

October 19, 2021

**A Modern Parable**

 This is the story of Father Stray and how he cast his bread upon the waters, after which it came back to him. He – Father Stray – was the Rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Brunswick, Maine back in the 1930’s.

There are in Maine a number of historical churches which are kept in condition for mostly a single program during the Summer. The Head Tide Meeting House, a Congregational Church, was one of those places. Knowing full well that it was an honor for an Episcopal priest to be invited to preach at Head Tide, upon receiving an invitation, Father Stray accepted and as the day approached, he worked studiously on his sermon. He had arranged on the appointed Sunday to have his own service conducted by lay leaders. On a beautiful Sunday morning, he took his small niece along for company and set out in his automobile.

At the Head Tide Meeting House, he drove his car into the shade of some large trees. After making sure that his picnic lunch would remain in the shade, he took his little niece by the hand and walked up to the entrance of the meeting house. On the front steps, he was briefed by the local committee, and hearing the strains of the organ prelude beginning, he went inside.

In the entry way (narthex), there was a contribution box on a stand. Father Stray paused to fish in his pocket for some money. He was dismayed to discover that, after having purchased his return trip ticket on the ferry boat, his finances had been reduced to a fifty-cent piece. He didn’t consider that ample enough, but it was all he had and so he discreetly dropped it in the box. Then he placed his niece in a front pew and took his seat behind the pulpit upon the platform.

As he sat there, he was pleased to notice a large congregation assembling. At the appointed hour, the church deacons closed the front doors and Father Stray arose to do what he had come to do. Perhaps he was challenged by the large congregation, but he thought to himself that he was doing much better than usual. The congregation was paying him rapt attention. Following his benediction, the deacons reopened the doors and another Head Tide annual meeting was over.

Father Stray, his niece at his side, stood on the front steps basking in the glow of a job well done, visiting with members of the congregation. As the people thinned out, a committeeman came forward and said, “Father, we don’t offer a gratuity, but over the years it has become customary to give our visiting preacher the contents of the collection box.“ He gave him an envelope, and then, Father Stray and his niece went to retrieve their picnic lunch. While they were eating, he opened the envelope. It contained fifty cents. His niece looked at him and, with wisdom beyond her years, said, “Uncle Arthur, if you’d given more, you’d-a got more.”

I think that that is a great story, with a punch line filled with simple truth. If you’d given more, you’d-a got more. Can anyone dispute the fact that it is the real givers in life who receive back a richness in the quality of their lives?

This story appeared forty years ago in the "Wall Street Journal." I have edited it.

Richard B. Tudor