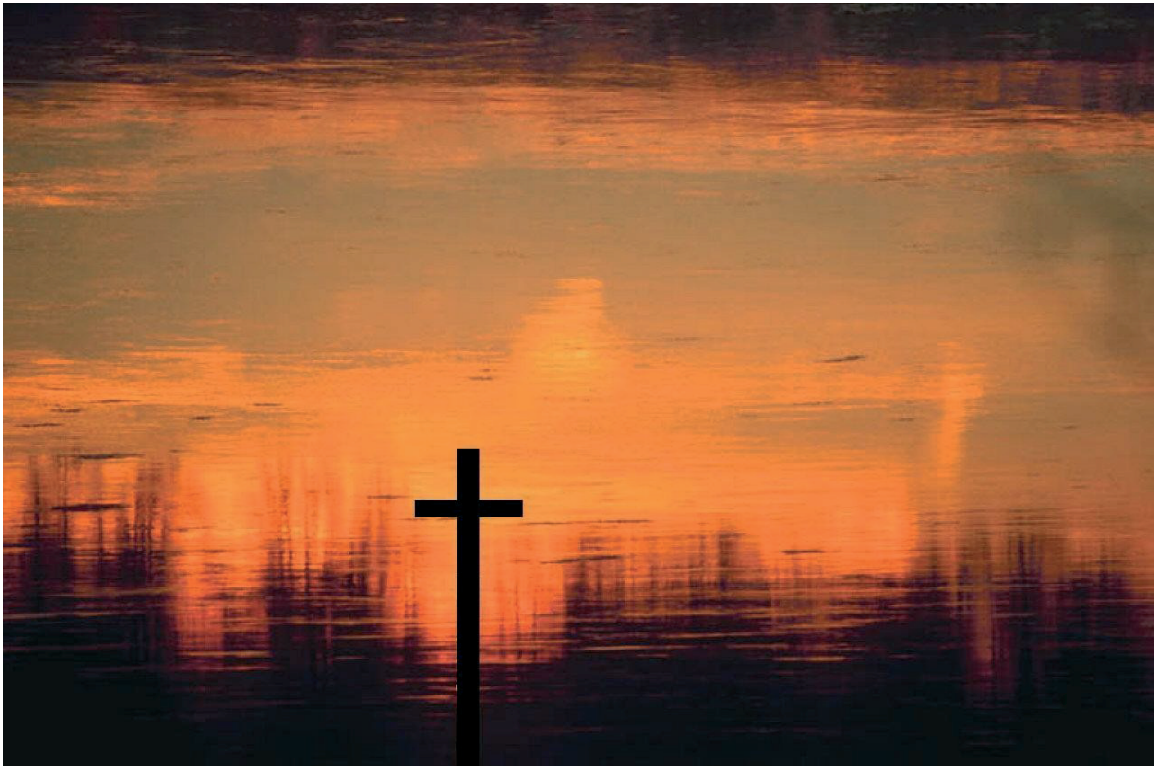


GOLDEN DROPLETS

**GOLDEN DROPLETS**  
**More wisdom of Father Ignatius**



**Victor S E Moubarak**

GOLDEN DROPLETS

## FOREWORD

“**GOLDEN DROPLETS**” is a compilation of stories about Father Ignatius, a character from my first book “**VISIONS**” (ISBN 978 1 60477 032 2).

“**VISIONS**” is a fiction story of three children who see an apparition of the Lord Jesus on their way to church. They tell their priest, Father Ignatius, about it; and pretty soon news spreads throughout town.

People react to the news in different ways. Some readily believe, others mock and scoff in disbelief, whilst some react violently towards the children and their families.

Parishioners seek guidance from Father Ignatius whereas the Church seeks to hush the whole story in the hope that it goes away; whilst Jesus appears again and again.

“**VISIONS**” challenges readers to ask what they would do in a similar situation – as Christians, as parents or just as onlookers.

A must-read book for everyone ready for a reality check on what they actually believe.

Following the publication of “**VISIONS**” I published further short stories about Father Ignatius on my Blog “**Time for Reflections**” – <http://timeforreflections.blogspot.com/>

The stories chosen here in “**GOLDEN DROPLETS**” each tell a different tale in the life of Father Ignatius and none of them are taken from the book “**VISIONS**” – they are stand-alone vignettes chosen from my Blog.

Thank you for reading “**GOLDEN DROPLETS**” (and “**VISIONS**”). You may also be interested in my other books “**GOLDEN DROPS**” and “**FELINE CATASTROPHES**” both of whom are available FREE in E Book format from my website [www.holyvisions.co.uk](http://www.holyvisions.co.uk)

I pray that God blesses each one of you dear readers, old and new, and may He be with you and your families always.

**Victor S E Moubarak**

[www.holyvisions.co.uk](http://www.holyvisions.co.uk)

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## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### YOU ARE INVITED

It is said you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but that shouldn't stop you from trying. At least that was the opinion of the Bishop when he decided to invite a number of priests from his Diocese to a Teamwork Seminar led by a prominent firm of Management Consultants.

Father Ignatius sat at his desk and read the same letter for the fifth time. He had hoped it was addressed to someone else. Father Donald maybe, Mrs Davenport the housekeeper, or even Canis the dog sleeping happily in the corner.

But alas no ... it was addressed to him alright.

Here was a command from the Bishop to attend a seminar run at a Monastery some miles away. For a summons indeed it was, despite the polite "You are invited" blurb in the opening paragraph. You can't easily decline an invitation like this, since by doing so it implies that you do not agree with the boss that you are indeed in need of Teamwork training – whatever that is.

So Father Ignatius decided to do the next best thing. He would appeal to a Higher Authority. For days he prayed that the seminar might be cancelled, or that some other urgent appointment may force him to pull out at the last minute, or anything, just anything might happen to avoid his attendance. But it seems that God agreed with the Bishop on this one and nothing happened to excuse Father Ignatius from attending the seminar.

Reluctantly, he drove to the Monastery that day and met there thirty or so other priests from the Diocese in need of the same improvement opportunities that the seminar might provide. He was pleased of course to meet some old friends and catch up on old news, and make the acquaintance of new priests he'd not met before.

As for the seminar ... well ... it was led by three young Management Consultants who used every cliché in the book to spout various platitudes and truisms one could not really disagree with. The course attendees were made to discuss their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They were asked to identify positive and negative traits in themselves. And to undertake various banal exercises and debates leading to nowhere.

Father Ignatius is nothing but polite and co-operative so he took part in the various tasks without question. "No point being churlish about it," he thought to himself.

At one stage the priests were divided into small groups of five and asked to consider a scenario where they were driving through the desert and their vehicle had broken down. They had to decide whether to stay with the vehicle in the hope of being rescued, or whether they should move on and attempt to find shelter from the unforgiving sun. They also had to decide which five items to take with them if they moved away from the vehicle.

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Some priests wanted to take binoculars with them; others preferred the knife and map, whereas a couple insisted on taking the bottle of water, the umbrella and the blanket.

The young consultant managing the exercise noticed that Father Ignatius was rather quiet and asked him, “What would you take with you Father if you moved on?”

After a few moments of consideration Father Ignatius replied, “the door of the vehicle.”

Rather puzzled the consultant enquired, “the door ... whatever for?”

“If it gets too hot, I can always open the window,” replied the priest.

A few days later whilst enjoying his breakfast Father Ignatius received a greetings card from Father Simon, a priest he had met at the seminar. It read:

“Dear Ignatius, I so much enjoyed meeting you at the seminar. Like you, I thought it unnecessary and hoped to be anywhere else but there. Yet your jovial attitude and constant cheerfulness kept me going. I shall never forget your joke about the car door.”

Father Ignatius realized that no matter how low you feel, or how superfluous you consider yourself to be, or reluctant to attend a gathering or event, you are always a welcome gift to someone else who may value your presence.

You don't have to be a celebrity or a famous personality; just being yourself is in itself a gift to others. Whether you're a spouse or a parent, a son or daughter, uncle or aunt or any other relative or friend; you are important to someone and they cherish your presence, your very being with them. The greatest present we can give others is our time, our attention, our love and our caring – it's worth more than any material gift we buy them.

Give yourself to others. Just like Christ did. And still does.

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### STABBED ANGEL

Being a priest is not really a sedentary job where you work just one day a week and you have plenty of time for leisure and watching TV. Far from it. Sometimes you come face to face with real danger as Father Ignatius can testify.

It was a wet autumn evening with leaves covering the ground, and when they start rotting away they become slimy and slippery; a cold autumn evening with a freezing wind that blows right through you; the kind of evening when you'd much rather be at home by the fireside with a hot cup of chocolate in your hands. Yes ... not the sort of evening to be out and about.

You guessed it ... the phone rang and Father Ignatius was called out as a matter of urgency.

One of his elderly parishioners was very ill and not expected to see the night through. Father Ignatius jumped in his car and drove to one of the less salubrious parts of town where Mrs Bartholomew lived alone with a cat as a pet. As he arrived at her house in a darkly lit street the doctor was just leaving; and a kind neighbour had agreed to stay with Mrs Bartholomew until her son and daughter-in-law arrived from another town not so far away.

Father Ignatius stayed with the elderly lady to comfort her and to pray with her until her family arrived at about half-past eleven at night.

As he left the house he said yet another silent prayer for her and made his way, in the drizzling rain, towards his car. He was just a few feet away from the vehicle when suddenly, out of the dark, a young man jumped out from an alleyway brandishing a big knife.

The priest was startled and was fortunate enough to recover his balance on the slippery ground by leaning back on his car.

The young man, hardly visible in the semi-darkness, pointed the knife at Father Ignatius and said, "your wallet mister ... and be quick about it ..."

The priest could see the long blade shining in the little light that was available from a nearby shop window. Before he could say or do anything the young man lunged forward with the knife aimed at the priest's chest. Father Ignatius moved sideways as a reflex and felt the knife slide down his side. Somehow, it got caught in his coat pocket pulling forward the youth who slipped badly hitting his head against the car door as he fell to the ground.

The youngster screamed in agony as the blade cut into him.

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Father Ignatius stooped down to help him. He had the presence of mind to throw the knife a distance away and told the lad to stay still whilst he fetched some help from the “24/7” shop.

Moments later both an ambulance and the police were on the scene and the youth was taken away.

The following day Father Ignatius called at the police station as advised by the officers. He learnt that the youngster, only 15 years old, was un-employed, and living rough. This was hardly unusual in this desolate town where commerce and industry had long given up hope and departed.

He was asked to make a statement and to help press charges against his would-be assailant, but Father Ignatius had other things in mind. He knew the chief-of-police and somehow managed to get the youngster put in his care without pressing charges for the attempted mugging. It was after all a first-time offence and the police had no previous records of the lad. Three weeks later the priest found him a job with a local farmer.

But the story does not end there.

On the night of the attack Father Ignatius returned home very late. Father Donald and Mrs Davenport the housekeeper were up and worried out of their minds. They did not know where the priest had been.

After getting cleaned up and nursing a nice cup of chocolate in his hands he re-told them that night's events. Father Donald insisted that in future he'd be the one to go out late at night if necessary. In his early thirties, and half of Ignatius' age, he thought he should be the one out there, leaving “the old man” at home.

Father Ignatius smiled and said nothing. Then after a pause he confided:

“Tonight, I've learnt two things I never realised before. When the situation first started and I thought I was about to die, I discovered that, in reality, I was not afraid of death. We all claim as Christians not to be afraid of death; and when it nearly happened to me, I found out I really wasn't scared at all. I seemed ready for it, but I was more concerned as to whether it would be painful.

