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Feelin' Useless at the USCCB Meeting

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There are many things about a USCCB meeting that are, well, strange. Walking into a room where everyone is dressed identically is strange. Seeing an altar with a large crucifix in a hotel ballroom is strange. Seeing Archbishop Timothy Dolan in running shorts and a sweatshirt at lunchtime returning from some exercise is strange. But, for me the strangest thing is to encounter a former schoolmate among the assembled hierarchs.

For two years in the mid-1980s, I was an inmate at Theological College, the national seminary attached to the Catholic University of America. In 2005, one of my former classmates, Joseph Tyson, was named auxiliary bishop of Seattle. Earlier this year, John Barres was ordained bishop of Allentown. I ran into John in the hallways of the Marriott where the USCCB meetings are being held. He looks none the worse for the intervening years, indeed he has scarcely aged. This would be sufficient grounds for intense dislike, except that Bishop Barres is, and was two decades ago, one of the most likable people you could ever want to meet.

Still, it is difficult not to feel like time has passed me by. A couple of years ago, Martin O'Malley, who was an undergrad at Catholic University with me, was elected Governor of Maryland. I said to him at the time, "Here you are, Governor of our state, and I can't remember to change the oil in my car." Alas.

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