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ESPECIALLY SYMBOLIC

Last weekend both of my grandchildren -- Gabriella and Gregory -- were baptized. It's wonderful that my two daughters live so close by each other in New York and that the grandkids are close enough in age to make it possible to do this together. Gregory, being older was the model of serious decorum while Gabby proudly displayed her comparatively youthful independence.

In the Christian tradition baptism varies quite a bit from denomination to denomination but at its most basic it is the official welcoming of the child to the church along with the dedication of parents, god-parents, family and church family to the ongoing support of the child. It was a very happy occasion that brought together family and friends to celebrate this important milestone.

Gathering together in this beautiful church and listening to the calm and familiar words of the Priest, surrounded by the symbols of the Faith, experiencing the ritual, the prayers – all set this time apart as being something special – something sacred. This wasn't just a time where we all gathered to 'do' something – it became a time where we became part of something.

As I get older I find a new appreciation of ritual, tradition, ceremony and pageantry. Having grown up during the *'Hippy Era'* that dismissed many traditions as being all form and no substance I can understand those who do not see the *'necessity'* of things that are ceremonial or symbolic. In their view you are just as dead with or without a funeral service – so why bother? They will say that a service is *'only'* symbolic – while I find a service to be *'especially'* symbolic. The fact that there are events that we commemorate because we choose to – makes them all the more important.

There are things about life that are both wonderful and sad and that defy understanding and explanation. We might describe it as love, as art, as music, or of the selfless sacrifice that others make on our behalf. It might be in the awe we feel with a beautiful sunrise or sunset or the connection we feel to a greater power. Symbols become an important point of connection to those things that we cherish but yet cannot fully express. Symbols are not just religious or spiritual. We hold the American Flag sacred because that symbol embodies a depth of feeling that is difficult to put words to. Seeing the Flag connects us to the pride we have in our country, the pride and appreciation we have for those who defend our country and the respect we have for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Our Flag isn't *'just'* a symbol – it is *'especially'* a symbol.

Christmas and the Holiday Season are now upon us and they bring a sleigh full of symbols that we can write off as crass commercialism or if we choose we can look a little deeper to find those symbols, rituals and events that are truly important to us. I still remember as a teenager finding the Christmas Eve Midnight Mass to be almost magical (especially as a Protestant who was afraid to go to a Catholic Church). And then on Christmas morning I would head over to the Veteran's Administration hospital in Brockton where I volunteered helping those in wheelchairs navigate this massive complex and get to the Christmas church service. At the time this is what I needed to make my Christmas feel complete.

We each need to find what is important to us and to our families at any given point in time and help transform those things from being ordinary to something very special --- what some might call sacred. Oftentimes rituals, traditions and symbols can help. You need to be the judge of what works for you and your family.

For me, Gabby and Greg's baptism, the ceremony, the ritual and the symbols helped me to feel connected to something greater. I find being part of a tradition that has changed very little in over two thousand years can't help but make me feel connected to something greater.

I hope you had a Wonderful Thanksgiving!

Age Well!

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