“Secondly, I think my Guardian Angel helped me tonight. When the knife came at me at speed, I saw a white shape come between me and the young boy. It was all over in a flash. One second I saw the shape and the next the boy was on the ground in agonizing pain. I'm certain that knife was stopped into going in my chest.”

Unfortunately, in a town where nothing much of interest happens, the story of the attack found its way in the newspapers. For days afterwards, every time Father Ignatius went to St Andrew's Catholic School the young boys made karate movements with their hands when they saw him, and called him Father Kung-Fu.



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### ILLOGICAL LOGIC

Logic it seems isn't always what it is perceived to be and no matter how much you try to understand the other person's logic you might end up failing. This could be either because of your inability to understand, or because the other person's logic is faulty – as Father Ignatius can testify.

He was walking round town the other day and happened to enter a bookshop advertising “Reduced Prices throughout the Store!!!”.

He made his way to the “Religion” shelf to see what was on offer and eventually found a book about Jesus which he wished to purchase. It had a big red label on it saying:  
Reduced price - £9.99.

He thought of buying two copies, one for him and another for a parishioner who would benefit from reading it. He looked around on the shelf and found another identical book; but without the red label.

When he reached the cashier to pay for both items purchased she said: “£29.99 please.”

“Why?” said the priest, rather puzzled.

“This book is priced £20.00 and this one is £9.99” replied the robotic assistant.

“But they're identical, and they're reduced in price aren't they?” enquired Father Ignatius.

“Only the one with the red label is on offer for £9.99; the other book is charged at the full price of £20.00” replied the cashier monotonously.

At this moment the manager happened to be passing by and overheard the conversation.

“May I help you Sir ... Reverend ... Father ...” he mumbled when he noticed the priest's white collar.

“Let me explain,” continued the manager, “every morning we go to check our stock of books and stick red labels on some of them. Those with the labels are reduced in price; whilst others are not.”

“I understand,” reasoned Father Ignatius, “but both these books are identical. Surely they should be priced the same?”

“Not so,” insisted the manager who obviously knew best. He was, after all, in charge of the shop, “not so at all ... this book with the label we'll sell at £9.99 whereas the other one we'll sell at the full price of £20.00; regardless whether they are identical or not.”



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Father Ignatius is a tenacious character when he feels it needs it; and he certainly likes a challenge of wits. So he tried one more time to make the man see sense:

“Tell me ... it is possible, is it not, that when you stick these labels in the morning, that you stick the red labels on two identical books?”

“Oh yes ... it happens frequently ...”

“And when it happens, then you’d sell two copies of the same book at the reduced price?” said the priest sensing a minor but very important victory.

“Oh yes ... in that case we would sell two or more copies of the same book at the reduced price, provided they had the red labels on them.”

Father Ignatius smiled broadly. “Game, set and match!” he thought to himself.

“But on this occasion unfortunately we stuck a label on only one book. So you’ll have to buy this one for £9.99 and this one for the full price of £20.00.”

The priest’s smile soon faded when the manager continued:

“May I suggest you buy the book with the label today, and come back tomorrow? It is possible that there will be another identical book with a label on it then. Although I can’t guarantee it ... but if you come back every other day or so then perhaps you’ll find another copy of the book reduced in price then!!!”

Father Ignatius gave up. There’s no point in engaging in a battle of wits with an unarmed person.

He now had to make a quick decision and had three choices:

To leave the shop and not buy the books.

To buy both books for the asking price of £29.99 and effectively, tacitly, agree with the manager’s faulty logic.

To buy the cheaper of the two books and leave it at that. Which is what he did.

“It’s a shame” he thought to himself,” as he left the shop. I would have liked to give a copy of this book to Mark. He’s always a helpful parishioner when we need him ... perhaps he can borrow my copy when I’ve read it ...”

It seems that the angels may well have overheard his thoughts because a little further down the road he came across another bookshop. “I wonder ...” said Father Ignatius. And sure enough, he found there an identical book selling even cheaper at £8.99. A saving of £1; which he put in the collection box at St Vincent Church.

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### RUNNING TO CHURCH

Father Ignatius was often encouraged at the level of participation in church activities by the parishioners at St Vincent. There were daily babies and toddlers groups for mothers and their young ones, a youth club for those aged twelve to sixteen met weekly in the hall, as well as the cub scouts, girl guides and other groups for the young ones in his congregation. Even the not so young met in the Senior Citizens Group and the Seniors Bridge Club. The Choir always attracted new members, Sunday Catechism classes were well attended and no end of boys volunteered as Altar servers during Mass.

He had worked hard over the years encouraging the many groups to be set up and run on a voluntary basis and attracting active participation. He prayed that it would remain always so.

Early one morning he was at his desk when he saw out of the window four young boys come running from the park opposite towards the church. He got up and made his way to church for morning Mass.

As he entered the Sacristy he heard the four boys shouting and arguing with each other.

“You’re a cheat ...” screamed one of them, “I came first ...”

“What is going on here?” asked Father Ignatius in his calm yet masterly voice.

“Henry is a cheat Father!” said a youngster, “we raced from the park and I came first. Peter was second. Joe and Henry came last.”

“No I didn’t ...” shouted Henry. “I was first in the Sacristy ...”

“All right ... calm down now,” said Father Ignatius, “I saw you running from the park. It’s dangerous crossing the road like that. In future I want you to stop and use the proper crossing by the traffic lights. Is that understood?”

“Yes ...” they said in unison.

“Now, what was all this running about?”

“We agreed that the first two to get to church will be the Altar servers today.”

The priest was silently impressed. To think that these eight year olds were rushing to church to serve at Mass. They were certainly a credit to their parents. To wake up early every day and compete to serve at the Altar denotes seeds planted in good fertile ground. There’s hope for the future.

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do ...” said Father Ignatius, “any two of you who can recite the Lord’s Prayer will serve with me at Mass today ...”

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“Easy ...” interrupted Mark.

“In Latin ...” continued the priest.

“That’s also easy ...” said Peter, “Pater Noster ...”

And to his pleasure and surprise all four recited the Lord’s Prayer in Latin word perfect. He tried them with the Hail Mary also in Latin and they performed admirably.

“All right ... all right ... you win” declared Father Ignatius, “I have decided that from now on we will have four Altar servers at daily Mass. Now go and get ready!”

As he left the Sacristy Father Ignatius heard one of the boys say: “When I’m a priest I will have one hundred Altar servers at Mass each day.”

Father Ignatius smiled and prayed to God that indeed it may be so.

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### I'M LOSING MY FAITH

Father Ignatius was in the Sacristy tidying up after morning's Mass when one of his parishioners came in and asked if he could have a quick chat. Being quite approachable, the priest glanced quickly at his watch and agreed to spend a few minutes with the young man, in his mid-twenties.

"Father ... I'm losing my Faith ..." was the abrupt introduction.

Father Ignatius said nothing, encouraging the young man to continue with a nod. "I've been a Christian all my life, but there are times when I'm totally confused. I ask myself whether God really exists ... whether it's all real ... or just some invention. I wonder whether God ... Jesus and the whole of Christianity have just been invented over the years by society ... just to regulate itself ... I sometimes find it a real struggle to believe that God exists ... but the more I try to believe the more I doubt."

"I don't blame you," replied the priest, and this had the desired effect of gaining the young man's full attention.

"We're living in difficult times," continued Father Ignatius, "times of confusion, half-truths and miss-information. The world is in financial crisis and turmoil. People are losing their jobs and their livelihoods. They fear for the future. Nothing seems as it should be. It is no wonder people get confused and don't know what to believe anymore. And in their confusion and daily worries they can't keep their focus on God. They hear and read so many conflicting stories they don't know what to think anymore ... to the point where they even start doubting God's very existence.

"You're not the only one who came to me recently saying what you've just said. That you doubt God exists."

"Oh ..." said the man.

"When the Jews left Egypt, they were confused too ..." the priest went on, "they had left the relative safety of slavery behind them, where they were fed and watered, and here they were, going round in circles in the desert following a man promising them jam tomorrow ... or was it milk and honey?"

The young man smiled.

"So they rebelled against Moses. They didn't want to believe in His God, leading them to safety. Despite what they had seen that God did for them ... dividing the sea so they could cross safely, sending food from Heaven and so on ... they still doubted and rebelled. They were more interested in placing their Faith in a statue made of solid gold. At least this was something they could see and touch and admire!

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“Years later we read in the Bible about other people doubting and in confusion ... just as you feel right now.

“Peter had been with Christ for at least three years and had seen His miracles and heard His sermons. He witnessed the healings, the raising from the dead, walking on water, feeding the thousands. He of all people had no reason to doubt. Yet when it came to the crunch he too doubted and denied knowing Christ ... not once, but he denied knowing Him three times.

“How does that compare with you ... hmmm?

“As for the disciple Thomas ... well he just refused to believe period.

“So you’re in good company young man. You’re not alone in doubting about the very existence of God your Creator.”

At this the young man was totally confused and didn’t know what to ask next.

Perhaps he had expected some magic formula to restore his ailing Faith, a wave of a wand, or some soothing words from his priest ... but alas no ... the priest just confounded his thoughts by affirming that his doubts are neither unusual nor unexpected.

Father Ignatius smiled and said, “That didn’t help did it?”

“Well ...” hesitated the young man.

“There once was a man whose son was very ill, and He came to Jesus for help” continued Father Ignatius, “ ‘Help us if you can,’ he asked Jesus. Jesus replied ‘Everything is possible if you have Faith,’ to which the man said ‘I do have Faith, but not enough, help me to have more.’

“Jesus healed this man’s son. He saw that the man was struggling with his Faith, as you’re doing right now. So He helped him.

“We don’t all have the same strength and vigor of Faith. Some, like you’ve admitted, are a little weak and waver from time to time. Just like Peter and Thomas did.

“But don’t tell me about it. Tell God, in your own words. Tell Him you’re struggling to believe; ask Him to help you.

“Say over and again I believe, Lord; help my unbelief.

“The good Lord will help you ... but only if you are willing to believe ... if you’re willing to fight your doubts, and your fears, and your confusion.

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“God loves you, and He does not wish to see you go astray, away from Him. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your capabilities. He is not in the business of losing souls you know ...”

Father Ignatius paused for a while and then continued in his gentle voice.

“There’s an old Cherokee Indian legend about a youth’s rite of passage, when he becomes a man so to speak.

“When the child is of a certain age his father takes him to the forest where he has to sit blindfolded overnight. He shouldn’t take off the blindfold but sit there, in the darkness, hearing all the noises of the night ... animals howling, and the rustling of the trees and so on, and conquer his fears.

“The next morning, at sunrise, he takes off his blindfold and looks around him only to find that his father had been sitting with him all night, protecting him from danger. He shouldn’t tell what happened to anyone else, so others may experience the love of their fathers too.

“You are now blindfolded and confused. But God your Father in Heaven is right beside you, protecting you at all times. Because He loves you, more than any earthly father can love his children.”

The young man smiled and wiped his eye with the back of his hand.

“OK ... I think you’re already on the first steps towards recovery ... I suggest you pray time and again ... especially when you feel doubts coming on ... recite the Rosary ... have you got one?”

The man nodded.

“Our Lady will always protect you if you ask her. Don’t be afraid to tell her how you feel.”

As the man left the Sacristy much relieved than when he first came in, Father Ignatius added, “and whilst you’re praying, don’t forget to say one for me!”

