



My great niece Fiona is graduating from eighth grade this spring. Last week, I went to Xaverian Genesis Academy to attend an award ceremony which was very well done. Today, I am going to her Confirmation and in June to her graduation. I am close to all my great nieces and nephews as I was to their parents, but I have been blessed to spend special

time with Fiona and her brother Sean since their parents live in the upstairs of our family home. I also often go on vacation with them to their home in the Poconos. Fiona is growing up to be a lovely young lady of whom I am very proud.

Sometimes, when I say something crazy or tell a nutty joke, she will say, *Uncle Pat, you're supposed to be a priest*. I always respond *that I am a priest* and that makes her laugh. I consider my life very blessed, since I have never had children or grandchildren, but I have had the joy of sharing so much life with all of the great nieces and nephews. When Fiona was little, I had to argue with her over whether we could watch on the television my choice of the Jets or her choice of Hanna Montana. As I matured, just a little bit, I would give into her. I am still the go to person for homework with literature or religion topics. I do recall a debate where Fiona said her religion teacher told her that Lazarus was the cousin of Jesus. I said that I had never heard that and that it was not in the Bible. She continues to disagree with me about that and sides with her teacher. Go figure.

As I saw at the award ceremony with my sister and Fiona's parents, Claire and Tom, I recalled the day that Fiona was born. I got to hold her on the first day of her life. Now, I kind of understand what I have heard parents very often say, *I an't believe how fast they are growing up*. I would smile when a mother would say; *my baby is almost six months*. I can't believe it! I think there is almost universal agreement how amazingly fast time passes, unless you are attending one of my sermons.

I have also heard it said that the older you get, it seems that time even moves even more quickly. I have a good Redemptorist friend who is about 15 years older than me. He is wonderful priest and friend, and he would often say to me, *Pat, how old are you now*. Whatever I was at the time of the question I responded. He would then say, *Pat, it goes so fast. Enjoy your life*.

I have seen many different version of the great American play *Our Town*. Once, I had the opportunity to see it on Broadway with the late Paul Newman playing the stage manager. I particularly recall the way he said this line: *"I'm awfully interested in how big things begin. You know how it is; you're twenty-one or twenty-two and you make some decisions . . . then whissh! You're seventy. You've been a lawyer for fifty years and that white-haired lady by your side has eaten over 50,000 meals with you. How do such things begin?"* The word *whissh* captured the rapid passage of time.

As I am preparing to leave St. Martin's, I can think back to hot summer day, in July, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 to be exact. I was both nervous and excited. My most vivid memory of that day was that the three Redemptorists who were stationed in the community, Fathers Henry, Jim, and Poly (a wonderful confrere from India, filling in for the summer) immediately came to greet and welcome me. And Father Henry had already turned the air-conditioning in my room so I would be nice and cool. It probably took six months for Genny our parish secretary telling me, *Father, watch the step into my office from your office*. I still have some bruised toes. Who knows where the time goes.

Years ago, our province had a workshop on aging. The presenter asked us what age we would want to be if we could choose any age right now. I think many of us thought about wanting to go back to an earlier time. He went on to explain if you choose any other age than the one you are right now, that you have not accepted where you are in your journey of life. That has stayed with me.

Whatever age you are that is the age to be. It is good to have memories of the past, and concerns for the future. That is very normal. But the great psychologist Carl Jung once said, *neurosis is a refusal to live in the present*. We all know it, but

moments, hours, and week are easily missed and forgotten, that best way to live is take each day and each moment as a gift from God. To me, that is the meaning of the wonderful words that St. Therese of Lisieux spoke on her deathbed: *All is grace*. Our first Redemptorist pastor, a dear friend of mine, Father George Keaveney said those words as he was preparing to die. *All is grace*. When Father George received the diagnosis that he was dying of cancer, he was in the hospital. They still wanted to run a few more tests. He asked that his rosary, a novel, and a donut be brought to him. I love that. He was going to keep living and enjoying life as the gift that God had given him.

As a child, I remember the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood, talking to us about *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*. We know a sacrament is an encounter with God in a very special way. The sisters were teaching us that every moment can be an encounter with the living God. I read somewhere there in *the Hail Mary*, we say *...now and at the hour of death...* The author said those are the two most important moments of our lives and: now and the moment of death.

I will conclude with another passage from *Our Town* that I think is deeply spiritual, and a call to try our best to live *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* and to know that *All is Grace*. You may know the scene. Emily, one of the key characters of the play has died and is in the town cemetery. She asks permission to have one more day of life. The other people in the cemetery tell her not to go back for a day since she will be disappointed. She insists and goes back to relive her twelfth birthday. It is a nice birthday, but nothing spectacular. We would call it an ordinary day. Emily sees how little we human truly see the gift of life. So, she asks to go back to the cemetery and these are her final words to all of God's children:

*"Let's really look at one another!...It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed... Wait! One more look. Good-bye , Good-bye world. Good-bye, Grover's Corners....Mama and Papa. Good-bye to clocks ticking....and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new ironed dresses and hot baths....and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you are too wonderful for anybody to realize you. Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it--every, every minute*