

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 C

“The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.” Jesus used that term, “the Kingdom of God,” more than any other theme in His preaching, and sent His disciples to announce the same promise. We continue to pray “thy Kingdom come” every day in the “Our Father.” We celebrate our freedom as a nation this weekend, and find ourselves much divided over abortion and many other issues. We are citizens not only of this country but called to live in the freedom of God’s Kingdom. ***What does that mean?***

My rough and ready definition of the Kingdom of God is that it exists wherever and whenever we allow God to be in charge of our lives ... when, as Jesus teaches in that same Our Father, we let God’s will be done. And thinking about God’s will always reminds me of Fr. Klaes Tande, a seminary classmate from Norway. With his dry sense of humor, he used to say that if he ever became Pope, the Latin motto on his coat of arms would be based on the Lord’s Prayer. But instead of “Fiat voluntas TUA” – “may THY will be done, ” his would read “Fiat voluntas mea” – “May MY will be done.” He meant it as a joke, but it captures well the line between wanting God to do things our way and entrusting our lives to God’s way.

Well, Klaes did NOT become Pope, but after 30-some years, I was curious – whatever did happen to Klaes? So I Googled his name, and found the remarkable account of a baby he baptized in Oslo 34 years ago now, a little boy named Victor Olav. In a series entitled ***The Baby in the Plastic Bag***, a local Norwegian paper recounted Victor’s story. He was born to a mother from the Philippines, unexpectedly premature, before she could return to her husband who had already traveled home. She is heartbroken at what she believes is a stillbirth, her baby showing no signs of life. Panicked and distraught, she hardly knows what she is doing. She places her lifeless child inside a plastic handbag, and brings him to a nearby cemetery, where she leaves the bag, hoping his body will be found and given a reverent burial she cannot afford. Some hours later, a man visiting his inlaws’ graves hears a faint sound like a cat’s cry, and

eventually traces it to a bag near a shrub. Opening it, he finds a crying newborn, blue with October cold but most definitely alive. Rushed to the hospital, doctors and nurses provide emergency care and Victor quickly recovers, although no one knows who he is or how he got to the cemetery.

Meanwhile, the police find a credit card receipt still in the handbag and locate the mother. She is stunned and overjoyed to hear her child is alive, so certain was she that she had lost him. But she also fears prosecution for her panicked actions. Seeing her sincerity, investigators soon come to believe that she truly thought Victor had died. Joyfully, she is reunited with her baby.

This is where Fr. Klaes comes in, as the baby is baptized in his parish church, St. Olav's. Mom names him Victor, for he had overcome so much already in his short life, and Olav, for the parish that had housed her and shown her such kindness. A few weeks later, she returned with her son – her fourth child, actually – to her family in the Philippines, and there the story would seem to end.

Naturally, though, a local journalist wondered the same about Victor as I did about Fr. Klaes ... 20+ years later, what happened to him? You can read all this on the Web, but after long searching, the writer eventually traced Victor in Manila. Arrangements were made for him to fly back to Norway, to see the places and people who shaped his first days. He is a gracious and grateful young man, saved by the concern of so many people who knew nothing about him other than his need. As one of his nurses said at the time: *“My mandate is to care for this baby, to make sure he experiences nothing but kindness.”*

To do God's will does not mean we will always see the whole story. Most of the people in Victor's story did not know each other, did not know what came before or what would come after; each simply did what they believed was the right thing to do, what it meant to do God's will, as their lives intersected with this unexpected situation. Like Fr. Klaes, each was a vital link in the chain that led to a happy ending of what began as a near tragedy. /// This week, you and I will encounter many people, situations where we can use

our freedom to become a link in a chain of events that make up each life's story. The words of Victor's nurse can inspire us in even those momentary encounters: ***“My mandate is to care for these persons, to make sure they experience nothing but God's kindness.”***