

Like a Rock

It was a wretched week. My professional life was collapsing like a house of cards. On Tuesday night the entire village turned out to bruise my ego by defeating me and my green platform by a margin 2 votes to 1 in the council election. Wednesday, I was informed that two of my kids need orthodontics. By Thursday, my wife and friends got under my skin by telling me over and over again what a good loser I am. Friday, my fear of financial insecurity went full blossom when I was effectively laid off from my job of eight years.

Fear flooded into my soul doing a good job of trying to drown my faith. My confidence was broken. My spiritual condition was listed as critical and on life support.

Thank God for my Saturday night watch at the chapel. My church has a little meditation room open twenty-hour hours and 168 people like me sign up to stand watch there for an hour each week. I always look forward to my one on one meetings with the creator of the universe there. With the Big Guy on my side, of what should I be afraid? My hour alone there in Eucharistic Adoration always seems to bring peace if not answers. This week I needed it as badly as other men need a good stiff drink.

As usual, I signed in at ten PM and said goodbye to the couple who stand watch for the hour before me. Most of the time, I sit there alone for an hour meditating and reading, but apparently I was not the only one who had a rough week.

A young Latin guy was already there, dressed in expensive black cycling shorts and what looked like an authentic Tour de France orange silk shirt. I admired his posture while he knelt deep in prayer and after the few mandatory kneeling moments of my own, I was soon in my customary chair in the back getting ready to read some spiritual tidbits and hopefully to embark on a full twenty minute deep meditation.

It was lent, the eve of Passion Sunday, and one of my readings extolled the virtues of abstinence and fasting and self denial.

I am a baby boomer with a long background of consumerism and indulgence. While I am a lot farther along on the journey than I was this time last year, self denial nor self flagellation are really a big part of my program. Sure, I was in recovery and haven't had a drink or a drug in nearly ten years and I have been monogamous for all 14 years, but I never met a jelly doughnut I didn't eat nor a beautiful woman I didn't furtively devour with my eyes.

But the writer of this night's spiritual reading seemed to make a big deal about how my spiritual condition and general attitude and lot in life could be much improved by telling myself "no" from time to time regarding my worldly appetites.

Since my spiritual condition was crap, I resolved right then and there to promise The Lord that I would give up jelly doughnuts and looking at women for Lent.

Soon the Latin guy left and feeling better about my new abstinent self already, I started to get into my meditating position. Just before I closed my eyes I saw the headlights of a car through the stained glass. I decided to read a bit more so that when whoever came in would not see me there feeling self conscience about having my eyes closed and my back straight and my palms up and open to the heavens pretending not to notice them enter our tiny room.

A balding, stout, middle aged man, my twin but not as good looking, came in. We nodded. He was a regular. I again prepared to meditate.

Just as I got into position, I caught the lights of another pilgrim through the stained glass. Again, I pretended to read until the interruption of the new arrival passed.

She was striking and looked to be about thirty. She came in quietly like a mouse and knelt front row center about five feet directly in front of me. I started to drink in her splendid body, tightly wrapped in designer jeans and a short sleeved sweater. She had exactly the kind of hair that I love to touch with loose curls cascading down the back of her neck and in my favorite flavor, strawberry blond. Shit!

I slammed my eyes shut. Hadn't I just given this up for Lent? Wasn't my life going to hell in a hand basket and wasn't my recovery fully dependent on the spiritual condition I came here to work on?

I tried to meditate, I started using my mantra for all it was worth. The girl in front was crying, sobbing almost silently. I could not see her face. One eye slipped open just in time to watch her long beautifully manicured fingers run through her curls. I watched how each disturbed lock found a new place to nestle against her neck and then my eyes dropped a notch and started drinking in her gorgeous..... Dam!

I slammed them shut and started to pray. Within a moment, the temptation was lifted when God arranged for her to get up and leave the room. She was one of those women who look so fantastic from behind, and I was pleased when I refrained with all of my might from checking out her front as she genuflected and left the room.

Then I remembered where I was. Waves of guilt washed over me as I realized that here I was in one of The Lord's special places and this poor woman had come here apparently in great pain. Had I prayed for her? No! Instead, like a vampire, I had ravenously tried to suck in and savor every stray single stray light ray that had touched her body.

Feeling ashamed, I tried to aim some fervent prayers in her direction. I envisioned a warm celestial Light and I asked it to wrap her and protect her and to help her and the source of her sobs.

Feeling better, I decided to give up on meditation and to read some scripture.

Flicking open a random page, I read the account of Jesus walking on water. These apostles who got to see and touch and listen to Jesus on a daily basis for years never cease to amaze me with their own petty fears and chronic lack of faith. They see Jesus out for a stroll on top of the waves and some think it's a ghost and freak. Jesus says, "Hey dudes, don't worry, its only me".

Peter thinks, "Cooool", and decides to try it. He successfully takes a few steps out and then gets distracted by the winds and the waves. As soon as he starts to get afraid...WHAM, he starts to sink like he's wearing concrete loafers.

Man, my week was just like Peter's stroll. A few days before I was a plausible candidate and man about town who had a creampuff six figure job all lined up with the merger. By Friday, I was sinking up to my neck in debt. The newspapers and my kids were calling me a good loser, and I was about to be unemployed.

Jesus extends His hand to sinking Peter and says, "Pete, your faith sucks. Try harder".

Feeling good that I am only maybe as bad as the rock upon which He built His Church, I sat there and started filling with those nice reassuring feelings of faith and confidence that I was on His team. I closed my eyes with a smile on my lips and started what was going to be a deliciously rewarding meditation.

Not a minute had passed before the door opened. Involuntarily, I opened my eyes. She was voluptuous. I had not seen her in months. She threw me a smile of recognition and knelt at the chair next to me. She was taller than I remembered, perhaps it was the long slinky turquoise dress she wore. She bowed her head down in prayer and her straight jet black hair, like an Asian's but finer, fell from her shoulders and drew attention to her breasts.

I closed my eyes and prayed.

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