

Hardship

By Father John Catoir JCD- 8/25/17

Hardship is defined as severe suffering or privation. Some of us experience it more than others, but life rarely excuses anyone from some form of suffering. Hardship builds character.

If you are currently undergoing some form of misery, my heart goes out to you. I send my sympathy and prayers, but there's one more thing I can offer; namely, your ancestors.

The memory of your courageous forebears, who braved the hardships of travelling to America in crowded sea vessels, should sustain you. Think what they went through, and their many sacrifices. You have that same kind of grit and courage in you.

You are standing on the shoulders of family members, who endured agonizing privations with uncommon courage. The Irish, Italian, Polish and Latino Immigrants of the 18th and 19th centuries were hard-working dreamers, who contributed enormously to the building of America.

Millions of others who came to our shores from different lands, did the same. They raised large families under harsh conditions, and suffered poverty and persecution in the process. Because of the heroism of your ancestors, you should have confidence in your own intestinal fortitude. You have inherited their greatness.

Three of my four grandparents were born in Ireland. My father's mother, Elizabeth McGuigan, married a Frenchman in Jersey City. He died young, so I only know about the Irish side of my family. My mother was the third child of Michael and Anna Caslin, who emigrated to America in the late 1890's. They were both born after the Great Potato Famine in Ireland, which lasted from 1845 to 1852, causing severe misery and unrest.

The wave of Irish emigrants to the new world began after that. Anna and Mike landed in New York City, and faced unimaginable challenges by today's standards. Eventually, Mike managed to get a job with the N.Y. Sanitation Department.

They lived in a cold-water flat on the lower-eastside of Manhattan. When I was about eight, we were living in Jackson Heights, Long Island, and I was brought back to visit an aunt who was still living in one of those rail-road style apartments.

I remember the dingy, dark hallway. At the end of the hall, there was one bathroom with one toilet, serving the whole family. You entered through the kitchen, which had the family bathtub. You turned right, and passed through two narrow bedrooms, before reaching a crammed living room with two beds and a stuffed chair. Living in that squalor, Mike and Anna managed to raise nine children.

Anna died at age of 51 of food poisoning, and sheer exhaustion. She was born on September 8th the birthday of Mary, and had a great devotion to Mary. She always prayed that one of her four boys would be a priest, and one of her nine children would be born on Sept. 8th.

Those wishes were never granted, but she must have kept on praying after her death, because I was born on Sept. 8th - and 29 years later was ordained a Catholic priest. Life is full of little family stories that boggle the mind. One thing is certain, we all owe our grandparents a great deal of respect and gratitude.

May the Lord be your strength and joy, as you struggle through the hardships of your life. Remember, you always have the help and prayers of your forebears, who love you very much.



Anna Caslin