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### THE POPE'S MISTAKES

Early one morning Father Ignatius received a phone call from Mother Superior. Sister Josephine had been called away to visit a very sick relative; would he take on her Catechism class of 7 and 8 year-olds.

He sat down at her desk and said, "Let's start where Sister Josephine left off last week. What did she teach?"

A young boy put up his hand and said enthusiastically, "She said the Pope does not make any mistakes. He is unflappable!"

"No stupid ..." interrupted a young girl, "Sister Josephine said the Pope is inflatable!"

"I remember it was inf something ..." explained little Dennis to the priest, "in follicle I think ..."

"I'm sure his Holiness would be pleased to learn that you consider him unflappable and inflatable!" said Father Ignatius gently, "I think Sister Josephine said that he is infallible."

"It means he does not make any mistakes," explained Dennis eagerly.

"Does it mean he can do all his sums right?" asked William.

"I don't think so," said Rose, "because algebra is very difficult. Everyone makes mistakes in algebra."

"I hate algebra," declared Derek, "and chemistry. Are you good at algebra Father?"

The priest tapped the ruler gently on the desk to get them to settle down.

"No Derek, I have never been good at algebra," he confessed, "I found it a little difficult too."

This had the desired effect of quietening them down.

"Now then," he continued, "what did Sister Josephine mean when she said that the Pope is infallible?"

"He makes no mistakes," said Sophie.

"Yes," said Father Ignatius, "what I'm sure Sister Josephine explained is that the Pope, when speaking for the Church, and teaching about Christianity, he does so in a correct manner, which we should accept and obey."

"Does this mean he is always right when answering Catechism questions?" asked Marcel.



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“It means that he is guided by the Holy Spirit, who teaches him and tells him what to say. You know who the Holy Spirit is; do you?” Father Ignatius asked the youngsters.

“He is a pigeon,” declared Alfred, “because I have an image of Jesus in the water with John the Baptism and a pigeon. Dad said it is the Holy Spirit.”

“No ...” replied Monica, “the Holy Spirit is fire which went on the Gospels heads when they were in the house, only it didn’t burn their hair. It made them speak many languages.”

“Yes ... that’s true” confirmed Steve, “it made them speak in Arabaic.”

“No, it’s Aramaic ...” corrected Dennis, “they spoke in all languages in the world except French!”

“Jesus spoke in English,” said Derek, “that’s why all the Bibles in the world are written in English!”

“No, He spoke in Latin. That’s why the priest says Dominus Vobiscum in Latin,” explained Harry who’d remained quiet up to now.

The priest tapped the ruler gently again on the desk to get them to stop talking. Obviously he had a lot of ground to cover to explain in simple terms to these enthusiastic youngsters the many mysteries of Christianity.

He told them how God at first spoke to us through the prophets, and then He sent Jesus to speak to us personally as a human being, although He is also God. It would have been difficult for people at the time to understand and fathom out the Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. So God allowed the Holy Spirit to appear in terms which people could perhaps understand, a dove, a voice from above, and indeed tongues of fire.

These mysteries are still difficult for some people to understand even today. That’s why we must pray often about them and ask God to help us believe, even if we don’t fully understand.

At this point the bell rang to signify the end of lesson.

As the children left Father Ignatius remembered that Sister Josephine was scheduled to take on his Catechism class this Friday.

“I wonder what booby traps she’ll lay for me with that lot?” he asked himself.

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### THE GIFT

Father Ignatius was helping a few volunteers clearing out a storeroom deep in the basement of the church. It was dark and somewhat humid down there as well as dusty amongst the cobwebs that accumulated over the years.

The intention was to redecorate the basement, connect it to the mains electricity supply, and use the area reclaimed from years of neglect to more profitable use than just storage space for unwanted bits and pieces.

The helpers had brought with them extension cables and lit up the place a little. Slowly they took out old bits of furniture, wooden boxes full of books and other knick-knacks, church ornaments, statues and whatever else had been deposited there by previous generations.

Father Ignatius and an antique dealer friend started cataloguing the items as they were recovered from the bowels of the church in order to decide whether they were of any value and worth keeping, or whether they would be sold or got rid off.

“Rather musty in here,” commented one of the volunteers carrying a large vase.

“Creepy too ... if you ask me,” complained another, “I wouldn’t be surprised if this place is haunted. Is there not an old crypt at the end of this corridor?”

“Boooo ... hooo!!!!” moaned another helper eerily covering his head with an old blanket.

“Grow up George ...” cried out Sonia.

“Are you having fun down there?” enquired Father Ignatius from the top of the stairs as he catalogued yet another candlestick.

“Hey Father ... look what I’ve found down here,” replied Sonia coming up the stairs followed by the other helpers who needed a short break.

She carefully carried a large framed picture with the glass still intact. The wooden frame needed a little cleaning but otherwise it looked in reasonable condition. The helpers wiped the dirt from the frame and glass to reveal a brightly coloured painting of a dove flying high with rays of light or fire descending on a heart.

“Wow ... this is beautiful,” said George.

“Isn’t it just ...” said Sonia.

“It’s the Holy Spirit ...” exclaimed Father Ignatius, “I wonder how long this has been down there.”

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“Why is He depicted as a dove?” asked one of the volunteers, “and fire too ... The Holy Spirit is a bit of an enigma I think.”

“I understand what you mean ...” reflected Father Ignatius, “the Holy Spirit can seem an enigma to some ...

“He appeared as a dove at Christ’s baptism, and as tongues of fire at Pentecost when he descended on the apostles.

“I suppose many people still misunderstand who the Holy Spirit is.

“We are taught about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit .... He doesn’t seem to have a title or a description.

“It was St Hilary of Poitiers, a Bishop in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD, who first described the Holy Spirit as ‘the gift’.

“He is the gift given to us by God after Jesus ascended into Heaven. He is the very Spirit of God Himself. His very soul come back to us on earth to dwell within us and to help us in our Christian life.

“That’s why He is sometimes referred to as the Helper, the Counsellor, God’s own Being living within us.”

“God living within us ...” repeated George.

“Yes ...” said Father Ignatius, “can you imagine that? God. Living within us. Guiding us. Helping us. Teaching us. Advising us when to speak and when to remain silent. What to say and what to do.

“Isn’t that wonderful? Or is it too difficult to imagine or believe?”

“Isn’t it a tragedy that these days many people are too willing to believe that the devil can possess an individual unwillingly and reap havoc in their lives; which of course is true.

“Yet ... they find it difficult to understand that the Holy Spirit of God is willing to abide within us and lead us to an eternal better life in Heaven. And He only does so when we ask Him, when we invite Him in our hearts ...

“All we have to do is believe ... and ask Him.”

They reflected silently for a few seconds when eventually Sonia said “I think we should hang this picture prominently in church.”

“I agree ...” replied Father Ignatius, “and it will give me an opportunity to talk about the Holy Spirit in my sermon this Sunday.”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### COMPLICATED GOD

Early morning Mass had just finished. Everyone had gone home or to work, except for Simon the gardener. He stayed behind to collect any stray hymn books left in the pews and to clear up in the Sacristy before he put in an hour or two mowing the lawn in the garden behind the church.

“That was an odd reading we had today from 2 Peter 3:8” he said to Father Ignatius as he locked the Sacristy door.

“You remember the exact chapter and verse I see ...” replied the priest, “what was so odd about it?”

“I mean ... it said ‘There is no difference in the Lord’s sight between one day and a thousand years; to Him the two are the same.’

“That must make it very difficult keeping an appointment with God ... imagine Him asking Moses to come up the mountain tomorrow ... Moses wouldn’t know whether it’s in twenty four hours’ time or in a thousand years ...”

The priest smiled and said nothing.

“Why is God so complicated sometimes?” asked Simon.

“It’s a bit early in the morning for all these questions ... I haven’t had my toast and ginger marmalade yet ... have you had breakfast?” asked Father Ignatius.

“Er ... no ... not yet ...”

“In that case I suggest we go to the kitchen and prepare something to eat ...” continued the priest as he headed for the Parish house.

Minutes later he had set the table with fried eggs and bacon, coffee, toast and marmalade.

“Now then ...” said Father Ignatius as he put his cup down, “what’s on your mind Simon?”

“Well ... as I was saying ... God and the Bible seem so complicated at times. All this business about one day is the same as a thousand years ... and the story of the Creation for instance ... if God is so powerful why did He need seven days to create the universe ... and did He really need a rib from Adam to create Eve? Seems so improbable to me ...”

Father Ignatius sympathized with what Simon was saying.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“Remember Simon,” he said, “the Bible is a book of Faith and not necessarily a book of literal facts ... not all of it ...

“No one was with God at the time of Creation. So no one can say for certain whether it took Him seven days or seven seconds or less even. In reality, it doesn't matter how long God took to create the universe; or whether he really took a bone from the side of Adam or not. What matters is that we have learnt that God is the ultimate Creator of all that we see and all that we are. And all that we have yet to discover in this great universe.

“The Creation is a story told by the writer of the book of Genesis to teach the people of the time about God. A story inspired by God no doubt, but not necessarily all factual in every detail.”

“That's what I meant by complicated...” retorted Simon, “how are we to know what is factual and what is not ... which bit to believe literally and which not?”

Father Ignatius chuckled gently.

“I see what you mean,” he said.

“Over the years, and in preparation for the priesthood, I have studied and read many books,” continued Father Ignatius, “you'd be surprised how many different views and opinions there are about God, the teachings of the Bible and theology in general.

“For centuries many learned wise heads have surmised and pronounced on various issues concerning God and Christianity. To the point where we have made it into a science; a discipline worthy of study at our universities and such like.

“And after all of my studies I've reached one conclusion ...

“God is not complicated at all ... it is us who make Him complicated.

“We question and analyse every aspect of our religion and our Faith. We try to understand in human terms what is not of human origin. We dissect our very Creator as if He were an insect in a laboratory and debate His very existence.

“This is wrong surely ...

“God is simply love. He created us out of love and wishes the best for us. He wishes to share eternity with us.

“But we distanced ourselves from Him through our sin. And when we did so, He did not give up on us.

“He loved us so much that He sent His Son on earth, so that we may see Him in human terms. Can you imagine that ... really imagine it?”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“God walked this earth as a man, just like everyone else. Humans saw Him, spoke to Him and listened to Him. They witnessed His miracles. He died for us, and was raised from the dead so that we may be forgiven.

“It’s as simple as that ... God created us, and loved us so much that He came down on earth and lived amongst us.

“God does not ask us to understand His ways or to know how things work ... He doesn’t expect us to analyse His motives and His strategies ... He just wants us to step out in Faith and dare to trust Him ... to love Him ... and to obey Him.”

“I like that ... to step out in Faith and dare to trust Him ...” repeated Simon.

“That’s right,” said Father Ignatius as he poured another cup of coffee, “let us stop trying to find answers where He doesn’t want us to ... let’s trust Him that His ways are superior and better than ours, and that His love will see us through ... if we let Him.

“Let God work in your life, rather than waste time working out all about Him.”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### COMING TO TERMS

It had been a horrible grey day, with dark skies and continuous light drizzly rain as you often get in England. A very soft freezing wind blew gently from the North; the kind of gentle wind which would hardly make a leaf tremble yet it could go right through you chilling your every bone.

Father Ignatius was in church. He stood by the doorway and looked at the rain and thought of his childhood. His mother used to say when it drizzled like today that it was the angels crying because of the many sins in this world. He said a silent prayer for his parents now long gone.

