate weekends I gave a clergy talk on the topic of "God's Designs and Desires". This particular talk included the story of my Baptism and subsequent experience of "a call" at age 16.

On each occasion God used this talk to reach to the heart of a teen present for the event to inspire them to later ask me if I would baptize them. In all three cases I followed the same of first asking the young person for permission to talk to a parent to clear this, as well as to invite them to the ceremony. Again in all three cases the Baptism was conducted during the last day of the three-day program, with their retreat peers and parents present. Each ceremony was a bit different, yet each was especially exciting and highly emotional. I know what a joy and privilege it was for me to make my own vows at my Baptism at age 15 and continue to pray for these young people that it was and remains as important in their lives. It is as if my story is a part of a ripple in the waters of God's plans that continues to have life and move on in others.

Another small joy and surprise arose out of one of these weekends. It was a girls' weekend. One of the adult leaders was a very quiet lady who worked primarily in the background helping with things like registration. Her husband had served on the previous boy's weekend and was much more outgoing, so I felt I knew him better. It was obvious that she was as moved by my "Desires and Designs" talk as any of the young people were and she made a point of telling me so. I did not think any more about it after the weekend was over that fall. I was reminded on my birthday the following March. The secretary at church informed me that morning that someone was there to see me. When it is not a

parishioner that usually means that someone has come to the church looking for help, so that is what I was expecting. Instead the secretary ushered this quiet lady into my office and she was carrying a box in her hands. It took me a minute to place her, which I did as soon as she smiled at me. She wished me happy birthday and placed the box on my desk and opened the lid. There before me was a fresh home-baked pecan pie, a token of how deeply the story of my first meeting with Father Hilbish had touched her. This surprise brought tears to my eyes, it touched me so much. This kind and thoughtful lady had noted my birth date from my registration form from that weekend and had planned this wonderful gesture. The pie was pecan in substance, but "small green apples" to me.

Perhaps the biggest surprise came in what had to be a chance encounter. I had flown to Indianapolis for a meeting with the Bishop of that Diocese at the diocesan office complex there. The building contained a couple other denominational offices, so a receptionist gave me directions to the wing containing the Episcopal Diocesan offices. As I walked down a long hallway a young priest came out of one of the doors and started walking toward me. He suddenly stopped and with a total look of surprise blurted out my name. I too was taken by surprise and responded, luckily remembering that his name was David. We had not seen each other for some seventeen years. At the time I had been the Episcopal Chaplain at Indiana University and he an active member of the Canterbury Club. David had considerable artistic skills and had been very helpful to me in designing and drawing several charts, which I used for an adult education program in the local parish. I had no idea that he had gone on to seminary and was ordained, but that was not the true surprise. What awed me was his sharing with me in that few minutes we spoke together, in merely passing in a hallway, was that my ministry there at I.U. had inspired his sense of call to the priesthood. In fact the acknowledging of this humbled me. It had to be God's doing, but in being shared like this it was also dessert for me

Finally, the most moving of these "metaphorical green-apple pie" experiences for me is the love expressed from our adult offspring. Most of us take for granted that our teenagers will think us "uncool", old-fashioned and out of touch with "their world". The process of growing into responsibility and independence is hard, usually, for both the teen and the parents. Our family was no different. It therefore has been a delight and pleasure to establish an adult to adult relationship with our children now in their 30's. What really has touched my heart are the occasional spoken of more often written words of gratitude addressed to me as a dad they love and are thankful for. To quote a Father's Day card notation of 1995; "Thank you dad for everything you have done and continue to do! Now that I understand things a little better I appreciate the sacrifices you have made I hope I can be more like you". Or this sentiment added to a birthday card from our daughter: "Thanks for all the support you have given me through the years, dad. This card expresses words I've not been able to say: The loving gifts you've given me as a father have shaped my life and made me the person I am; your strong sense of values, of fairness, right and wrong, are all a part of me. My outlook on life; my sense of humor, interests and talents, are all from you. It makes me happy and proud to know that the qualities in you I love and admire are so much a part of me."

Nothing in all my life has made me feel better or more fulfilled than such sentiments of love and respect from my sons and daughter. It makes all I've striven for in life, and all that God has done through me in life, really seem right. For all my foibles and faults there are still some fruits of the Spirit working in and around me. I can echo Saint Paul's words here as well: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are the called according to his purpose." (Roman 8:28) Amen to that!

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## *A Few Small Green Apples*

## **Green Apple Pie**

