



Sometimes a seat in the back is the best one (The Catholic Review)

Fr. Joseph Breighner

October 18th, 2007

During the recent installation Mass for Archbishop O'Brien, I ended up fulfilling the Scriptures. Unfortunately, it wasn't the Scriptures I wanted to fulfill!

What am I talking about? Well, we all remember Jesus telling us to seek the lowest seats at special events, and wait for someone to say, "Friend, come up higher." In the procession at the beginning of the Mass, I ended up in the front pew of the seats in the sanctuary of the cathedral. It was the best seat in the house!

Then, about two minutes before the Mass began, Father Jerry Francik came up to us and said, "We need these first three pews." So, Monsignor Joe Luca, Father Marty Demek, Father Ed Miller and I, and three more rows of priests, all were escorted to the back rows of the cathedral. We who had been in the first three pews, now filled the last three pews. The first were indeed last. "Come down lower, Friend" is what we heard!

What comforted me was looking across the aisle, and spotting Sister Carol and Sister Pauline of the Little Sisters of the Poor. I figured if I was seated anywhere near them, then these must be the best seats. I can only hope at the Last Judgment to somehow be close to them in line. Then I'll know I made the final cut!

Speaking of the last being first, I recall a story Sister Pauline told at Annunciation Parish. She said that a man had come to St. Martin's Home to ask if he could live there. They explained that the social worker first had to process some papers, but why didn't he stay for lunch.

The man said that his clothes were dirty, and he didn't feel right eating with the other residents. Sister explained that he could take a shower, and she would get him some fresh, clean clothes.

He ate lunch that day dressed in a suit. "I feel like a banker." he said.

He explained that he lived in a halfway house. He didn't have anywhere else to live. Sister Pauline had the man brought home, and assured him that she would come by the following Monday to pick him up. "Just meet us right in front of the house," she said.

The next Monday, Sister Pauline and her companions arrived at the house, but he was not outside. They knocked on the door and asked for him.

"Oh," said one of the men. "He died last night." "Where is his body?" asked sister. "Nobody claimed his body. It's down at the morgue."

They made some phone calls to try to find someone related to him. One relative said, "I haven't seen him in 50 years. I want no part of him." The man who had no home also had no relatives who wanted him.

So the good sisters got the body from the morgue and gave him a full funeral. "We had 12 retired Sulpician priests concelebrating," Sister Pauline said. "How many of us will have 12 priests at our funerals?"

The sisters buried him in the last grave plot that they had. They wondered what they would do for future guests.

The next day, sister was opening the mail. The first letter she opened read, "Dear Sisters: I would like to donate five grave plots." Two letters later, another letter read, "Dear Sisters: I would like to donate eight grave plots!"

The last will indeed be first. The man who had nothing got everything. The nuns who give everything every day always seem to have enough. We don't always get what we want in life. We do get what we need.