

WHAT DID JESUS SEE

“You know, from a little farther up you can see the tops of the skyscrapers on a clear day.”

Looking across the ledge at “Uncle” Joey, “Hammer” stretches his legs and locks his fingers behind his head. “I know,” he says softly. “Got Jason a telescope for Christmas and came up here last week to try out the view.”

“Who knows, Walt, you just might have a budding astronomer in the family,” Father Bob says, chuckling softly.

Standing up, Joey brushes the seat of his jeans and chuckles. “You know, being up here almost makes you wonder where on earth a person can see the farthest.”

“I’d think it would be from the cockpit of one of those jets you fly Ace,” Vinnie “Bullets” says, smiling at his friend.

“My guess ... wouldn’t be on earth, Bobby “Pretzels” says. ... “I’d have to think it would be from space. Like that picture of earthrise the astronauts took. Or somebody looking through the Hubble.”

“You got a point Bobby,” Hammer says, pouring some coffee from a thermos. Pausing he looks across the rocks at Father Bob sitting against a boulder.

Rabbi”, you have that look on your face like you know something we don’t. What do you think?”

Popping the top on a can of cola the priest looks across the ledge at his friend. “Me ... I’d vote for a man in a garden...”

Hi ... I’m Tony Baggz. We’re up here on Copperhead Run, about fifty miles east of the city. It’s the gang’s favorite trout stream. It’s a warm Sunday afternoon in April and some of the guys have decided to try their luck. Father Bob Scanlon and the Reverends Mike Daniels, Martin Williams and Paul Jacobson have been joined by “Uncle” Joey, Vinnie “Bullets,” “Mike the Russian”, Walt “Hammer” Robinson, and Bobby “Pretzels.” Walt’s decided to give fly fishing a try and this is his first time here with the gang. Fishing’s been okay. Everyone’s got a fish or two; Bullets got four and he’s ecstatic. But the size of their catch isn’t all that important. Just getting up

here is tonic enough for these guys. The air is clean and fresh, no haze or pollution, and the pollen count is still low.

There's a large rock ledge about a quarter mile from the stream. It overlooks the valley below and a great place to take a break. The guys always bring a cooler of sandwiches and drinks for lunch. It's peaceful, you can see for miles, and today, I guess it's gotten the guys to thinking so I guess it's easy to understand the question Joey posed. From what point on earth can you see the farthest?

It's the nature of these guys. A simple question or observation can turn into a foray into the world of philosophy and faith. I guess as a group, they enjoy taking the grey matter out for a spin every once in a while. Seeing the quizzical smile on Pastor Williams face and the look on Father Bob's, I think the potential is here for an interesting ten minutes or so.

What do you say we listen in ...?

"So, a garden huh, Father?" Walt asks.

"What garden, Bob," Mike Daniels asks, a sly grin on his face.

"Oh, an olive garden ... one about two thousand years ago."

"Interesting, you just think of this?"

"Not really. I remember this very question coming up last year about this time before Good Friday. One of the people in the adult Ed class asked what Jesus saw in that garden that moved Him to the point of actually sweating blood. In fact, Martin and I were talking about it just the other day."

"And what conclusions did the two of you come to, if any?" Pretzels asks.

"Well, Bobby, we decided the possibility existed that the two natures of Jesus, the human and the divine, saw different things," Pastor Williams says, taking up the conversation.

Everyone leans in or moves a little closer to hear. Martin is known for his wisdom. He continues

“I think Jesus, the man, saw the agony of the coming day. The thorns, the whips, the weight of the cross, the agony of the nails, the humiliation, and finally the gruesome death to come.”

“And Jesus, the divine?” Bullets asks.

“Looking down the long road of human history, I think He saw mankind in all his worst moments. He saw the tyranny of the powerful and the abuse of the poor, not to mention the wars throughout time waged in His and His Father’s name. He saw the blood drenched earth of the 20th century and the ongoing slaughter of the innocents under the guise of ‘freedom of choice’; a slaughter that made Herod’s crimes pale by comparison? And the coming orgy of death under the guise of death with dignity, as doctors become at least, coconspirators, and at worst, executioners. He saw the orgy of lust and decadence indulged in by millions at the click of a computer key, protected and defended by slick little flesh peddling hustlers under the guise of freedom, freedom of speech.

