

Chapter XXVII

Prygocki was robed and in the sanctuary. A contingent of Bulls with Johnson along was seated close to the front of the congregation. Chris' family, including this auntie, was in the front row, too. The casket, draped in a white funeral pall with a golden cross embroidered on one side, rested placidly at the end of the long center aisle.

Grimaldi noted with some irony that Prygocki could have anything under that robe, a gun to take out what remained of Chris' family, to decimate the Bulls and take out Johnson, to desecrate the altar with the blood of the mourners and worshipers.

Quiet weeping came from the pew where the Brown's sat. When Grimaldi spoke with Chris's aunt, earlier, she had exchanged some information about the tension in the family when her grandfather had converted. He had argued ever since that if the church had undermined slavery before, during and after the Civil War, rather than having condoned it, hundred of thousands of freed slaves would have come over.

The gospel choir brought Grimaldi back from his memories. The choir sang rhythmically, and haltingly, the praise of the Lord.

For a moment Grimaldi got lost in the liturgy—the sacred Mass passed down faithfully from the disciples of Christ, in its ever evolving faithfulness, the bastion of the oppressed, the sanctuary of sinners seeking new life together with Christ and his community.

Grimaldi had noticed that at certain celebrations time would open up, all the centuries would unfold and all the people who had ever worshipped would worship together, devoid of time. The sacrament had come alive.

If it hadn't been Prygocki by the altar with the ancient pastor at the consecration, Grimaldi might have continued in his revelry. It just brought one point home to him, though, once ordained, it didn't matter who you were or what you did, you had been called to continue the tradition of the church.

But it was with irony the Grimaldi viewed Prygocki, when his former coach and teacher watched totally absorbed as the priest lifted the host and proclaimed the mystical words, "Do this in memory of me."

Grimaldi believed the words and the blessing that consecrated the round, disk of unleavened bread, that transfigured the ordinary table wine into the body and blood of the risen Christ, who exists without the limitation of time or physicality, who came in truth and honesty to reunite the fallen with the Creator, to heal the broken sons and daughters of Adam and Eve.

Grimaldi joined the line of worshipers who would receive and walked slowly up the aisle singing softly the words of the communion song, knowing full well that at the end of the line was his Lord, and handing the Lord to him was Prygocki.

The Mass ended with the funeral blessing of the body, a reminder of the fragility of the human person, and the greater dynamic of the bond between Creator and creature, with the emphasis on baptism and resurrection.

The pastor told the congregation to go in peace, ending the Mass.

"Thanks by to God," Grimaldi said joining the others, marveling at the strange contradiction between mourning the dead and celebrating life.

His was never a perfunctory response, exclamation. He believed he went forward from Mass with a Gospel imperative to be leaven in the world, to be a peacemaker, and to help the oppressed. But what to do about Prygocki, he thought.

It was different instruction that the lawmakers had, than the police had, than even school teachers. But how did it work with a Prygocki out there, with killers, with young men and women being tortured, raped, and left to die in abandoned buildings, shot dead at the foot of a great cathedral, almost at the entrance of the school building that they would be graduated from.

And what kind of confrontations were these – across conference tables and over Eucharist? His accusations were based on hunches, impressions, induction. It was the same process at work when he wrote his articles, piecing them together cogently. His element was the word, and yet what good was the word when so much terror was in the world?

Perhaps, it was his instrument in the world, as was his love for God and for others, that gave him the strength to go on. Rather than being a fighter, he was a witness, in the biblical sense. He would be a person for whom peace would win over war, love over hate, even if it meant giving up his life. Did he really believe that? What would Katie think? Are you there, Katie? he asked himself. And where is this character Prygocki that I thought I knew so well?

Even though he was at Mass, Grimaldi expected Prygocki to be capable of almost anything. He didn't serve at a sacrificial altar for nothing. Because in the end, Grimaldi knew that if there was a God of goodness, there had to be an equivalent god of evil, a counterpart; if there was a prince of peace, there had to be a prince of war.

How the whole thing worked was mystery, mystery of the cross and resurrection, victory of good over evil, maybe that was why there was so much destruction in the world – the bad guys had to lose in the end and they always started out thinking they could win. It got to a point that if they couldn't win they might as well go down fighting, killing raping, polluting. Illumination over darkness, depravity. Was it simply a matter of believing or was it a matter of acting?

He watched the family get into the black limousine that would take their beloved to the cemetery. He'd lost sight of Prygocki, he concluded, and that made him uneasy. There was something inside him that reeled with inconsistency. In the morning sunlight, it made his head spin.

He was thinking still when Grimaldi felt a hand press on his shoulder. He flinched. Turned out to be Paradis, his reporter friend, who pointed across the street.

“Quite a collection of riff-raff. You got your Bulls over here, and the your Raiders over there. A few old ladies protesting the closing of the school and some other parents and kids doing the same thing. How you like the signs? A body being loaded into a hearse, mourners pulling out in a limo. I think there's enough here to warrant calling for some back up.”

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