

Extracted from St John Vianney Bulletin on April 24, 2010

Beware the Dark Ifs by Carl E Beyer

Beware the “Dark Ifs”. What are the “Dark Ifs”? They are the “Ifs” that can make you forget your blessings. Since I am writing in the St. John Vianney Bulletin, we can start with the bulletin. What “if” Father Mansfield would simply give me his write up each week instead of me having to ask him at least once, if not several times, for his write-up? After doing the bulletin for four years it becomes tiring to ask. But these are the “Dark Ifs”. For what “if” I waved that magic wand and made Father Mansfield give me the write up early every week as I would do? In doing so, I might make Father just like me. But with this “if” we might lose parishioners. For who would come to listen to me on the pulpit? Instead we need to count our blessings in having such a blessed priest who is able to draw people to church with his homilies.

As we age, sometimes the “Dark Ifs” can make us wish we had chosen a different road in life and often in looking at the “what ifs” we forget our blessings. What “if” I would have studied harder in college and gotten better grades? Maybe I would have secured a good job after college and had a successful career. There would be no money troubles. Ah! those “Dark Ifs”. Instead I joined the Army after college and met my beautiful wife and I am so blessed to have three great kids. I would not give up these kids or my wife for any “Dark If”. On top of that, I was blessed with being able to serve the greatest country ever blessed by God.

Most of us have met people who live in the “Dark Ifs”. Their life is a terrible mess, and according to them it is because of something they did or did not do earlier in their life. If only, at that fork in the road of life, they had taken the other path. We look at them and see them surrounded by blessings to which they seem oblivious. This choice between recognizing our blessings and living the “Dark Ifs” will make all the difference in our life’s attitude. Follow the “Dark Ifs” and you will likely waste the precious gift of life God has granted you. Nothing in life will ever be good enough. If you have blessings you will wonder “What If” you could have done something different that would have given you more blessings.

One of the biggest problems we encounter with the “Dark Ifs” occurs when we apply them to others as in my first example. What “if” my wife made me a hot breakfast every morning? That sounds good to me except for the fact that she leaves the house at 5:30AM which means I would be obliged to get up early every morning to eat. I would rather get that extra hour or so of sleep. These “Dark Ifs” are most often applied to the failings in others that we “know” we do not have. If we were in their shoes we know we would do everything right. A noble goal, to strive for that perfection, but a little bit of true self evaluation will find us failing in many other areas.

The most blessed gift any of us could ever be given is to recognize the “Dark Ifs” when they are happening. When we encounter those forks in the road and we have to weigh our “ifs”, let us make our decisions on a spiritual basis instead of a material one. Do we take that job with the higher pay and many more working hours or do we tighten our belts and spend more time with the family? Do we take that fork in the road that will bring us more pleasure or the road on which we know we can best serve our fellow man? Beware the “Dark Ifs”.

The biggest tragedy of the “Dark Ifs” is that they can become so consuming that the good qualities of other people are overlooked. The “Dark Ifs” give us blinders so that all we see are the faults in other people. I know there are some people at whom you have to look awfully hard to find their good qualities and to see how they bless you, but this is not true of the majority of people with whom we meet and interact on a daily basis.

When I think of a special group of people whose blessings to each of us is so apparent, but so often overlooked, I think of all our great volunteers at St. John Vianney. Since I schedule two of the ministries I sometimes hit those “Dark Ifs” of why scheduling has to be so difficult to accommodate everyone’s vacations or unavailable times. But as I put each person into a timeslot for them to volunteer, I am reminded of what a blessing they are. By giving their time, energy and talents they make the Mass possible. Each volunteer is serving in a position of vital importance to their fellow laypersons. The average parishioner fails to realize how many people have volunteered to contribute to the smooth operation of the Mass. Thank you to all the volunteers for their hard work.

Go forth and fight those “Dark Ifs”. The next time one of these “Dark If” thoughts enters your mind, turn and strike it down by realizing the blessings in that person or event. God Bless you all. I am happy and blessed that when you asked “What if I read the bulletin?” you choose to read on. Thank you.