Every now and then, the cold wind carried with it a sweet sugary smell from the brewery nearby. The aroma of caramel or syrup, 'or was it malt', thought the priest, enveloped the whole church and Parish House.

Eventually, Father Ignatius locked the church door and crossed the car park in the gentle rain as he made his way towards the Parish House.

As he entered the house, closing the door behind him, the phone rang and he was asked to go to the hospital.

Half-an-hour later he was at the bedside of Isabelle Bennett.

Isabelle was a lively 28 years old, always cheerful and laughing enthusiastically as she spread happiness to everyone she knew. Father Ignatius had known her and her young husband Martin for some years now. They were both members of the Parish Council and took part in many church activities and events.

Then suddenly, about a month ago, Isabelle was taken seriously ill and admitted to hospital where she remained ever since. She was not getting any better and the doctors had given up hope.

She smiled feebly as Father Ignatius entered the hospital room where she was lying in bed. Her face ashen in colour and her beautiful blue eyes very tired from the many injections and pain-killers she'd received. Her husband sat by her side Rosary beads in hand holding her hand gently.

The nurse brought in another chair which she placed on the other side of the bed; and Father Ignatius sat down.

"Are you in pain?" he asked her gently.

She shook her head. Her husband raised the hand he was holding to his lips and kissed her.



## GOLDEN DROPLETS

Father Ignatius started praying quietly as the nurse left the room. He gave Isabelle Holy Communion and then sat down beside her.

“Can we recite the Rosary Father?” she asked softly.

And for the next few minutes the priest and her husband recited the Rosary together whilst her lips moved gently as they prayed.

When they had finished praying she asked him how he was, and made small conversation. Her voice was soft and somewhat laboured as she drifted in and out of consciousness. One moment she was talking about church matters and the next she was asleep, then awake once again.

At these moments of silence Father Ignatius sat quietly and prayed silently.

She moved her other hand towards him and held his hand. Holding her husband and her priest in each hand.

Suddenly, she squeezed the priest’s hand tightly and said: “Don’t look so miserable Father. I’ll be seeing Jesus before you.”

Father Ignatius moved a little forward and kissed her on the forehead.

About twenty minutes later she passed away peacefully.

The funeral was very emotional. The church was full to capacity with friends and relatives coming to mourn the loss of such a young and vivacious life.

Her husband Martin was totally devastated to have lost his young wife within seven months of marriage.

Father Ignatius prayed for him and the whole family who found it very difficult to come to terms with such an early death.

A few weeks later, the priest witnessed the first signs of renewal when young Martin phoned him one morning.

“Father,” he said, “I will inscribe what she said on her tombstone.

“It will read: Don’t look so miserable. I’ll be seeing Jesus before you.”

Three years later ... and Martin is studying for the priesthood.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### GOD IN ADVERSITY

Jack was a lovely man. Well loved by his wife, three children and four grand-children, as well as his wider family and friends.

When they all went to church together they filled the two front rows on the left of the Altar. But that wasn't often, because they usually attended different Masses at St Vincent.

One day, out of the blue, Jack was taken severely ill and admitted to hospital. The whole family was devastated and it is fair to say that their Faith took quite a beating.

But not Jack. He remained calm and somehow, accepted the will of God. Of course, he was a little scared, but accepted what was happening to him willingly, trusting God that all would be well.

Father Ignatius visited him in the hospital often, and was greatly humbled by the man's Faith and cheerfulness, despite the obvious pain he was in at times.

Jack remained in hospital for a while, receiving family visitors as well as his priest every now and then.

One day, whilst Father Ignatius was the only visitor Jack said to him:

“See that man over there Father, in the bed just opposite me?”

The priest nodded silently.

“He doesn't believe in God Father ...” continued Jack, “and he's scared to death. He has the same symptoms and the same problems as me ... and to be honest the doctors don't hold much hope for either of us ...”

Father Ignatius held Jack's hand.

“Hey ... I know what's what Father. Both of us will have an operation soon and the chances are ... well, I wouldn't bet my shirt on it ...”

Jack laughed weakly.

“You know what I did Father ...”

The priest shook his head.

“Yesterday, I went over to that man. His name is Larry. And I said to Larry that Jesus will look after him. I told him that everything will be OK and he is not to worry about the operation.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“I don’t think he believed me, or in Jesus ... but I think it calmed him down a bit.

“At least I’ve noticed that he’s stopped crying. He used to sit there and wipe his eyes and feel sorry for himself. He’s stopped that now. Maybe Jesus has started working on him ... hein?”

Father Ignatius nodded weakly. He prayed silently for Jack and thanked the Lord for this man’s Faith in such adversity. Not only to believe in Christ’s healing power but to announce it boldly to someone who didn’t believe at all.

“Hey Father ... you’d better give me Communion now; before the family turns up ... you know how emotional they get ... especially my wife ...” said Jack with a weak smile.

The priest prayed with Jack for a while after giving him Communion and waited until his family arrived before leaving the hospital.

A few days later Jack and Larry were operated on. Both operations were successful and after a period of recuperation in hospital and at home both fully recovered.

Jack and Larry became friends. Larry and his wife and daughter became Christian and attend church at St Vincent.

Jack’s severe illness and his stay in hospital were the channel for a family of un-believers to get to know and love Christ.

(Based on a true story).

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

Father Ignatius heard Mrs Davenport, the housekeeper, speaking with the telephone engineer in the main living room, so he kept well out of the way in the kitchen not wishing to be involved. He planned on having a quick toast and ginger marmalade for breakfast and then out of the back door and he was gone.

But too late ... he heard Mrs Davenport calling:

“It’s been installed Father Ignatius ... would you like to see how it works?”

He couldn’t pretend not to have heard and sneak out quickly, could he? That’s certainly not Father Ignatius’ style; he was honest to the nth degree. He’d heard her calling and that was that; honesty dictates that he has to answer her call.

He reluctantly walked into the living room and was greeted by a smiling telephone engineer, “Good morning sir ... I have installed your new Series 12 Telephone Answering Machine and it is ready for action ... if you care to see how it works ...”

Father Ignatius was not anti-progress as such, but he felt that the phones should be answered by a real person at all times especially if on occasions someone might call the priests in an emergency. But he was eventually convinced by Father Donald and Mrs Davenport that it was time St Vincent Church entered the 20<sup>th</sup> Century so he finally acquiesced.

“This is the on-off switch ...” explained the engineer, “and ideally the machine should be always on. This button here is to allow you to record your out-going message; that’s what the callers will hear when they phone you ...”

Father Ignatius nodded passively half-listening; his mind concentrating on the un-eaten toast and marmalade in the kitchen.

Eventually, the engineer asked, “Any questions?”

“Does it make toast?” asked the priest almost instinctively.

“Eh ... no sir ...” replied the confused engineer.

“Perhaps the Series 13 machine would have this added feature ...” smiled the priest, and then thought he’d better ask an intelligent question to compensate.

“At present all phones ring at once, this one, the one in my office and the one in Father Donald’s ... one of us answers it first. Will this machine jump in first and answer the calls?”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“No sir ... I have timed it that it will only answer after about one minute of the phone ringing ... you can augment the time delay with this button here ...”

Father Ignatius soon regretted his intelligent question and hoped the machine could make hot espresso coffee instead.

Throughout the day that machine became the centre of attraction. Mrs Davenport proudly demonstrated it to every visitor to the Parish House. The vegetables delivery man got a full demonstration of which button does what, and so did the gardener when he came to mow the lawn, and three members of the choir; but certainly not Mother Superior who declined politely as she sought refuge in Father Donald's office for a school governors' meeting.

Father Ignatius smiled to himself every time he heard her repeat which button is supposed to do what and then ask herself “at least that's what I think the engineer said ...”

“How lucky we are,” the priest thought to himself, “that God does not have an answering machine. We never hear Him saying ‘sorry there's no one here to take your call’ or ‘call back later’.

“He's with us always, just as Jesus promised, only a prayer away. Ready to listen, to help us and to guide us all the way back to Him in Heaven.”

Mrs Davenport had certainly taken to the machine and embraced new technology as it entered the Parish House for the first time. Father Ignatius was proud of that, and had not expected it from her. He saw her as more conservative and stuck in her ways.

“One day ...” he said to her, “no doubt someone will invent a portable telephone which you take with you everywhere. And people will talk to each other as they walk in the street, as they drive and as they shop and so on ... how would you like that Mrs Davenport?”

“But won't all those wires get tangled up with each other as all the people walk about carrying their phones?” she asked innocently.

Later that evening Mrs Davenport confirmed in the priest's mind that new technology had not yet reached the Davenport brain after all.

He overheard a conversation with a young Altar boy sitting in the kitchen doing his homework whilst waiting for his mother to pick him up.

The child asked Mrs Davenport who was preparing the evening meal: “If a person is in a vacuum can you hear him shout and scream?”

“It depends if the vacuum is switched on or off at the time, and the amount of dirt in the bag ...” replied Mrs Davenport.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### FORGOTTEN IN PURGATORY

Father Ignatius was in the back garden pruning the rose bushes whilst one of his parishioners was cleaning the pond and checking that the goldfish were in good health.

It was more to start a conversation than anything else when the parishioner asked: “Father ... is it a sin to fear death?”

“That’s a strange question ...” replied the priest, “what brought that on?”

“Well ... it’s not so much death that I’m concerned about,” said the man, hesitating a little, “it’s what comes afterwards.”

“You’re concerned about Heaven?”

“No Father ...” continued the man standing up from the pond and drying his hands on an old towel, “Purgatory ... that’s the real problem.

“The Church tells us that our souls will go to Purgatory until they’re made clean of all sins.”

“Yes ... that’s right ...” said Father Ignatius stopping what he was doing for a moment.

“The way I see it ...” said the man placing the old towel on one side, “we all have some sin or other on our conscience at any one time. So whenever we die not one of us will escape Purgatory. No matter how much I try ... the chances are that I’ll die having committed some sin or other ... and I’ll spend time in Purgatory.

“I don’t even know how long I’ll be there ... it could be years ... and I don’t like it.

“I’m not even sure what’s in Purgatory ... is there a fire like in hell ... only not as hot?”

Father Ignatius laughed.

“What’s so funny Father? What is in Purgatory anyway? It’s never quite explained in Catholic teaching; all I remember from my Catechism days is that it’s a place where we’re spiritually cleansed ... sounds more like a car-wash to me!”

Father Ignatius smiled again. He stopped pruning the roses and sat down on a nearby chair.

“Jesus certainly told us about Heaven and hell ... and He certainly described hell as a fiery place ... but He never mentioned Purgatory,” said the priest cautiously.

“So it’s a Catholic invention then?” retorted the parishioner, “because I know that other Christian churches don’t teach about Purgatory or believe in it.”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

Father Ignatius took off his glasses and cleaned imaginary specks of dust to gain some thinking time.

“You accept, do you not ...” he asked eventually, “that after you’ve confessed your sins you should do a penance?”

“Yes ... sure.”

“Well ...” continued the priest, “those who die with sins on their soul, venial sins that is ... have to go to Purgatory as a penance until they are spiritually cleansed. That’s what the Church teaches ...

“The Catholic Church bases its teaching from Scripture. In Revelation Chapter 21 Verse 27 it says ‘Nothing unclean shall enter Heaven.’ So, strictly speaking, if we die with venial sins on our conscience we’re not spiritually cleaned ... and that’s why we go to Purgatory.

