

## PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

“Hey guys, hold on a minute.”

Looking back, “Uncle” Joey and Rabbi Green see the man in black bend over to pick up a dime.

“Hey, c’mon Bob, tickets are seventy-five bucks, hot dogs are five, a beer’s eight, a coke’s four fifty ... and what, you’re picking up pennies?”

Pocketing the coin, Father Bob flashes the look of a man who just found nuggets in a gold pan. Before anyone can say anything, he walks over to the curb and retrieves a stray quarter. “Eureka!” he laughs and holds up the treasure for all to see.

“Well, one thing’s certain, there’s nothing wrong with your eyesight,” Doc chuckles.

“Collections been that bad, lately,” Rabbi Green asks.

“Hey, it was a quarter, I never walk over money. When I was a kid, we counted pennies.”

“Yea, and pennies had a bust of Caesar on the front.”

“Hey ... how old do you guys think I am?” the priest says, feigning a hurt look.

“Correct me if I’m wrong but wasn’t your mom a waitress at the Last Supper?” Josh laughs.

“Yea ... and your social security number is, nine?” Billy Swanson chuckles.

The priest shakes his head, straightens an imaginary tie and doing his best Rodney Dangerfield imitation looks at the group.

“No respect ... I don’t get no respect at all.”

**... Hi, it’s Tony. It’s a crisp November Sunday afternoon. We’re walking through the parking lot headed for section 136 of “The Bowl”. The “Boys in Black” are seven and two and should be in the playoffs this year. Joey, Samantha Bates and her little girl Emily Ann have joined the Rabbi, Father Bob, Martin Williams, John Randall, Billy Swanson, and Doc Rogers for the afternoon. And, several of the other guys got here about ten minutes ago. It promises to be a good time.**

**Seems the gang’s picking on Father Bob and I don’t think the priest has heard the end of their good-natured jests. Then again, Father Bob’s from the Bronx and never entirely lost his New York attitude. He’ll hold his own.**

**Pocketing the coins, he looks at “Uncle’ Joey and winks. Even money says there’s an impromptu sermon in the immediate future.**

**... Let’s listen in.**

“The way you dove on those coins, Bob, makes me wonder if you’ve ever heard those words about the love of money,” chuckles Pastor Randall. “Want me to quote the Good Book?”

The priest shakes his head and smiles. “Mea culpa,” the priest says, laughing and shaking his head.

“If you want, Bob, we can duck behind that souvenir stand and I’ll hear your confession,” Rabbi Green teases.

A look of mock disbelief crosses Billy Swanson’s face. “A rabbi hearing a priest’s confession!” he says. “That’s rich, what’s next, our esteemed Baptist colleague, here, performing a bris in the baptismal font.”

“Marty the mohel ... now that’s rich.” Reverend Williams says, his trademark laugh echoing across the parking lot. “Next thing you know, Josh’ll lead the synagogue in a rousing rendition of “Ave Maria.”

An impish grin lights up the Rabbi’s face. “Ave Maria, nice song ... I especially like Pavarotti’s version. But, ah ... no ... don’t hold your breath. They’d run me out of town.”

“Hey, another one,” says the priest, ambling over to a minivan and picking up another stray quarter. “Looks like my lucky day.”

Pocketing the coins, Father Bob turns and seeing the looks on their faces, grins sheepishly. “Hey guys, it’s just an old habit ... call it a superstition. Goes back to when I was a kid. Dad died when I was twelve and it was a struggle. A quarter was a week’s allowance and five dollars was real money.”

Winking at Rabbi Josh, a ‘watch this’ look crosses Doc Roger’s face. “Didn’t George Washington’s wooden teeth cost five dollars?”

“Naah, Doc, you’re thinking of Blackbeard’s peg leg,” Billy laughs.

Chuckling and feigning a man with a limp, the good pastor resumes heading for the stadium gate.

The rabbi rolls his eyes as little Emily giggles. “Bob, how do you reconcile amassing a fortune in stray coins with your Carpenter’s words about money?” Josh asks, winking at Sam.

