

Keep Them Safe

I was debating upon how long to wait until I put my reaction to the latest in what seems to be an endless stream of tragedies of late. The events which befell the community of Newtown, Connecticut have left yet another indelible mark on not only that town, not even this country, but I am positive the entire world. The lives of 20 SMALL, INNOCENT children taken so senselessly by a literally ill human being before he ended his own life just sends chills through my entire body.

It is not for us as humans to ask why this continues to happen because there is not a person alive who can definitively state the reason. A person can hear just so many takes on the gun rights issue. To me, the most important thing we can do is to pray for those children and others who lost their lives, those injured, the survivors, the families, and the entire community which we are all a part of. For a time yesterday, school prayer had returned to Sandy Hook Elementary School in the closets, bathroom stalls, and other secluded places where teachers led their students. One teacher told the children that if they believed in the power of prayer to do so and if not to think happy thoughts.

Last night, the family attended the concert of my junior high school aged nephew, Alex. Before the music began, the elementary principal gave a word about the tragedy and without saying the word "prayer" asked for a moment of silence.

Another issue driven from this... how soon and what to say to our own children. I don't know that there is a definitive answer to that problem, either. I would think that being open and honest with them as the situation presents itself. I do know that there is no way that they can be totally shielded from the tragedy but lending an open ear and loving words will help them and maybe ourselves take strength from that sharing.

I do think the media takes these things a bit too far. I don't think it can go any farther than having a young child

being asked questions hours after their school had gone through such an event.

One good thing did come out of this event. Hours after Alex's concert, a couple in the audience welcomed a healthy, new born son into the world.

May God welcome the little children home in his warm, gentle embrace where they will celebrate the coming birthday with He who saved us all. And may we all continue to pray for those who lost their lives and those families who have lost so much.

Nature Strikes Again


☒ Wasn't it just a few years ago that I reported on a "microburst" which swept the village hall to shambles?! Last night around 11:00, another landmark was struck. This area has been in almost desperate need of rain. Our prayers were answered as lightning and thunder rolled throughout town.

While watching the Yankees handle the Blue Jays, a large booming "pop" was heard, felt, and seen. No one knew where it originated from but undoubtedly, it was from one of those streaks of lightning that lit up the night sky. Between 10:30 and 11:00, police cars, fire engines, and ambulances lined the street in front of the house so of course, I began to wander outside to investigate. I did not get far before I came face to face with the unmistakable smell of smoke. I could not see anything so I came back home and called my sister who lives right across from the United Methodist Church (my house stands 5 buildings to the north of the church). "Yes, the church is on fire!" This would explain the pop that went off about a half-hour earlier!

At approximately 11:45, I saw the smoke and flame from outside our dining room window. Initially, heavy smoke was reported coming out of the steeple and higher parts of the building. Eventually, flames erupted and the roof caved in, injuring one of the dozens of firefighters from 15 surrounding communities. The firefighter was transported to an area hospital with non life-threatening battle scars. I went across the street to the empty school lot to investigate along with dozens of others some of whom were out of towners who had gotten off 2nd shift jobs. Thankfully, the blaze was contained and did not spread. However, the battle was fought well into the night/early morning.

This morning, the damage could really be seen. Holes in the roof. Stained glass windows on the north and south sides of the building blown out. Remarkably, the bell tower was still hanging on and the windows on the east side of the church were still intact.

I personally have had a relationship with the church over the years. Each summer, my brothers and sister attended Vacation Bible School. The church has sponsored our village's Cub Scout pack for a number of years. Each year, the pack participated in a service by providing alter boys, readers, and other functions. Over the last several years, the church has held Wednesday Night meals and provided a food pantry for the needy in the area.

Another landmark that has stood over 75 years brought down by nature's fury. May God be with the rescue teams who responded so bravely, the one who was injured, and most importantly, the congregation of Edgerton United Methodist Church as they will rally together and continue to follow the Lord. 



