

A FEW SMALL GREEN APPLES

JOY

The second fruit of the Spirit in Galatians is joy. Like most people I know, the deepest sense of joy for me have come in family relationships and special life events, like graduations. Obviously, my marriage day and the day of my ordination to the priesthood stand out as moments of great rejoicing. But the most soul-reaching event in my life, a truly spiritual sense of **JOY**, came for me in the event of the birth of our first child. For both my marriage and for ordination there was a long period of preparation and anticipation that were fulfilled with joy when the events took place.

Nothing could really have prepared me for the overwhelming awe and life affirming joy experienced as I stood next to my wife to watch and share in that moment of the birth of our first child. I was in my last year of seminary. We had not planned to have a child yet. In fact, we had "planned" not to have a child until we were happily settled into parish life. Life is full of surprises, and believe me we were surprised! Even though the pregnancy meant that my wife could only teach for the first semester, and therefore would mean we would be financially strapped, we were still both happy that we were to have a child. We adjusted our thinking and our plans, tightened up the already tight budget and looked forward to this "blessed event." Her family and our friends in the seminary community were also very helpful and supportive.

Our baby was due in March, graduation ahead in May and my ordination set for June and first parish assignment for July 1. Life was full

of promise and excitement. Yet in all of this anticipation and a closing strong sense of dreams coming true, I was not prepared for the stirring euphoria that the birth process gave me.

The only problem (and it seemed important at the time) I was fearful of, as our son's birthday approached was a two-fold one. It involved timing and a phobia of mine. The baby was due in the second week of March. As fate or providence, whichever way you look at it, would have it, I was also scheduled to perform a special duty incumbent as all senior seminarians just for one week in that last year. This duty was to preside as the officiant for a morning worship service for the whole seminary community, students, faculty staff and wives from Monday through Saturday. All eyes were on you! Now I had been dreading this as I had had to overcome a problem of stage fright and even stuttering whenever I faced a group of people. And while I had come a long way when dealing with this shyness and phobia, this duty loomed ahead as a real test for me. To this point when I had only had to read one single, simple lesson in chapel, my knees shook beneath my cassock.

Could God help me get through this, a whole service some twelve to fifteen minutes long? You already have guessed, surely, how these two events came together. As God is my witness, it's true. My wife Betty went into serious labor on a Sunday afternoon, March 10, the day before I was scheduled to officiate at Morning Prayer for the week. I took her to the hospital, gowned up, and took my place at her bedside in the labor room. Wisconsin had a program for prospective parents. By taking classes I had qualified to be with my wife through the whole process of the birth, even in the delivery room. Betty was having some pain

and difficulty and the labor lasted for several hours. At one point she acted like she didn't want me there with her, then she would change her attitude and squeeze my hand so hard it turned white. They did give her gas when we got into the delivery, to help her in what was a difficult labor. Meanwhile, even though I am not normally good around blood, I was really swept up into the wonder and miracle of what was happening. When finally at around 3 o'clock on Monday morning our baby came into the world, I stood there watching, heart thumping, speechless and tears of joy streaming down my face. When I finally could speak after the doctor held up our child and let me touch the tiny hands and feast my eyes on this red, shining, squawking bundle of life, I said to my wife, "It's a boy." She responded about three times, "Is it a boy?", "Is it a girl?", "Is it a boy?" It was the effect of the gas they had administered. I just kissed her forehead and said over and over, "It is our Christopher", the name we had chosen beforehand. I really felt that I could have floated out of that room. I stayed at the hospital until my wife was in her room asleep.

It was about 4:30 a.m. when I got back to the seminary. Since I had to be at chapel in a couple of hours, I didn't bother going to bed. I was too "high on joy" anyway. And miracle of miracles this joy was so pervading and profound that I was not the least bit nervous when I conducted the worship service that morning, which made it easy for the five days that followed.

Now I do need to say too that there was great joy experienced at the births of our other two children as well as that of our grandchildren. The circumstances were different and as it turned out, dramatic too in all cases. On the

evening of the day that I conducted the funeral services for my father, who died unexpectedly, our son Chad was born. The experience gave new meaning to the Biblical expression "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

For our third child, I had to rush my wife through ten miles of busy superhighway traffic the day our daughter was born. In fact Betty's water had broken during the trip and we just got to the hospital on time. She was actually delivering while I was going through the process of checking her in. I didn't know this when the receptionist told me where the father's waiting room was located. Now this was a Roman Catholic hospital and I was wearing my black suit with regulation clerical collar. Three times a diminutive Nun, in habit, came into the room to ask, "Father, can I get you anything?" The third time she did, I asked if she could please check to see if my wife had delivered yet. The Nun turned so white I thought she was going to faint. Finally she found her voice and responded, "Reverend, I'll check for you." I hadn't realized that she took me for a Roman Catholic priest, not the Episcopalian that I am. At any rate, you can see that this third occasion was one of excitement and joy. All three were special, yet there was just something extra special about being physically present and a part of the birth of that first child, that like a "first love" remains in your heart for life, a profound **JOY** in this case.

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