“The belief in the existence of Purgatory goes back to the early Christians; and other Christian denominations, though not all, do also believe in such a place where souls go before they are ready to enter Heaven.

“As you know ... we Catholics also believe that if we pray for the souls in Purgatory, or offer Mass for them, it shortens their stay there ...”

“That’s exactly what I’m scared about Father ...” interrupted the man somewhat agitated, “I have no family whatsoever ... when I’m dead and gone I’ll be forgotten there in Purgatory for years on end ... it’s just not fair!

“Having accepted that I’ll die with venial sins I’ll then spend time in Purgatory with no one praying for me or offering Mass for me ... I just can’t escape the fact that I’ll end up in Purgatory ... totally forgotten.”

Father Ignatius sympathized with the man and his fear of the after-life and what was in store for him there. He had to tread a thin line indeed between the teachings of his Church and the realities of life as he faced them right here and right now.

One of his parishioners believed so much in Catholic doctrine that it frightened him to death, almost literally so.

“Hey ... don’t be scared ...” he said gently, “let’s consider this a bit more ...

“As I’ve explained, the belief in Purgatory and the need to purify our souls before we enter Heaven goes back to the early Church.



## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“Over the years ... you can rest assured that many wise heads have pondered and argued about this time and again. And it is still a matter of contention between various denominations today ... As you rightly say, some Christian denominations don't believe in the existence of Purgatory as we Catholics do.

“Now ... you wouldn't expect me as a Catholic priest to tell you that Purgatory doesn't exist ... it's all a Catholic invention ... as you put it ... would you?”

The man shook his head. “No Father!”

“Good ... as a priest I can tell you what the Church teaches about Purgatory.

“But I can also tell you this ... and I believe it because Jesus taught us so ...” continued Father Ignatius gently.

“God our Creator loves us very much ... so much so that He sent Jesus to die for us ...

“Those who love God and believe in Jesus as His Son will certainly go to Heaven ... as Jesus promised us so many times ...

“God is a loving, forgiving Father whose wish is for us to be united with Him in Heaven.

“I don't believe that He is so callous and uncaring that He'll leave you forgotten in Purgatory for years on end ... He loves you too much to forget about you.

“He knows your soul as well as He knows mine and everyone else's. When we die He knows how pure we are; and He'll decide when and how we will go to meet Him in Heaven.

“If there is such a place as Purgatory, or a means through which we have to be cleansed spiritually before we enter Heaven, God will make sure that this happens to us as is fitting and appropriate to our individual circumstances.

“So don't fret so much about going to Purgatory but concentrate more on being at Peace with God. Trust Him to do the right thing.

“By all means, pray for those who died before you ... put in a good word for them with our Lord.

“But most of all Trust Him to guide you and welcome you to Heaven rather than worry about how you'll get there.”

The man nodded silently and continued cleaning the pond. Meanwhile, Father Ignatius prayed silently that the Church's teachings serve to up-lift those put in its care rather than frighten them as in this case.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### I HAVE SINNED

It was another Saturday morning and Father Ignatius made his way into the confessional and sat there praying silently.

It was one of those old fashioned wooden confessionals consisting of a large cubicle into which he sat and at either side of him there was a little window covered by a thick curtain. On the other side of the window his parishioners would kneel to confess their sins; alternating one on the left and one on the right.

He was half-way through reciting the Hail Mary when he heard two people kneeling at either side of him. He leant to his right and said quietly “In the name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

This was his signal for the person at the other side of the curtain to start his confession. At first he had two or three young children confessing their usual “I have been naughty ... I disobeyed my parents ... I forgot to say my evening prayers ...” type of sins.

These were then followed by a few adults with more mature sins to confess. Nothing too serious though like murder or robbing a bank; but the usual sins he had heard times before perfectly symbolizing the frailty of human nature and the tendency to fail again and again at the same stumbling block.

It got to the point that, over the years, he got to recognize his parishioners by their voices and he could foretell their litany of sins before they even started speaking.

“Ah ... it’s Mrs Salter once again ...” he would think, “and here comes that same old sin once more ... it’s like going to the doctor for a repeat prescription for the same old ailments!” He would yet again, gently and with love and sympathy, dispense his words of wisdom before absolving her and mete out a penance.

And Mrs Salter would be followed by Mrs James ... and Mr Collins ... and so on and so forth ... all religiously kneeling beside him confessing, more out of habit rather than determination, the same old sins week in and week out.

He’d fantasized that one day he’d stop one of his parishioners before they started and he’d say, “Now let me guess ... you’ve done this and that once again this week ... and you’ve also done this ...”

Of course, Father Ignatius would never sully the sanctity of the Confession by doing such a thing, but the thought had crossed his mind many a time. Besides, if he did such a thing they’d probably think he was a mind-reader ... and that would be worse for his reputation!

One Sunday morning he resolved to address the problem head on; but he had to do it with kindness and diplomacy. He approached the lectern and said:

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“I love ginger marmalade!”

Well ... that certainly focused his parishioners' attention.

“I have ginger marmalade on toast for breakfast every morning,” he continued, “sometimes Mrs Davenport, our kind and very helpful housekeeper, only serves me two slices of toast for breakfast ...

“So I wait when she's not looking and sneak into the kitchen for two more slices!”

Mrs Davenport frowned in the front pew as the congregation laughed.

“Mrs Davenport says that I am putting on weight ...” said Father Ignatius, “and it's true that when I stand on the weighing machine it confirms what she says ...

“So I have resolved to do something about it ...

“From now on, I promise to stop weighing myself!”

The congregation laughed again. The priest waited until they'd settled down before going on.

“You see ... ginger marmalade is my weakness. You may call it my sin.

“No matter how much I try ... I always weaken and have some more. Sometimes I serve a little bit more marmalade than I need on my plate; and then, having finished the toast, all four slices, I enjoy the extra marmalade by itself ...

“But this is not my only sin of course. I confess many others to Father Donald and Monsignor Thomas when he visits here ...

“Now I don't know about you ... but I find that I frequently seem to confess the same sins I committed before ...

“Just like ginger marmalade ... the wily old devil seems to know my weakness and he tricks me yet again into the same sins.

“Do you remember I wonder when the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught committing adultery?

“Now that was a whopper of a sin! Not just an extra spoon of ginger marmalade ... was it?”

The congregation laughed.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“And according to Jewish law she had to be stoned to death for that sin,” continued Father Ignatius gently.

“Now we’re told in the Gospel of John that Jesus wrote in the sand with His finger.

“We’re not told what He wrote ... I guess He wrote ‘Dear God ... will they never learn?’

“But that’s not important ... what is important is that after He said let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone ... and when they all left one by one ... Jesus turned to the woman and asked ‘Is there no one left to condemn you?’

“She said ‘No one ...’

“And Jesus replied ‘I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.’ ”

Father Ignatius paused for a few moments.

“Go, but do not sin again,” he repeated.

“Now Jesus did not mean do not sin any sin whatsoever ever again for the rest of your life ...

“He knew that that would be impossible. The woman was human, and it is natural that she would sin again.

“Jesus knows our human nature and He knows that we are liable to sin again and again ...

“What Jesus said to the woman is, do not commit that particular sin again ... it is serious enough to get you into a lot of trouble with the Pharisees as well as with God Himself.

“And that’s what Jesus is saying to us today ...

“He knows we are weak ... He knows that we will sin ... which is why we have the Holy Sacrament of Confession.

“By saying ‘do not sin again’ Jesus is warning us to beware of those particular sins which are serious enough to lead us into damnation, and into an eternity of exclusion from our Father in Heaven.

“As we prepare for our weekly confession we need to consider carefully the seriousness of our sins. Which ones are ginger marmalade sins; and which ones are grave enough to exclude us from God’s ever lasting love.

“In our propensity to sin, God is loving and caring enough to forgive us again and again.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“But with our confession there should also be remorse and guilt for what we have done. Confession should not be just a laborious recitation of the same old sins; and a futile exercise which serves no one and certainly does not fool God Himself.

“Without true remorse, and a genuine resolve not to repeat our sins; then Confession means nothing. And it would be better not to come to Confession at all. At least that is honest in the eyes of God.”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### STARS AND CELERY

It was a beautiful warm summer evening. The youngsters from the Youth Club had gathered in the gardens behind St Vincent Church and enjoyed a lovely prayer service led by Father Ignatius and Father Donald, followed by a barbecue and singing by the fire.

As night drew in they had left one by one as their parents came to collect them and take them home. Even the Youth Club Leaders had gone. Only the two priests and Mrs Davenport, their housekeeper, remained in the gardens. She got up from her chair and started collecting the plates and cutlery to take them in the house.

“Oh ... do sit down Theresa ...” said Father Ignatius, “you’ve been working all evening. Just sit down and relax.”

“But there’s all this washing up to do Father ...” she replied, “it won’t get done by itself ...”

“Don’t worry about the washing up ...” said Father Donald picking up his guitar and playing a tune, “Ignatius and I will do all the washing up later ... I promise. Now sit down and let’s enjoy a few moments by the fire as it dies down ...”

After a few moments of silence, listening to Father Donald playing his guitar, she could keep quiet no longer.

“What are you looking at up in the sky?” she asked Father Ignatius.

“All those stars ... shining brightly in a clear dark sky. There must be hundreds and thousands of them. And they’re so far away ...” said Father Ignatius pensively.

She looked up and said nothing for a moment or two.

“How are they held up there in the sky?” she asked.

Father Donald stopped playing the guitar.

“They are not held ... they are just there ...” he mumbled in his broad Glaswegian accent.

“But why don’t they fall?” she continued, “something must be holding them in the sky ...”

“There’s no thing as a sky as such ...” Father Donald began to explain, “there are stars, and planets and solar systems which make up the universe and ...”

“Of course there’s a sky,” she interrupted, “it’s up there and I can see it. It is black at night and it changes colour in the morning to blue and sometimes it is red in the evenings ...”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“Dear Lord ...” mumbled the priest as he picked up his guitar once again.

“What do you think Father Ignatius?” she asked, “isn’t God wonderful to have made all these stars ... and in seven days too! He must have been working real fast.”

“I suppose so ...” replied Father Ignatius gently.

“And then He made us humans and He put us on this earth ...” she interrupted yet again.

“That’s right ... He created the universe and all that is in it ... including us,” continued Father Ignatius.

She gazed at the stars silently for a few moments. You could almost see the cogs turning in her head as she thought her next question.

“Do you think He created other living beings on those stars Father?” she asked.

Father Donald stopped playing the guitar and waited in anticipation for his fellow priest to reply.

“That’s a difficult question to answer ...” said Father Ignatius eventually.

“Why should we be His only creations?” she enquired again.

“We really don’t know if this is the case,” said Father Donald, “there’s nothing in Scripture to suggest that God created other beings apart from us ...”

“What do they look like? I wonder ...” she interrupted again, “do they look like us? Or are they green with antennas on their heads like you see in the films ...”

“It says in the Bible that God made us in His image ... so He must look human. Or does He look green with antennas so the people up there can recognize Him?”

“And did He send them Jesus like He did to us ... only He looked green too?”

“I think you’re running ahead of yourself Theresa ...” said Father Ignatius gently, “we really have no way of knowing whether God created other living beings on other planets or other solar systems. Nor indeed what they look like.

“But in reality ... that is not important.

“What is important is to focus on Him here and now. To accept Him as our God and Creator; and to love Him just as He loves us.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“There are enough mysteries in our Faith which we are asked to believe without us inventing new ones such as green creatures living in outer space ...”