So Long

It was never goodbye. It seems that whenever Dick Clark signed off for any of his broadcasts, it would be with his traditional salute and his familiar "This is Dick Clark... so long." Whether it be the myriad incarnations of the original Pyramid game show, "Bloopers and Practical Jokes" (along side another icon, Ed McMahon), his 30+ years of hosting his own Rockin' New Year's Eve show, the "oldest living teenager" seemed to have his hand in every aspect of every show he was associated with. I was not around to really enjoy the heyday of American Bandstand; however, popular music owes the show and the man most associated with it a huge debt. Bandstand not only brought rock'n'roll to teenage homes on Saturdays but also broke the color barrier by showcasing acts like Chubby Checker, Sam Cooke, the Supremes, Gladys Knight and the Pips, amongst others.

Today, Mr. Clark bid his final *adieu* after suffering a massive heart attack at the age of 82. I'm not sure which I remember him more from. Every New Years for as long as I can remember, the TV was tuned to ABC from 11:35PM onward to witness whatever elements were being thrown on Times Square to ring in the New Year. Until the last few years (after he suffered a stroke), Clark was in the thick of rain, snow, sleet, or 60°+ degree weather counting down the minutes until the ball would drop from atop Number One Times Square to ring out the old and bring in the new.

From time to time, I catch reruns of the many Pyramid shows on GSN. Others have attempted to recapture the success of the original but have failed for whatever reason.

While I was not alive in the 50 and 60s, I do remember seeing

some of the hit artists of the 80s on Bandstand. From Michael to Janet to (I'm almost embarrassed to say) Prince, and Madonna AB was a staple after cartoons ended.

HOWEVER... I have been trying to recollect if Mr. Clark had one of those famous "poke their head out the window" cameos on Batman visitng Gotham City from his home Philadelphia way.
SURE ENOUGH!

Rest in Peace, Mr. Clark. May you ring in the New Year for eternity.

Putting It All Together

Well... with just a little over three weeks to go, I FINALLY tracked down a capable accompanist who is not going to bail on me. This morning, we met at the studio and it sounded great (even if my accompanist was doing little more than sight reading). While K did a fine job of playing for me, it allowed very little time for her to focus on what I was doing and what to critique. Happily, she had very little to comment on except for a few spots I KNEW could have been better.

Usually the first time hearing the full accompaniment for a piece (rather long... let me see... 11), makes me a bit apprehensive especially when I'm not sure of the pianist's ability. But as I have been taught over and over the best ones will follow you and BOY did he ever! I think the addition of the full accompaniment only enhanced many of the pieces. I can't wait to hear what the final product will produce!

"Songs I Have Learned" is going to be bookended by two (what I feel are) more inspirational pieces. A bunch of fun character-driven tunes (my favorite kinds) and some emotional ballads will comprise the remainder of the set that will be divided into two. Each of the songs hold a special place in my heart a lot of which I will share.

Yesterday at work, I was approached by a customer who had just come from the theatre's revival of *Escanaba in da Moonlight*.

She had heard in the intro to the show that I would be presenting a show on March 16th. I definitely will need to

attend Saturday night's show (an extended night) to see if this was so... not that I had not planned to see it before, just haven't found an open date on my calendar. I was asked if I would be interesting in performing at a special ceremony commemorating the 100th anniversary of Clem (the Civil War statue that was injured a few years ago in the "microburst" that destroyed our village hall). The service is scheduled for Memorial Day following the ceremony at the cemetery. I said I would be happy to and to keep me informed of the details.

Speaking of hometown events, the Boys' High School Basketball team has completed its regular season. **A PERFECT 20-0 record!!!** The first time in school history! I have not been to a game in many seasons and I do kind of miss them. Perhaps, I will be able to make one of the games on the tournament trail. We shall see.

