

12TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Love letters from the Father

BY LIZ KELLY

When I lost a job not too long ago, I asked my Dad to help me through the difficult transition of unexpectedly having to find work by sending me postcards. I was feeling as though I was a hapless victim of the cold, cruel universe and knew I needed to address that thinking immediately or I'd soon become "attitudinally challenged." My father, recently retired from the bench, spent his entire professional career in law as a city attorney and then as a judge. I saw him as a bit of a tough cookie. I knew he wouldn't let me get away with the "poor me" bit for too long, and so I turned to him for support.

I called him and proposed the following assignment: "Go out and buy a pile of postcards, address them all to me, and send one to me every day for several weeks. Write on the first line: 'You are not a victim,' and on the second, 'You are (blank),' filling in the blank with some positive attribute you see in me, some talent or gift God has given me." He

accepted the mission enthusiastically. Just a few days later, I went to the post office to check my box. When I opened it up and saw a postcard waiting there with my father's handwriting spelling out my name, I began weeping (much to the dismay of other postal customers).

It wasn't just his willingness to support me that touched me, nor was it the fact that obviously he didn't think I was a no-talent victim in a hapless, hopeless universe. But it proved to me that, as Christ says in this week's Gospel reading (Mt 10:26-33), "Not one sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's knowledge." Christ was constantly reminding us that the Father is intimately acquainted with our needs and more than dedicated to meeting every one of them — whether it be food for the table, fulfilling work, the relief of a cool breeze on a hot summer day or something as simple and free as a word of

encouragement offered from a concerned father to his distressed daughter. The real surprise in this little experiment came with my father. He completely embraced the project, embellishing on it with far more zeal, humor and creativity than I expected.

One of his more memorable openers was, "Victim...NOT!" Many of the gifts and talents he listed, I never even knew he noticed or thought about. At one point in his correspondence he wrote, "I always thought all these things; I guess I just never said them."

Dad wasn't always able to stop and tell us directly how much he cared about us in the rigors that accompanied providing for seven children, but through our *dis-course de postcarte* he, like Christ, reminded me that there was nothing going on in my life at any time in which he was not acutely interested. How much more is that true of my heavenly Father.

It is a trying thing, some days, to be a disciple of Christ. I have spent too many hours with my head cocked heavenward, wondering, "Lord, You do know how difficult it is to be a single, Catholic woman in this culture, don't You?" With my eyes affixed to whatever obstacle lay before me, I am sure to lose sight of Him and the fact that "even all the hairs of my head are counted."

Thankfully, there are many antidotes available to adjust that attitude; in fact, the world is shouting out the constant and complete love of the Father for all of His children. A few of my personal favorites include the African violets that sit next to my bed, the bed I sleep in that my father made for me, all of the arts, my 4-year-old godchild who is always brimming with affection and delight, and wise and thoughtful philosophers, such as Peter Kreeft, who writes: "The whole world is a love letter from God." Indeed.

And, of course, I have my own personal stack of love letters, or love postcards, as the case may be.

Thanks, Dad. Happy Father's Day. □

Kelly writes from Nashville, Tenn.

