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by Pat Marrin

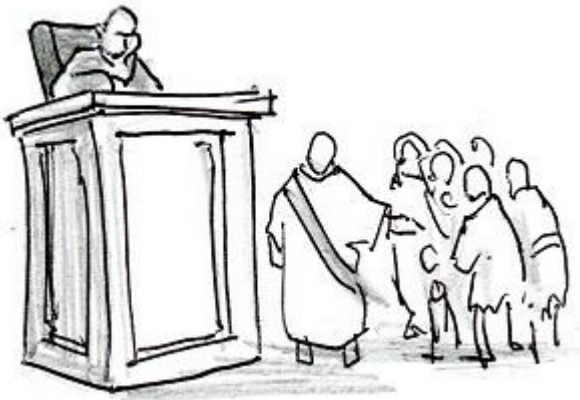
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“Blessed is the man who loves the Lord, who greatly delights in his commands”
(Psalm 112).

2 Cor 9:6-10; Ps 112; John 12:24-26

There is apparently very little humor in the Gospels if we think of funny in contemporary terms. No slapstick, no pratfalls, no snappy dialogue with a punch line. And in the early church there were few comedians. Except for Crazy Larry. Aka St. Lawrence was a 3rd century Roman deacon martyred during the persecution under the emperor Valerian.

The first Crazy Larry story was that when he was ordered to produce the treasures of the church, he rounded up the poor. For this affront he was grilled alive, and the best Crazy Larry story was that when he was done on one side, he asked to be flipped.

True or not, the stories display the willing spirit of some early martyrs to lose their lives for Christ in order to save them for eternal life. If paradox and reversal are the heart of classic comedy—the triumph of right over wrong, humility over pride, love over death-- then the first generation of Christian martyrs were all comedians who believed that they would have the last laugh.

Jesus' image of the seed that falls to earth was perhaps one of his last parables, shared with his disciples as they passed the fields at spring planting before entering Jerusalem for his final Passover. There could be no harvest without sowing. Jesus was about to fall to the ground in death so that new life could spring forth and be multiplied. What he was asking his disciples to do he would first do himself.

This spirit of self-sacrificing love is the heart of the Christian vocation. Few of us will be martyred for the faith, but each day offers opportunities to come in on empty, to let go of our own advantage to advance another, to listen more than talk, to be generous to a fault. Life becomes calmer and more fun when we don't need to compete, win or get even to protect our pride. Comedy is another name for freedom and even compassion once we see how unpredictable and paradoxical life really is. In the end only love really matters.

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