A Sad Day In Happy Valley

This will be relatively short. I do agree with the firing of Joe Paterno after the shocking week at Penn State University. In 2002, after he was approached by the graduate assistant who knew of the assistant coach's gross inappropriate conduct, Joe Pa should have gone NOT to the Athletic Director nor even to the head of the school, he should have gone to **THE POLICE!** He was morally and (most importantly in this case) legally obligated to do something more. Instead the assistant coach's actions were covered up. It may be easy to say... "In hindsight..." Well... in my eyes, that does not excuse the suffering of the 25 (I believe) victims of the crime. The 61 year coaching tenure of the most winning and one of the most revered coach's in college football history ended by scandal.

Not a good year for Big 10 football off the field.

A Day Of Heroes... Ten Years Later

It just seems surreal that we are already remembering the tenth anniversary of one of the two days that “will live in infamy.” It seems like only yesterday when I rushed out into the beauty shop (on a Tuesday... don't remember why Mom was working unusually on a Tuesday) to tell everyone that a plane had just crashed into one of the twin towers. I'm sure, like millions of others, that this had to have been a horrific accidental however, minutes later it became clear that the United States of America was under attack! Like everyone else, we were glued to the television.

A few years ago, I travelled with some friends to Ground Zero and saw first hand the remains of the horror. I remember vividly standing at the site where a few years ago, I was on tour with the BGSU Men's chorus on Spring Tour. Totally stunned! Walking through the building which houses items from the site, video clips, recordings, fragments of the buildings, and a myriad of other memorabilia was very emotional. Seeing the skyline from outside our hotel complex was haunting.

Remembering, what to me, was the worst day in the country's history. The worst day perhaps but not without a sense of pride in hearing America's response to the attacks. The hundreds of firefighters, police, and other rescue personnel bravely, selflessly rushing in to deadly environments to rescue the living and search for the departed. Hearing the voices and hearing the stories of those who fought back when their plane was hijacked. TRUE heroes who do not wear capes

or leap tall buildings in a single bound!

This weekend, I was presented with a brilliant question: "What do we tell the little ones who may or may not understand the why and consequences of September 11, 2001?" How are the children of those who sacrificed their lives remembering their parents or do they even remember them?

Today, let our nation remember those heroes not in the spirit of retaliation of those who were responsible for the devastation but in a spirit of forgiveness. This morning's readings and Father Art's sermon could not have been poignant.

How many times must we ourselves forgive others? Seventy-seven. Drawing from the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32): [We are] still a long way off.

Remember and forgive.

Goodbye to the Greasy Spoon

Lester's Diner has been a staple in Bryan Ohio since its inception in 1955. On Memorial Day 2011, it closed its doors for the last time. Like many small towns, the restaurant was a gathering place for seniors who sat around the "round table" (whether or not it had an actual round table... I think Lester's feature was its lunch bar). Not only was it a hang out for the young-at-heart, I have heard a story or two about a group of young whippersnappers who frequented the joint after high school football games.

OK... maybe they were not so young. My parents along with the former high school band director , his fiancée, and other

friends would travel there occasionally after the game while high schoolers would head to Pizza Slut (err... Hut). The next day, we would be regaled with tales of "Sweaty Betty" who would make perfect hamburger patties by placing a ball of meat under her armpit. Dad said that he once found a hair in his burger. All right, I doubt if that was true but it sure made for a good laugh for a 7th or 8th grader (I was in junior high at the time)! I'm sure regulars could sit and tell tales a mile long about the "spoon."

The atmosphere and scenery of the eatery took the diner back to the fifties complete with swiveling stools at the bar, four person booths with classic mini jukeboxes, and milkshakes served with the tall silver shake cup. The giant sign outside the establishment featuring the giant "16 ounce cup" (I stand corrected, it was a "14 ounce cup") of coffee was the inspiration for the sign outside Mel's Diner on the 1970-'80s tv series *Alice*.

Yet another piece of Americana dissolving only to be a memory to those who knew it.