“That the Church He founded on the fisherman in its worst times become a pit of vice and corruption to the point it was torn apart and scattered in so many different directions. And, maybe even more agonizing, that His death would not save so many,” Father Bob says, picking up on Martin’s thought. “That it would not prevent the ongoing debauchery and defiance of God that man had already shown.”

Crumpling his sandwich bag, Mike Daniels shakes his head. “Given those scenarios, it would be hard to see why Jesus even chose the cross.”

“Yea, Mike, but that’s not the end of the story,” Martin says.

“I know,” the Episcopal Rector says, a knowing look in his eyes. “Please, go on.”

“The Divine saw three groups,” the Baptist minister says. “First, those mired in lies, hatred, greed, lust, murder ... vice and filth of all kinds.”

Pausing, he sips his coffee and continues.

“Then there were those who think only of themselves. Who turn their backs on God and take for granted all that a loving Father has given to them. Those who are so wrapped up in their own self-indulgent, apathetic and avaricious lifestyles they not only violate God’s laws, but make no time to bend a knee in gratitude or thanksgiving for the abundance they enjoy.”

Looking across the ledge at Father Bob, Martin nods in his direction. “Like Bob said, I think a great part of that agony was the realization that His sacrifice was not going to save so many in those two groups.”

Mike the Russian reaches for another drink from the cooler. “But there’s more, isn’t there?” he asks.

Nodding his head gently, Pastor Williams just smiles and continues.

“Well the third group may be the most important and the answer to the Joey’s original question. It’s those whose days are filled with faith and a belief in the sanctity of every human life created in the very image and likeness of its Heavenly Father ... the goodness in man that never makes headlines. Those who give of their time and self to drive a sick person to a doctor, a grieving widow or widower to a counseling center, or child or a homeless person to a shelter. All the countless little acts of love and kindness that keeps society functioning.”

Martin pauses as Mike Daniels picks up his thought.

“He saw you when you listen to a child or an adult who can’t make sense out of life,” he says. “He saw you when you open your wallet or your closet, or your home to help others in a disaster ... when you smiled and taught a small child about the goodness of others by an act of kindness ... when you offered a hurting friend a shoulder to cry on, listened when someone troubled just needed to talk, or offered a gesture wrapped in kindness to someone lonely and depressed.”

“Or spent a couple hours serving meals to persons at funerals, or Thanksgiving Day, or Christmas, or any other day when others needed what Art and Paul called, “A Bridge Over Troubled Waters,” Father Bob says, continuing Mike and Martin’s thought.

“He saw you when you stood tall and proud at the completion of a task that benefited others, then knelt to tie a three year old’s shoelace. He saw children on Christmas morning, teenagers collecting food for the poor and disadvantaged, people building shelter for the homeless, donating blood for the sick and injured, brides and grooms with faces and hearts filled with love and hope for a future united in Him and in each other. He saw all the goodness, all the joy, all the charity, love, and belief in His Father and His Father’s law, by people down through the ages.

Pastor Williams smiles at his friend, and setting down his coffee cup, says softly;

”Love of each and every man, woman, and child, good and not so good throughout history was ...

... what made Him pick up that cross the next day, and stagger to the top of a hill ...”

God owes us nothing. Ours is the same God that wiped out all life in a great flood, destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, and rained misery on an entire nation, even to destroying the firstborn of all the land, because it held his people captive.

Yet in a moment born of love, God Himself made an ultimate sacrifice to reconcile us with Him.

In a quiet moment, look in the mirror and ask yourself ... That night in that olive garden, when The Son of God looked down the long road of human history, what did He see? When He came to you ... what did He see?

And then ask yourself ... are you worth His sacrifice?

Thinkaboutit ... I'm Tony Baggz.