“No conflict, Josh,” chuckles the priest. “If money is evil, then work is evil, and the Creator is the greatest worker of all.”

“But didn’t Jesus say love of money was the root of all evil, Father?” Sam asks.

“Ah Sam, that He did. Love ... not respect. They’re completely different things.”

“How so, Father?”

“Well, love of money – making it a God in itself - as Jesus meant it, is a form of greed, a sin. And that profanes both man and money. It fails to recognize money’s sacred nature.”

A skeptical look crosses Doc’s face. “Sacred?”

“Yea, Doc, sacred. Two aspects of the image and likeness of God is to be both creative and productive. And money is that objective value we give to the fruits of those attributes. To me, that makes my money sacred.”

“And you see that in your Carpenter?” Josh asks.

“I do. Jesus was a working man, a builder who used His talents and skills to produce products and services for others. I can only think He produced those things for a fair price, and being paid for His efforts, Jesus probably had a great respect for money. He made a profit and an honest profit is an honorable and virtuous achievement.”

Pausing to look at the coins in his hand, Father Bob continues. “To make money is to give value for value; to earn it by honest labor and contribute positively to the world in the way God envisions life for man.”

“But what about the rich; those He said could easier fit through the eye of a needle?” Sam asks.

“You mean people simply trying to amass it by whatever means possible? Then hoarding it without regard for the needs of those less fortunate. People who blaspheme the meaning of money.”

“Blaspheme ... strange word,” John Randall says. “Though when you think of money and religion, the word guilt is often lurking somewhere.”

“Yea and it’s wrong, John,” Father Bob says. “There’s no guilt in honestly making money. There is, though, in stealing it; obtaining it dishonestly, by coercion, deception, or fraud. To obtain it without an honest and equal exchange of goods and services is to prostitute money to the dark side of man’s nature; greed and laziness.”

“And we know people like that?” chuckles Martin Williams.

“Oh yea, just look at the interest rates on credit cards nowadays.”

“Or the opulent lifestyle of some of my colleagues,” Pastor Williams says, an obvious tone of disappointment in voice.

“Amen to that,” John says.

“Seriously though, all work performed honestly is a tribute to the creator. A janitor at a local school works hard to leave the children and teachers a clean, healthy environment. He honors his money and his money honors him. He is worthier in the eyes of his Creator than the businessman who steals, using a fountain pen or a computer instead of a gun and a mask. That person profanes his money. He sins against it and against God.”

“So, you’re saying, work is a prayer?” Doc asks.

“Yes, expressed in our daily activities, Doc. We go to Sam’s and enjoy her coffee and pastries ... the fruits of her talents and labor. In turn, Sam pays you to keep little Emily healthy. You purchase a treasure from Joey for your anniversary. And Joey pays Walt to build a deck on his house. All give value for value. Life well lived, understanding the proper relationship of men to each other and to their Creator, is a prayer.”

Father Bob pauses, again looking at the coins in his hand. “The contents of my wallet are my congregation’s statement of the value they put on my efforts for them. In my eyes, that’s as much a prayer as any other.”

Wandering over to the curb, Reverend Williams bends over and picks up two shiny pennies. “Eureka!” he laughs, holding them up for all to see.

“Well, it’s a start,” chuckles Rabbi Green.

“Oh no, it’s contagious,” Billy Swanson says, a look of mock horror on his face.

“Keep at it Martin, though you’ve got a way to go to catch up with the master, here,” laughs Doc.

And from the back of the group the familiar voice of St. Katie’s pastor is heard.

*“Rookie!”*

**Money doesn’t corrupt a man ... a man corrupts his money.**

**“The love of money is the root of all evil.” Words often misunderstood or used out of context.**

**Jesus was a working man; paid for his labor and his products in the coin of the day. Understanding the sacred nature of money, we can only believe that Jesus had a proper understanding and a profound respect for money ...**

**Shouldn’t we?**

**Thinkaboutit ... I’m Tony Baggz**