Goodbye To Yet Another Childhood Fixture

In a shocking turn of events, it has been announced that Ronald McDonald will be getting a makeover. Apparently, the chain wants to promote a healthier, trendier menu. OK... are we getting rid of Happy Meals, the Big Mac (hold the pickle), and

all the rest? I can;t believe that they would be doing away with the character totally with the Ronald McDonald House which he has given his name to for the past several years. While the decades (48 years to be exact) old fixture has not been as visible in ads for the fast food chain, I remember my birthday party the summer after I completed Kindergarten (I think I was 9 at the time... I had a little problem with eating glue... HAHA!). McDs was the place to celebrate when you were a child of the mid-70s... my corner of the woods did not have a Chuck E Cheese or Crazy Pinz.

<https://www.dailyfinance.com/2011/03/03/ronald-mcdonald-put-to-pasture-as-fast-food-chain-gentrifies/>

Hope the video doesn't frighten anyone TOO much.

10 Years

They say that time flies once you reach a certain age (or when you are having fun). To me the decade from 9-11-01 to the events which unfolded last night have flown by. I'm not sure if the killing of Osama Bin Laden will have the same, lasting impact as the destruction, devastation, and heinous mass murdering of that fateful autumn day. I wonder how many will remember where they were and how they found out about the death of the Al Qaeda leader. How many of us can remember where we were nearly 10 years ago? I was at home watching GMA when the announcement hit and rushed out into the beauty shop to tell everyone out there.

Last night, I was reading on my nook and happened to flip to the local ABC network to watch the 11 o'clock news after everyone else had turned in. And I saw the blurb on the screen: Osama Bin Laden Killed. The news held me captive for the two hours it was on. People in front of the White House cheering "USA, USA!" It really was like the gathering, camaraderie, and patriotism felt by so many hours and days following 911. Kind of an awkward feeling: although most of us feel glad and grateful that the murderer was silenced somehow, the Christian in me questions if killing him is justified. However, in my opinion, the feeling that the head of this organization of pure EVIL is gone THIS time and in few other situations justifies the operation.

However, we should not be so quick to celebrate too prematurely. My cousin came downstairs last night and I showed her the news and told me that her husband was informed

that the military is on alert. They did not know for what. Her husband is not officially out of the Army until May 8th (or somewhere thereabout) and could still be called and returned to duty. Who knows what retaliation the sects of Bin Laden supporters could exact?

But until then... God bless our military forces. May the thousands left in mourning during this war find whatever closure they can.

A Change Is Comin'

As I was reading the newspaper this morning, I found that some universal changes will be made in the Catholic church (which will be fully integrated by November at the beginning of Advent, the season when we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ). As an area priest noted, these changes will not be as dramatic as those that took place in the late 1960s. Most of these new changes will be seen in the responses spoken after blessings and some of the words spoken in prayers. From what I gather, these changes are meant to reflect the translation from Latin.

I have noticed a lot of word changes in our hymnals. Our organist has two humongous binders which are held together by duct tape that must date back 20 years. For every season, we get new song books and sure enough there are a handful of songs which have words changed. Most are little things such as a "man" changed to "all."

OLD:

We are the light of the world. May our light shine before man.

NEW:

We are the light of the world. May our light shine before all.

May not seem like much, but we must follow what is in the new book or the congregation might choose to not join in song... those who do choose to join □ BRAINSTORM! Why not have a screen in front of the church display the words? Not sure if I have ever seen a Catholic church use audio/visuals in quite this way but I often find that the book gets in the way at times... esp. when I lead which is why I like to memorize the pieces as much as possible. WAIT! The church we visited when we spent the weekend visiting my oldest brother while he was in college used such a display.

By the way... i know that no one is infallible, but the local newspaper has made two big goofs in the last week. Last week, our sectional champion boys' basketball team was honored with a picture of LAST YEAR'S TEAM. The caption was for the current team but the photo included players who graduated last year. Today's paper included a photo of the interior of "Sacred Heart Church" when it was clearly "St. Mary's." Unless of course, the churches are identical in every way. I'm sure I have been inside Sacred Heart at least once but that was 20 something years ago.