

12 Bars of Soap by Deacon James V. Parrilli



My first vocation is the sacrament of matrimony which has been a wonderful ride and I can't imagine life without it. This morning, I'd like to give some insight to my second vocation being a permanent deacon.

Being a Deacon, it can be hard to explain, the level of contact and the level of connection that you have with people through ministry. I never experienced it anywhere else.

When you're in ministry, ministry can be a sacramental rite or a conversation before or after Mass, you go into a situation with being open, present, and intentional. Knowing that there is power at work (holy spirit) that can change somebody's life or bring somebody through a very difficult time... there's no other job like that. It's about this instant intimacy, moments of grace, that surround you in your listening and especially speaking to help comfort the one who is suffering.

By the way, Jesus has a sense humor! I am assigned to a parish where I am the only deacon and I try to make myself available to as many of the 5 masses we have over the weekend. I can be found in the sacristy sipping my coffee in between the Masses.

A number of years ago Rita in comes before the next Mass. The first question from Rita and everyone who walks in the sacristy is the same. "Deacon, is Father around?" and so is the answer. "No, I'm sorry he hasn't arrived yet."

Rita looks at me and says I'd like to ask you a question, sure I said. She continued, "I turned 82 this week." I interrupted and said, "Happy Birthday!" Then she stated "I think I have enough bars of soap until I hit eternal life, I have 12 bars. Do you think that is enough?"

I repeated what she said just in case I did hear her correctly... So, you turned 82 and you're asking if 12 bars of soap are enough until the time, you're called home? She said "yes, I had 8 and I didn't think it was enough so I bought a 4 pack."

Thank God! in my repeating the question I remembered that her husband Frank past 18 months before. I said, "Rita, I am no expert on the quantities of soap one uses each year but maybe you're correct. But listen, Mass will be starting soon, would you like to get a cup of coffee afterwards? She said yes!

Rita and I had a wonderful conversation about her life with Frank, the children and the lifetime of memories she made with them. She said, "Deacon, I still love him! And I said that Frank loves you too. That love doesn't die. You may not hold Frank's hand but now you carry him firmly in your heart, always."

November is the month that we remember our dearly departed. We stand on the shoulders of those who went before us, saints and sinners. And more of our family and friends arrive passed that doorway with each passing year.

This gift of remembrance gives us the nudge maybe to realign and or confirm who we are and who loved us first while we were being knitted in our mother's womb. If it has been a while since you have been invited to come away from the world. Do it, and be enveloped in His love again. And don't worry about the soap.