

> In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen  
>  
> It was another Christmas at the Corrigans. This year the special gift  
> was—the flu. As I lay on the ground, staring at my in-laws bookcase, I  
> noticed a book I had never seen before, Bless me Father, by Fr. Neil  
> Boyd, the pseudonym of a Roman Catholic priest who served as the  
> curate in a parish in London in 1950. The protagonist is Fr.  
> Duddleswell, the parish priest. There are recurring characters in  
> Bless Me Father, including the Anglican clergy.  
>  
> The Anglicans and the Roman Catholic clergy are portrayed as brothers,  
> as siblings. They protect each other when the outside world threatens,  
> but when no one is looking, they might punch each other, and pull each  
> other's hair, just like real siblings.  
>  
> The story that I will recount is one of those sibling hair pulling  
> type stories. Fr. Duddleswell is looking unhappy as he reads a letter.  
> He has been instructed by his Bishop to do something ecumenical. With  
> the same resigned air as adopted by the French officer in Casablanca,  
> who ordered his men to round up the usual suspects, Fr. Duddleswell  
> instructs his curate, Fr. Boyd, to call up the Anglicans.  
>  
> In the next scene, we see that the Anglicans have come over for a spot  
> of tea. This time though, they are loaded for bear, they have come to  
> tweak Fr. Duddleswell's tail.  
>  
> "So, Fr. Duddleswell, is it true that you believe in Hell?"  
> Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course I do! For Holy Church says it is so!"  
> Anglicans: "And Fr. Duddleswell, is it true that you believe that  
> there is a place of eternal torment and punishment?"  
> Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course I do! For Holy Church says it is so!"  
>  
> With that the Anglicans grab their hats and coats, head for the door,  
> and on their way out, spit out at Fr. Duddleswell "Sadist!"  
>  
> As Fr. Boyd is helping Fr. Duddleswell clean up the wreckage of the  
> tea, he decides to pursue the theological implications of this  
> conversation a bit further.  
>  
> Fr. Boyd, asks, "So, Fr. Duddleswell, is it true that we believe in Hell?"  
> Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course, we do, for Holy Church says it is so!"  
> Fr. Boyd: "And Fr. Duddleswell is it true that we believe that there  
> is a place of eternal torment and punishment?"  
> Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course, we do, for Holy Church says it is so!"  
> Fr. Boyd: "And, so there are people there suffering in this place of  
> torment and punishment for eternity?"  
>  
> With that, Fr. Duddleswell puts down his dishes, turns around, and  
> stares in shock at Fr. Boyd. "What?" says Fr. Duddleswell. "You  
> actually think that there are people there? Are you insane?"  
>  
> Using a Fr. Duddleswell like perspective, let's examine the sheep and  
> the goats. To get there, I will first reflect on my experience as a

> father. I recall that Connie and I grew up in a social milieu that  
> believed spare the rod, spoil the child. And so when child number one,  
> Charlotte came along, at an opportune time, we spanked her. The result  
> was disgusting. Charlotte transformed herself into a bubbling mudpot  
> of snot, mucous, tears and all sorts of disgusting effluence. This  
> went on for hours, and so, Charlotte trained us not to spank her. It  
> was thoroughly unrewarding and counter productive. However, we figured  
> Charlotte was unique, and so when child number two, Ben, came along,  
> we tried spanking him. Well, Ben was different alright. He even had  
> developed his own language and vocabulary. Spanking Ben sent him into  
> insane bouts of rage in which  
> he announced "You Whagooks you! I am going to lock you up in jail!"  
> This would last for hours. Yes, spanking, Ben, was quite different,  
> but, again a total exercise in futility. We hardly bothered spanking  
> child number three, Emily, or child number four, Helen.

>  
> So what we had on our hands was a flock of sheep, what I call carrot  
> people. "Do the right thing, and I will buy you an ice cream cone."  
> "Ooh! I like ice cream! I will do the right thing."

>  
> Reflecting on myself, I realize that I am more of an old goat, what I  
> call a stick person. I am actually quite lazy. Sitting on the couch  
> and doing nothing suits me. Trinkets and baubles do not interest me.  
> What got me to bestir myself, and get off the couch was a mantra that  
> was inscribed in my heart. "Work or die!" "Work or die!" It was the  
> fear of negative consequences that motivated me. I was afraid that  
> those who I held most dearly to me, would wither and die, if I did not  
> get up and do what I had to do.

>  
>  
> We have to remember that Jesus dwelt in our midst. He listens to us.  
> He has inhabited our skin and flesh. He knows us inside and out. He  
> knows that some of us are carrot people, sheep people. "Yo! Listen up  
> carrot people! Do the right thing, and you get an ice cream cone!"  
> "Oooh! I like ice cream cones! I think I will do the right thing."  
> "Yo! Listen up stick people! If you do not do the right thing, I will  
> smack you!" "Oooh! I do not want to get smacked. I guess I will do the  
> right thing." Either way, the message will be nuanced in the way that  
> we need to hear it, and we will be given the chance to do the right  
> thing.

>  
> So, what does doing the right thing consist of? It seems fairly  
> straight forward. Feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, clothe the  
> naked, house the homeless, visit the sick and incarcerated. Well, it  
> turns out that there is another commandment, somewhat hidden. The clue  
> is in the words, "For whenever you did it for the least of them, you  
> did it for me."

>  
> I have a rare disease, Pityriasis Rubra Pilaris, PRP, Pretty Red  
> People. At the height of its intensity, every joint screamed in agony  
> and every ligament dried out. The edema turned me into the Michelin  
> man, and is surprisingly painful. Shifting position sends water down  
> the wrong way of the body's one way streets that are not designed to

> withstand sudden flooding. The pain is excruciating, like withstanding  
> minutes of bursts of machine gun fire.  
>  
> Anecdotally, there is a 20% chance that the PRP sufferer will never go  
> into remission. I recalled the philosopher Viktor Frankl, a  
> concentration camp survivor, who found that those who survived the  
> concentration camps were the ones who could find meaningfulness in  
> their suffering. And so I prayed:  
>  
> Help me Jesus, help me. Jesus, I can really feel the pain that you  
> felt. Thank you Jesus. Thank you for taking upon yourself the entire  
> pain of the world, in order to release us from our pain. And Jesus,  
> let my pain have meaning. Let me be One-d to you. Jesus, and just as  
> you took upon the pain of others, lay someone else's pain upon me, and  
> let them be released from their suffering. Let me be your instrument.  
>  
> And as I prayed, people began to see something new in me. They came  
> out of the wood works to feed me, to bring me gifts, to pray for me.  
> They could see through me the face of Christ, and feed it. It turns  
> out that the hidden commandment is that each and every one of us must  
> take our turn in the gutter. Each and every one of us must become an  
> opportunity for others to fulfill their Matthew 25 ministry.  
>  
> Let us pray. Heavenly Father, We thank you for the gift of your only  
> begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Christ our King, who laid out His hands  
> upon the Cross, and took upon himself the entire pain of the world in  
> order to save us. We ask, Heavenly Father, that you so thin us out,  
> that others can see in us, the face of Christ, and feed Him. We ask  
> for this so that we can be instruments of your peace, the means by  
> which others can fulfill their Matthew 25 ministry, and so bring about  
> the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.  
> Amen.