“One day as I was in the kitchen,” she said, “Father Donald waved a few sticks of celery through the open window and shouted the ‘Triffids have landed ... the Triffids have landed ...’ he has a wicked sense of humour, Father, don’t you think?”

“Sometimes humour helps to lighten the mood ...” replied Father Ignatius defending his fellow priest.

“He also told me that there are no animals or pets in Heaven ... what do you think Father Ignatius? Are there animals in Heaven?”

“I hope not ...” replied Father Ignatius, “I would hate to come face to face with the Sunday roast reprimanding me for what I had done to it!”

“Aye indeed ...” said Father Donald, “humour does help to lighten the mood ... I hope it helps lighten the washing up which we’ve promised to do. Let’s get started!”



## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### HARD FORGIVENESS

“Father ... I have a problem with forgiving” said Sonia as she folded the last of the vestments and put them away in their cupboard in the Sacristy.

Father Ignatius was checking some paper work at a small desk in the corner of the large room. There was a tray there and parishioners were invited to place their messages, notices and sundry bits and pieces of information intended for the weekly Church Newsletter. The priest was reading through them in preparation for printing the Newsletter that evening. He stopped what he was doing and asked:

“What do you mean? A problem with forgiving ...”

Sonia hesitated.

“I know you’ve always said we should forgive with all our heart ... unreservedly ... if we want God to forgive us our sins ...

“I understand that ... and I try as best I can to forgive wholeheartedly ...”

“I can foretell a ‘but’ coming up ...” smiled the priest, “but in this case ...”

She smiled back.

“But in this case it is different ...” she continued.

“There’s this woman at work who has hurt me really bad ... she lied about me Father. And as a result I was severely reprimanded by our manager and I was made to lose a day’s pay ... which I cannot afford.

“We used to be friends and all ... but she lied to cover up her mistake and I got unfairly punished. This happened about two weeks ago ...”

“This is terrible ...” said Father Ignatius frowning at the unfairness of what he’d just heard. “Is there not some sort of appeal procedure at your workplace? Someone to talk to about it perhaps ...”

“No ... that’s not the problem Father.” Sonia said.

“The thing is, this woman came to see me yesterday and apologized profusely for what she had done ... she cried her heart out and said she could not have been found out as having made yet another mistake ... she was on her last warning and another mistake would mean losing her job. That’s why she lied and put the blame on me ...

“She begged me to forgive her ... which I did straightaway Father. I told her to think no more about it and that all was now OK ...”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“That’s very generous and loving of you ... so what is the problem?” asked the priest.

“She wants us to be friends again, as before ... we used to visit each other at our homes ... and we’d shop together, or pick up each others’ children from school and so on ... she wants everything to be as before.

“I find that very difficult ... I just can’t trust her anymore and I want us to keep our distance ... I forgive her as I said ... but I can’t go back as before. My husband agrees and says I should no longer speak to her. I think I can speak and be nice to her at work but that’s as far as it goes ... I can’t be friends again.

“Is my forgiveness worthless?”

“No ... it is not worthless,” replied Father Ignatius gently, “when we forgive someone else, we touch their very soul with the merciful love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

“You’ve been hurt Sonia ... hurt and punished unfairly and undeservedly ...

“When we forgive people it means that we no longer hold their wrongdoings to account. We no longer bear them any malice or ill-feelings or ill-will.

“We acknowledge that we forgive them and we let them go their own way free from any fear of punishment or retribution on our part.

“This doesn’t mean however that we forget the pain caused to us. How can we? The hurt is imprinted in our memory and try as we might the chances are that we’ll remember it time and again. It’s only natural ... it’s human nature.

“You forgave her and told her so ...”

Sonia nodded; holding back her tears.

“And that’s all that is expected of you ...” continued the priest gently, noticing that she was very upset at the mere thought of the event.

“We all have a right ... a duty even ... to protect ourselves and to protect our loved ones ...

“If we feel uncomfortable about a particular situation or relationship, we have every right to distance ourselves from it ...

“For very understandable reasons you feel uncomfortable at being friendly with this person as you were before ... visiting each other and picking each others’ children from school and so on ...

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“There’s nothing wrong with that ... tell her politely that you’ve forgiven her and that you feel both of you should leave it at that ... an amicable relationship from a distance ...”

“But ...” Sonia interrupted, “how can that be forgiveness? By keeping my distance implies that I’m still holding something against her ...”

“She knows that ... you and I know that ... and God knows that ...”

Father Ignatius smiled.

“Oh yes ... God knows that all right ... and He knows the reason behind it too ...” he said.

“Let me tell you a story ...”

“Jesus once taught His disciples and His followers about Himself.

“He said, ‘whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him’

“A number of His followers found this difficult to understand. What does He mean ... eat His flesh and drink His blood ... Many today, find this very concept difficult to understand; so you can imagine how it was in those times.

“So a number of Christ’s followers decided to leave and no longer follow Him.

“What did Jesus do?

“He didn’t call them back. He didn’t say, ‘Wait, let me explain ... this is what I meant to say ...’ He didn’t compromise His position in any way ...”

“He just let them go ... and He even asked His twelve disciples, ‘How about you ... do you want to go as well?’

“You see Sonia ... Jesus forgave them and let them go ... He didn’t curse them and send plagues and pestilence on them and their families for generations ...”

She smiled again feeling a little calmer.

“He just forgave them and let them go ...”

“Which is what you should also do ...” said Father Ignatius serenely.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### THE FOX

It was a lovely warm summer afternoon. Father Ignatius had invited Theodore Luxton-Joyce and his lovely wife Rose to a barbecue in the church's gardens. After all, the priest had been invited to the eccentric millionaire's mansion many a time and it was perhaps appropriate that he should return the favour.

Father Donald was also there of course and had entertained the group with his guitar playing. Mrs Davenport had excelled herself in preparing a lovely meal helped by Sister Martha and a few other nuns from the Convent nearby, who had also been invited. All in all it had been a lovely afternoon with great food and drink and a wonderful small gathering of friends enjoying themselves and each others company.

Father Donald had just finished his solo performance of some Spanish melody on the guitar when Theodore decided to change the mood of the party altogether.

"I have brought my bagpipes with me ..." he declared, "they're in the car ... let me fetch them and play you a tune or two ... what?"

Before anyone could react to the suggestion, he stormed out of the garden missing altogether the sideways glances between Sister Martha and Father Donald.

"He has been practicing for some time ..." said Rose sweetly with a smile, "I don't see why I should be the only one to enjoy his noise ..."

"It'll make a change from the guitar ..." replied Father Donald in his broad Glaswegian accent, "and it's great to have someone proud to be Scottish ... I would have learnt to play the bagpipes myself ... but it's hard to practice when you're brought up in the tenements of Glasgow ..." he chuckled.

A few moments later Theodore re-appeared with his bagpipes in hand.

"You're from up North Padre ..." he asked Father Donald, "Do you play the bagpipes?"

"I'm afraid not ..." replied the priest, "I learnt the guitar instead as a child ..."

"Oh ... I can teach you if you wish ..." said Theodore enthusiastically, "although I can't think off-hand of any church hymns suitable for the bagpipes ..."

As he started blowing through the pipes and getting ever so redder in the face, his cheeks inflated to the point where they would explode, there was a rustling noise in the bushes at the back end of the gardens; just by the statue of Our Lady. They all turned round towards the bushes as Theodore stopped playing, and they saw a fox come out of the bushes and fall on its side at the feet of Our Lady.

"Strange behaviour ..." whispered Father Donald, "I'll go there slowly to investigate."

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

The others remained in their seats by the barbecue and watched intently as the priest walked ever so slowly towards the fox, trying not to disturb it. When he was a few feet away the creature let out a scream but did not get up or even move. It just lay there baring its teeth threateningly. Father Donald stopped and then after a short while he walked backwards slowly to rejoin the group by the fire.

“It’s badly injured ...” he said, “its back leg is bleeding ... probably shot by a farmer in the lands just behind our gardens ... or maybe bitten by some dogs ...”

Theodore pulled Father Ignatius gently aside away from the group and then whispered quietly “I have my shot gun in the car Padre ... shall I put it out of its misery?”

“No ... that won’t be necessary Theodore ... I’ll phone the Animal Welfare Society for their advice,” replied Father Ignatius, “in the meantime, get everyone in the house ... luckily we’ve all finished eating.”

About half-an-hour later they all watched from the safety of the house as the Animal Welfare Society people dealt with the situation. They tried to capture the fox and take it to an animal hospital where it could be treated and looked after until it is strong enough to be released in the wild once again. Every time they approached the animal he bared its teeth again and attempted to bite his benefactors. Eventually, it was caught and taken to the hospital.

“And to think I was prepared to shoot him ...” said Theodore looking out of the window, “luckily the Padre here stopped me ... well done Padre!”

“That fox reminds me of our behaviour ...” said Father Ignatius gently as he poured his guests hot chocolate drinks just brought in by Mrs Davenport in an extra large pot.

“How so ... Padre ... I don’t look like a fox do I?” interrupted Theodore as Sister Martha smiled coyly.

“When things go wrong in our lives we too tend to behave like that fox,” continued Father Ignatius. “We get angry at what’s happened, we’re concerned, frightened even, about the future ... we get defensive and we go on the attack. We believe that God has abandoned us; and we’ve reached the end of the line. When we behave like that, we shut off a channel of communication with God. When God is temporarily put aside, He doesn’t stop loving us, but we block His influence to do good in our lives. Like the fox, every time God tries to help us we bare our teeth in anger. Our behaviour is futile and un-productive.

“The fox did not realize that by being caught he’d soon improve his hopeless situation. But we should know better, and trust our Lord rather than lash out at Him without thinking.”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“How true ...” said Sister Martha, “what a good observation Ignatius.”

“Thank you Father,” said Rose, “I’ll remember that next time I feel things are getting too much!”

Theodore put his cup down and declared “Jolly good show that God doesn’t carry a shotgun ... that’s what I say ... what?”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### THE DEAL

There are times that whatever Father Ignatius says or advises is sure to be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Yet, his duty as a priest and guide to his flock is to teach them, as best he can, about God our Creator and His unrelenting love for us.

One day he entered the church from the Sacristy and saw an elderly lady kneeling in the middle aisle right at the back of the church. He said nothing and proceeded to the Altar where he took away the candlesticks back to the Sacristy for Mrs Davenport to clean.

A few moments later he re-entered the church to find the same old lady still on her knees but a few paces further forward towards the Altar. He approached her gently. He hadn't seen her before in church.

"Welcome to our church" he said in his soothing kind voice, "you're new here ... I haven't seen you visiting us before ..."

"I can't get up Father ..." she said looking up at him from her kneeling position.

"Are you in pain?" he asked, "Do you wish me to help you up?"

"Oh no Father ... I'm able to get up ... but I can't ... I don't want to upset God."

"I'm sure God will not be upset if you have a rest for a while ..." said Father Ignatius comforting her, "here ... sit down for a while ... and tell me all about it."

He held out his hand and the elderly lady got up with some difficulty and sat down on the nearest pew. He sat down beside her and asked, "Why did you think God would be upset?"

"Well Father ..." she hesitated, "my son is fifty years old, and he's just lost his job ... he has a wife and three children to look after ... he won't find another job at his age ... not in the current situation. So I said to God that I'd pray the whole Rosary on my knees ... walking one step at a time ... from the back of the church to His altar. Then I'd do the Stations of the Cross on my knees ... so that He would help my son get a job."

