

Thinking Twice

Why do I keep remembering a moment from many years ago? I was still a young fellow, home for a week from the seminary. I was visiting my Italian-American baptismal godfather Marty Giangola in Philadelphia.

He was an authentic blue-collar guy, stocky - building ships at one of the many shipbuilding yards along the Delaware River. He brought his lunch to the job and if his wife's prepared sandwich wasn't hot (i.e. spicy) enough to make him weep, it was a failure. He was a traditional Catholic (was there any other kind back in the 1950's?). And for a man with limited education, he had an active brain about all sorts of things.

So he and I were sitting on a sofa watching the McCarthy hearings on TV. It must have been 1954. Marty sat silent, eyes fixed on the exchanges going on in the hearing room. I was watching, being mainly out of touch with current events due to my cloistered confinement in a seminary. All I knew was that Joe McCarthy was a Catholic Senator ferreting out subversives in the government (and currently in the Army) of whom, in his opinion, there were plenty. He was popular among Catholics in general who shared his anti-communist phobia, given the ideology's atheism and advances in Europe and Asia. And so as for me I was almost by reflex – pro-McCarthy.

And then my godfather, as thoroughly Catholic as I was, broke his silence and said, pointing at McCarthy: *That guy is a fascist*. I did a double take! Was my godfather at odds with the opinion I had picked up from my environment? He was! And with quiet yet vehement conviction.

Why do I remember that? *Because it made me think twice* about something! Regardless of the politics of the day, the extreme polarization of those times (not unlike that of today), *another way of looking at things* had intruded upon my closed mind, a window flashed open upon an alternative view. I was dislodged from what might be called lazy thinking. And I emphasize: beyond the particular issues of the 1950's, it was *that shock, that experience* that has remained with me ever since.

It was like that day later in the 1960's when I walked into our seminary chapel and saw a hole in the wall where our altar had been; rubble all around – and saw it repositioned yards away whence Mass thereafter would be said *facing* the friars. And then there is that moment in the Gospels when the High Priest and Pontius Pilate and even Christ's disciples were sure he was dead and buried – yet it proved to be otherwise.

All of which reminds me of a poem by Jane Kenyon called *Otherwise*:
*I got out of bed / on two strong legs. / It might have been / otherwise. I ate / cereal, sweet / milk,
ripe, flawless / peach. It might / have been otherwise . . . / I slept in a bed / in a room with
paintings / on the walls, and / planned another day / just like this day. / But one day, I know, / it
will be otherwise.*