

Re-examining fatherhood and faith

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I no longer have a dad to provide fatherly advice. I no longer have a mom or big sister to help me get in touch with my feminine side.

It's been some time since I had any of these shoulders to lean on. We make do with what we have and what we've been given. While I love music from the 1970s and '80s, I don't tend to dwell on the past. I've always said, if you must look back, keep one foot on the gas!

Faith is a funny thing. My dad was Catholic and my mom was Lutheran, but their faith was shattered by the horrors of the Second World War. Neither spoke much about it, but the stories I did hear continue to haunt me.

The fact they made it, found each other and came to Canada is against all odds. I'm so glad they did for obvious reasons. To me, that's more than a series of coincidences or twists of fate.

I had time to reflect on these things when I wrote my son a letter, which was part of a school-related exercise. I found myself praising my son, pointing out his good qualities. I wrote that life will present many challenges, and we have to face them with focus, fortitude and inner strength. Where he draws that strength is up to him, but I wanted him to know he is not defined by his accomplishments, but by the content of his character and the goodness inside. Plus, we all have his back, as it should be.

As I said, faith is a fickle thing. For many, it's a great source of comfort, hope and yes, strength.

I found some early in 2017 during a humanitarian mission trip to the Dominican Republic. There, in the *Basílica Catedral Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia*, a cathedral in Higuey, a miracle is honoured. A long time ago a young girl asked her father for a portrait of the Virgin Mary. Her father brought the picture as gift for her. It is believed that the portrait was placed at their house, and for some reason, at the break of dawn of each day, the portrait was always found outside the house, beneath a small tree. Every day this portrait was moved back inside by the girl, until she told her parents about it. The place became sacred, and the basilica was built on that same spot as reference of Mary's grace.

I find stories like this fascinating. The DR is also home to some of the oldest churches in the Americas.

During our mission work, I found that faith is the only source of strength for some of the desperate Haitians who toil for meagre wages. I brought along many crosses to give out and they were very much appreciated.

My son is going on his third trip this coming January and oh, how I wish I could return to those remote villages and show them that they are loved.

In the past year or so, I've taken up a new-found interest in antiquities, particularly bronze crosses, pendants and medallions from the dawn of Christianity through the Middle Ages. I find these interesting because back then religion was so very important to people and it was something they held close to their heart. Peasants and the wealthy alike displayed their faith openly. So when I come across a nice, affordable piece online, I snatch it up.

My wife doesn't believe that these items are relics, but rather modern copies. I try to do as much research as I can to ensure they're the real deal. Some are affordable, for the very fact that long ago, things like coins, crosses and good luck charms were churned out

by blacksmiths and metallurgists on a constant basis. People from far and wide traded them and wore them proudly. Things like arrowheads and Roman coins are abundant because they were produced in such large quantities. Many are affordable, but of course, some are priceless. I am amazed by holding a piece of history, something that has survived for thousands of years.

I have one Byzantine coin minted in 1,000 AD that I find simply amazing. On one side is the image of Christ, on the other, the words ?IH?SUS X?RISTUS bASILEU BASILE.? Experts say the first two words are part of a phrase that translates to ?May Jesus Christ conquer.? This is the first appearance of the current term on U.S. currency ???In God We Trust.?

I will continue to search for more of these trinkets from our past. In a strange way, they give me strength, just knowing they're in my pocket every day.

I have also found some new evidence of faith in recent years. I'm a huge fan of the supernatural and love shows that depict exorcisms. My wife can't watch them because she finds them too unsettling. What I have come up with is this. Exorcisms have been performed the world over and some of these documented incidents have no rational explanation. My argument is, if there are demons then there must be angels. In other words, if there is evil, there must be good, the form of a supreme being (God).

I have also seen a ghost. It was the spiritual leftovers of my uncle who passed away one night long ago and his last words to his wife was that he wanted to visit his relatives in Canada. It was a weird, but really cool experience.

Again, I argue that if spirits exist, there must be an afterlife. If there's an afterlife, there must be a higher plain of existence. Call it Heaven if you like.

I have seen a lot in my time here on earth. So much so, that I can't believe this is all there is.

That, and my faith in the goodness of people, give me strength. What's yours?