Father Ignatius was touched by the love of this elderly mother for her son. He smiled gently and said "It's good of you to pray for your son ... it shows how much you love him and his family ..."

"But God does not want you to walk all around the church on your knees."

"I'd do anything Father ..." she said, "tell me what to do ... and I'll do it no matter how much it hurts me ..."

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“God does not want you to be hurt ...” replied the priest gently, “God loves us and He listens to our prayers as long as they’re honest and come from the heart ...”

“He does not want us to beg like dogs ... He does not want to humiliate us and make us lose our dignity ...”

He stopped for a while and then continued.

“Humiliation and loss of dignity is the work of humans. See how we humiliated Jesus when we stripped Him of His clothes, we spat on Him, beat Him and mocked Him; and eventually killed Him most cruelly by nailing Him to the Cross.

“The Stations of the Cross are a reminder of how we humiliated Him and took His dignity away. And we still do so today when we hurt and hate one another instead of loving each other as He commanded.

“God does not want you to walk around in pain on your knees ... He listens to your prayers no matter how or where they are said. Even sitting at home just say to Him in your own words how you care for your son and his family ... ask God to help them. I’m sure He’ll listen and ... in His own way and time ... He will respond.”

“But I promised to do the Stations of the Cross on my knees ...” she protested.

“Hey ... trust me ... I’m a priest ...” Father Ignatius said with a smile, “I’ll pray to God for you and your family ... Believe me, you don’t need to go down walking on your knees. Just sit here for a while and say a little prayer.”

“I’ll do that Father ...” she said as the priest got up to go back to the Sacristy, “although I might stay on my knees for fifteen minutes to show God I’m willing ...”



## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### OLD HENRY

Old Henry was seventy-five years old yet his mind was as keen and sharp as it's ever been; even though his body slowed him down a little with the usual aches and pains that surprise old folks every morning when they occur in ever new and unexpected places.

He didn't leave his small cottage very often and spent his time pottering about in the garden or sitting indoors by his radio. He was glad of company every now and then, especially since he lived alone, and he particularly looked forwards to Father Ignatius' visits every week. The priest would pray a while with him and give him Holy Communion, and then they would spend sometime discussing world affairs and putting things to right.

This week however old Henry was unusually quiet. Father Ignatius wondered if perhaps he was unwell and would not say in case the doctor took him to hospital for a check-up.

"You're rather quiet today," said the priest hesitantly, "has nothing happened in the world this week Henry?"

"No ... it's not that ..." replied the old man, "it's Thumper ... I found him dead this morning ..."

"Oh dear ... I'm sorry to hear it ..." replied Father Ignatius "It's so sad when a pet dies ... I love my dog Canis and I'd be heart-broken when his turn comes ... but ... but ..." hesitated the priest, "I've been visiting you for a while ... I never knew you had a dog ..."

"Thumper is not a dog ..." said old Henry, "he's a goldfish ... or rather he was ... I found him floating on the surface of his tank this morning ... as dead as a dodo ..."

"Oh ..." mumbled the puzzled priest.

"I called him Thumper because he thumped his tail on the side of the tank when I fed him ... alas ... Thumper will thump no more ..."

Father Ignatius said nothing imagining for a moment a goldfish thumping its tail against the glass tank wall.

"I plan to bury him in the garden," said Henry, "just by the rose bush. He's in that cardboard box there ... Will you say a few words with me whilst I bury him?"

It was rather unusual but the kind priest acquiesced. Henry opened the box and showed Father Ignatius a three inches goldfish lying peacefully on its side on a bed of cotton wool.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

The two men went out in the garden and Henry placed the open box on a table with the lid beside it.

“I’ll go fetch a spade to dig a hole ...” he said as he shuffled slowly towards a shed a few yards away.

Just as Henry was out of sight it happened. It happened so quickly that Father Ignatius had no time to react. He just stood there, frozen on his feet, watching the whole event unfold before his very eyes and unable to do anything to prevent it.

A cat came out of the bushes ... jumped on the garden table ... picked up the dead fish in its mouth ... and hurried away in a flash.

Father Ignatius put the lid back on the box and held it solemnly in his hands. He prayed that the old man would not ask to see his beloved Thumper one last time before committing him to the ground.

Henry returned and started digging a hole by the rose bush. He then took the box from the priest’s hands and laid it in the hole and started covering it with earth he’d just dug up.

Father Ignatius stood silently throughout the whole ceremony, thanking the Good Lord that Henry did not open the empty box one last time.

Henry stood by the tiny grave, head bent slightly down, and finally said “I’ll miss you Thumper ... you’ve been a good companion to me all these years ... I’ll miss your wagging tail every morning ... rest in peace my friend ... wherever you are ...”

Father Ignatius said “Amen” as the cat came out of the bushes licking its lips in delight.

The two men made their way back into the house.

“Will you get another goldfish Henry?” asked Father Ignatius cautiously as they sat down drinking a cup of tea.

“Nah ...” said old Henry, “too much trouble ... changing the tank water every few days ... I can’t be bothered with a goldfish anymore ... I might get a budgie though!”

Father Ignatius smiled as he readied himself to leave.

“You’re a kind old priest ... in your funny sort of way ...” said Henry as he walked him to the front door.

“How so?” asked Father Ignatius.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

Henry smiled as his eyes brightened and he said “I saw that darned neighbour’s cat eat Thumper ... and you said nothing ... you let me bury an empty box so as not to upset me ... that’s very Christian of you if I may say so ...”

Father Ignatius said nothing his lips half-smiling in nervous appreciation.

“One day I’ll bury that darned cat too ... mark my words ...” continued old Henry.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### BELIEVING WITH EYES CLOSED

Sister Georgina came to see Father Ignatius in his office. She was a nun living in the Convent nearby and whilst it was not unusual for the nuns to visit the Parish House from time to time this visit was somewhat formal. The nun had phoned the priest that morning and asked him for an appointment.

“Hello Sister ... come in ... come in ...” said the kindly priest, “would you like some coffee ... or some tea perhaps!”

“No thank you Father ...” she said somewhat shyly as she sat down.

“You know you don’t need to phone to make an appointment ...” he said as he closed the door and sat at his desk, “just pop in anytime ...”

“Well Father ... I wanted to make sure you were available ... and we would not be disturbed.” She said. “The thing is ... I’m finding it very hard believing ...”

“Are you having doubts about your Faith Sister?” Father Ignatius asked gently and soothingly.

“No ... no ... it’s not that. I believe in God and Jesus and the Trinity ...” she hesitated, “Can someone be selective in their beliefs?”

“Well Georgina ...” he smiled, “it depends on what one is selective about ... I do have my doubts about some of the changes we’re making as a Church ... What is troubling you exactly?”

“Well Father ...”

“Let’s dispense with the formalities for now ...” he interrupted.

“Well ...” she hesitated again, “for some time now I’ve had great difficulty in believing in the true presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist.

“I can’t quite explain it. Did Christ in the Last Supper ask us to celebrate Communion in His memory ... or is it really His flesh and blood? And why would He want us to eat and drink His very Being?”

“It is one of our fundamental beliefs as a Church,” said the priest calmly, “one that has been tested and debated for centuries. You’ve no doubt heard of the Eucharistic Miracle at Lanciano?”

“Yes Father ... but how can I make myself believe?” she replied, “I could shut my eyes tightly and convince myself to believe ... but at the end of the day my mind says differently.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“I have no difficulty in believing the existence of God ... I accept that as fact. I believe in Christ’s Virgin birth, His resurrection, the Holy Spirit and so on ... Somehow these beliefs cause me no difficulties and they are part of my being ... they are me and have been me for sometime.

“And I suppose that at some stage I must have believed in the Eucharist too. How could I not have?”

“I became a nun ... studied for years and took on my vocation ... and all was well ... Yet now, it’s this one aspect of my Faith that I find difficulty with.”

The priest paused for a while and said a silent prayer before going on.

“We’ve all had our moments of doubts and our little stumbles every now and then ...” he said.

“It’s our human nature coming to the fore. We’re programmed to think, to analyse ... to ask questions and yes ... to doubt too.

“It’s what some people call Free Will ... and I’m sure you’ve heard the many debates about that and God’s pre-destination of our lives!”

She smiled as he continued.

“God does not want us to work hard at our beliefs. He does not want us to shut our eyes tightly and convince ourselves to believe in this or in that.

“He understands our struggles between total acceptance and the natural desire to examine and evaluate what we’re told to believe.

“He did make us after all ... so He knows what makes us tick and how the cogs in our heads constantly turn.

“What God asks of us is to believe like a child. A child never questions the veracity of what he’s told ... he just accepts it.

“There’s no need to believe with eyes tightly shut.

“Just accept ... like a child. Trust him ... like a child. Love Him ... like a child.

“And when your mind questions ... as it certainly will ... just say ... Get behind me Satan.

“Look up at God and pray ... I believe, Lord; help my unbelief.”

She left with a much lighter heart and a heavy weight off her shoulders.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### NO DENTURES

In a poor and desolate town such as where Father Ignatius was stationed it was evident that he would meet a lot of hardship amongst his parishioners, especially in difficult economic conditions where jobs were scarce and business closures rife.

One day a young man came to him complaining that he couldn't get a good job and he felt a bit down because of lack of prospects at the factory where he did menial tasks.

Of course, the priest sympathized with him. It is good to see someone with ambitions wishing to better himself and get on in life. Yet, put in its true perspective, there were many others with no jobs at all and living literally in poverty.

Father Ignatius wished to convey this message to the young man, but he had to do it gently and without being critical of someone hoping to improve a bad circumstance.

He sat down on his chair behind his desk and looked at the young man in the face for a second or two and then asked:

“Have you got all your own teeth?”

The young man was taken aback at this unexpected and somewhat irrelevant question.

“Ehm ... yes ...” he mumbled.

“All your teeth hein?” repeated the priest, “no false teeth or dentures?”

“Yes ...” said the man.

“That's good ... Just like me” said Father Ignatius pensively, “I have all my own teeth. No false ones. I've been lucky that way!”

After a few moments of silence the young man asked, “What has that to do with what we were talking about Father?”

“Oh ... I was just thinking ...” remarked Father Ignatius, “there's plenty of talk about grinding and gnashing of teeth in the Bible.

“I wondered what would happen to those people with no teeth. Would they get given dentures do you think?”

The young man was now more puzzled than ever and thought the priest was perhaps getting a little senile.

Father Ignatius smiled and asked “Are you in good health?”

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“Yes I am ...” said the man emphatically.

“In good health ... and doing a menial job at the factory! It’s good to want to improve yourself. You live in a rented apartment do you not?”

“Yes I do ... not far from the church!” said the man.

“Oh yes ... I forgot,” said the priest, “and you go regularly to church too. That’s good. And you help with the Youth Club we run here. That’s very commendable you know.”

The young man smiled.

“Let’s try to recap,” said Father Ignatius gently, “you’re young, fit and healthy too, you live in an apartment nearby, work at the factory on the East side of town, doing menial jobs as you say ... You go to church ... A good Catholic lad I suppose ... I also know you have a red bicycle. I’ve seen you cycle to church. And you help with our youth work ... And to top it all you have all your own teeth ... mustn’t forget the teeth!”

The young man smiled again as he understood what the priest was saying.

“You see ...” continued Father Ignatius, “life is very hard for many people these days. And I don’t decri your wish to do better for yourself. That’s very laudable.

“But when we pray to God, let us thank Him for what we have rather than bemoan what we haven’t!

“He knows our situation and He’ll certainly take care of us.”

The young man went away much wiser than he came and very grateful for his lot.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### THEODORE'S REQUIEM REQUEST

Father Ignatius rang Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the well-known eccentric millionaire who lived in a large mansion in the countryside just outside town. He needed a small favour from this old friend who, although he lived in a world of his own, really had a heart of gold and would help at the drop of a hat.

“Hello Theodore ...” said the priest tentatively, “how are you keeping these days?”

“Oh ... jolly well Padre ... considering old age is creeping in what?” responded the rich man jovially, “I haven't seen you for a while ... perhaps we should meet for a spot of lunch what?”

“That would be nice ... and how is Rose?”

“Oh ... she's very well indeed and looking after me ... best thing that happened to me marrying her ... It's nearly a year now since our wedding you know. Mustn't forget to buy her a present ... I'd better tell my secretary to remind me don't you think old boy?”

“It's about the wedding I'm phoning you ...” said Father Ignatius, “you remember you had someone playing the bagpipes?”

“Yes ... Gregor McBurnish ... Haven't seen him since the wedding. Must arrange a spot of lunch with him too ...”

“I wonder if he could help me ...” asked the priest, “an elderly parishioner has died recently and as it happens he asked for a piper to play by his grave side during the funeral. He was from Dundee ...”

“Dash inconvenient that ...” interrupted Theodore.

“Being from Dundee?” enquired the priest somewhat confused.

“No not that ... just remembered. Must have my tartan kilt cleaned. I wore it at a function last week and forgot all about it!

“Wants a piper by the grave-side you say? No need to bother McBurnish, Padre. I'll do it ... in full costume too ...”

“Oh, I couldn't possibly impose ...” said the priest sensing troubles ahead, “you're such a busy man and ...”

“Nonsense ... It's the least I could do for a fellow countryman. I'll be at the funeral. McBurnish taught me to play the bagpipes you know ... I could also play my own composition ...”



## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“Your composition?” asked the priest in trepidation.

“Yes ... Chopin Piano Concerto Number 1. Do you know it?”

“Yes ... yes ... I do know it. It’s a piano piece, not a bagpipes ...”

“Oh ... I’ve re-written it for the bagpipes Padre.” declared Theodore enthusiastically.

“Don’t you worry about that ... It can be played whilst marching up and down or standing still by the graveside. Now you can’t do that with a piano, can you?”

The priest managed to convince Theodore that traditional bagpipes music would be more appropriate and agreed a time and place when he should be there.

He put the phone down nervously and picked up a local map to find the new cemetery which had just been commissioned a few miles out of town in beautiful woodland surroundings. The priest had never been there and his parishioner was one of the first people to be buried in this new location.

On the day in question Theodore dressed in full Scottish costume and drove to the countryside accompanied by his lovely wife Rose who read directions from a map.

Try as they might, they just could not find the new cemetery. They drove up and down country lanes, through beautiful meadows and woodlands, and they were beginning to panic a little as they realized they were lost. There was no one to ask directions from; so they kept searching until they saw an open field, beside a small wooded area, in a secluded piece of land. The digging equipment was still there as well as the crew having a rest; but there were no mourners, nor the hearse, anywhere to be seen.

“Dash it all ...” said Theodore as he stopped the car abruptly, “we must be late! I can’t possibly let the poor fellow down like that. You stay here my dear ... I’ll soon get things sorted ...”

He got out of the vehicle, put on his beret, grabbed the bagpipes and marched towards the men and digging equipment.

He reached the grave and saw a metal box in there.

So he decided to do what he was asked to do. He got his bagpipes ready and played.

He played like he’d never played before; not missing a note and with real Scottish pride. He played all the religious songs he knew ... Abide with me ... The Lord is my Shepherd ... How great Thou Art ... and finished with everyone’s favourite ... Amazing Grace. As Theodore walked to his car one of the workers followed him and asked: “What was all that about? I have never seen such a thing before ... and I’ve been installing septic tanks for years!” Luckily, the worker knew where the new cemetery was and he gave them directions to arrive just in time.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### THEODORE LUXTON-JOYCE SPEAKS HIS MIND

Father Ignatius and Father Donald welcomed a visiting Franciscan priest, Father Randolph, to the Parish for the weekend to lead the Marriage Renewal Seminar.

The Seminar was held on the grounds of the Parish Gardens providing plenty of time for the participants to spend time together re-assessing their married life, in preparation for a Renewal of Vows Ceremony to be held after Mass on Saturday evening.

The two Parish priests were pleased that they managed to get twenty married couples to attend the weekend event and looked forward to a successful Seminar for all involved.

The same cannot be said however for Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the eccentric friend of Father Ignatius and very generous benefactor of St Vincent Church.

Theodore preferred to be well away from “organized love-ins”, as he called the Seminar and would not have attended for one moment had he the choice. But his lovely wife, Rose, convinced him otherwise and he, being an old romantic, albeit he hid it well, acquiesced to her request.

After lunch on Saturday the group met at the Church Hall and was addressed by Father Randolph.

He spoke about the necessity of working at a marriage to make it successful, and explained how very often couples tend to drift apart because of the pressures of modern living and having to work hard just to keep body and soul together. He went on to stress the importance of “being aware of the other person in your life”, the importance of “listening” to their feelings, and “showing love” by saying something nice every now and then, by holding hands, giving a hug every so often and not taking one’s spouse for granted.

“Love doesn’t end after the honeymoon” declared Father Randolph, “it’s a precious flower which needs nurturing and feeding every day if it is to flourish for a lifetime!”

At this point Father Randolph noted Theodore Luxton-Joyce raising his eyebrows and looking in the distance out of the window, no doubt wishing he was anywhere else but here.

“What do you think Theodore?” asked the visiting priest, “Do you think it’s important to tell your wife, Rose, that you love her?”

“Every day?” asked Theodore.

The Group laughed and Fathers Ignatius and Donald, sitting at the top table, looked at each other silently.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“Yes ... every day ... why not?” continued the Franciscan priest after the laughter died down.

“I don’t see the point ...” replied Theodore, “Rose knows that I love her very much ... (then looking at his wife) ... you do know that don’t you?”

“What’s the point of all this adolescent childish talk ... it goes without saying that I love her ... what?”

“I wouldn’t have given up a weekend of good fishing and come here, if I didn’t love her ... don’t you think old boy?”

The Group laughed again.

“Fifteen – love ...” Father Donald whispered quietly to Father Ignatius.

But Father Randolph was not to be beaten so easily.

“No ... it does not go without saying ...” he responded quietly, “it is important to tell your wife, or husband, that you love them. That they are not taken for granted. It is important to say it ... and say it often. It’s important to be nice and to compliment one’s spouse every now and then.

“Very often I’ve seen couples drift apart yet deep down they do really love each other. They just don’t bother, or don’t have time, to say it. With time, they forget what first attracted them to each other. And every time we forget ... love dies a little!”

“Let me challenge you Theodore if I may ...”

“Fifteen all ...” Father Donald whispered softly under his breath. “A good return from the visiting priest!” Father Ignatius sat quietly and said nothing.

“I want you to answer quickly without thinking,” Father Randolph challenged Theodore. “Are you ready? Without thinking ... what first attracted you to your wife Rose?”

“She makes a decent steak and kidney pie ... what?” declared Theodore.

The Group broke down into hysterics.

“Thirty – fifteen to your eccentric friend!” Father Donald said to his colleague Father Ignatius.

Father Randolph was astute enough to continue with his talk rather than get into a pointless debate with Theodore. Minutes later he asked the Group whether anyone had personal knowledge or experience of marriages breaking down after a long period together. He called them “mature divorces”.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

Theodore raised his hand.

“I bet you regret inviting him ...” Father Donald whispered to Father Ignatius.

“Years ago ... when I was in the military, one of my people got divorced after twenty years of marriage ...” said Theodore.

“I asked him why ... and he said his wife was violent what? Apparently she threw things at him in an argument ... Anything ... Cups ... saucers ... cutlery ... crockery ... anything that came to hand.

“Turns out she threw things at him throughout the marriage ... twenty years of it.

“I asked him why he took so long to decide to leave her.

“He said her aim was getting better ... what?”

The Group burst into laughter to the embarrassment of Rose, whilst Father Randolph tactfully decided to call a short tea break.

“Game ... set ... and match!” declared Father Donald as he got up from his seat.

The rest of the weekend proceeded without further difficulties for Father Randolph, albeit Theodore was the most popular member of the Group.

As they drove back home he asked his wife, “You don’t think it necessary to say ‘I love you’ every day ... do you?”

“It’s nice to hear it every now and then...” she said, “It’s reassuring you know. Women like reassurance!”

“Tell you what old girl ...” he replied, “I’ll write it down big on a piece of paper. You can read it as often as you want when you need reassurance ... what?” he chortled heartily.

She smiled; knowing full well that he was the world’s biggest romantic, yet his upbringing did not allow him to show it.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

### WHEN I'M DEAD AND GONE

Father Ignatius was at the monthly Any Questions Meeting held at St Vincent Parish Hall, whereby parishioners and their guests asked any questions which he and Father Donald would attempt to answer and teach about the Catholic Faith.

The discussion centered about death and our achievements in life.

Father Ignatius said, "Imagine you are dead and resting in your open coffin. Your family and friends pass by to pay their last respects. What would you want them to say?"

Someone hesitantly said that she'd like people to say that she was a good wife and mother and that she always attended Mass on Sunday.

Another person added that he was a good doctor and did his best for his patients.

A third parishioner went on to say that she was a good teacher and cared for all the children in her care.

Father Ignatius noted that Theodore Luxton-Joyce, the eccentric millionaire and generous donor to the church, was scribbling away in his notepad and was somewhat un-interested. He'd only attended the Meeting to accompany his lovely wife Rose.

So the priest asked him, "How about you Theodore? What would you like people to say when they see you lying in your open coffin?"

"I'd like them to say 'I've seen him move ...' " came the swift reply as everyone laughed.

As the laughter died down Father Ignatius continued, "I'm sure they'll say you had a great sense of humor too ...

"But on a more serious note ... how exactly will we be remembered?"

"A parishioner once told me that it was hypocritical to always speak well of the dead. If a person had been nasty and bad in his life, the only difference is that he is now a dead nasty and bad person. And to pretend otherwise would be insincere.

"This is a little uncharitable perhaps; but that parishioner had a point."

Father Ignatius stopped, as he often did, to punctuate the importance of what he had just said.

He then continued, "Now is the time to ensure that people will be honest when they speak about us.

## GOLDEN DROPLETS

“We do this by remembering Christ’s commandment to love one another. And to practice that commandment.

“The best gift we can offer each other is our presence. We all have a part to play in other people’s lives. Just think for a moment how many people rely on you ... your spouse, your children, your elderly parents, your neighbours perhaps ... if you’re a teacher or a doctor the children in your school rely on you, as well as your patients ...

“I need not go on. But the point I’m making is that we should be generous with our time with these people. Our very presence on this earth can be a source of great joy and happiness to others.

“When Jesus was raised to Heaven, His disciples missed Him and were sad to see Him leave them. They were totally devastated and confused.

“Missing someone is a sure sign that their presence affected your life in a good way.

“So let us be remembered not for who we were but for what we have done; and how we made a real difference for the good in someone’s life.

“And even though we might not move in our open coffin, as Theodore hopes, at least our lives will have moved others.”