

PRAY Loving God, you live as a community of three in one love. Your Spirit fills the hearts of all of us, calling us to extend our loving into the whole human community. Warm our hearts to those we dismiss. Amen.

November 3, 2024 • Vol. 37, No. 5

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

SPiRIT

By Christine Sutton

I love travelling on trains. This one is old fashioned, four seats facing each other. We've been rattling along for two hours now, passing fields dotted with grazing cattle and slowly moving harvesters. The other passengers are doing what passengers do, read, snooze, gaze out of the window, anything to avoid making eye contact.

Not the boy, though. When he got on, he sat down opposite me and really stared. I didn't notice at first, but when I looked over, his face split into a big, friendly grin. I couldn't help but smile back.

In the corner the man in a pinstripe suit cleared his throat. The boy did the same. The man eyed him over the top of his glasses before burying his head

back in his newspaper. The boy's grin widened.

"Hello," he said. "What's your name?"

"Karen," I told him. "What's yours?"

"Kevin," he answered. He stood up and came to sit beside me.

I noticed the woman to his right glance in my direction. She was dressed head to toe in beige.

"Karen and Kevin, we sound like a singing group!" he said.

"Except that I can't sing," I said ruefully.

"Me either," he admitted, unzipping his jacket to reveal a green tee-shirt with a wolf's head motif. "I'm going to an outreach center for a week. Where are you going?"

"My mom had to go into the hospital for an operation," I told him. "I'm going to stay with my Aunt Sal for a while."

"Can't your dad look after you?"

I shook my head. "He died in a road accident when I was small. There's only Mom and me."

Kevin made a long face. "Gee, that's sad. I'm sorry."

"It was a long while ago, Kevin, but thanks. My aunt lives in a house right on the beach. I'm looking forward to swimming in the gulf instead of a pool! Do you swim?"

He nodded. "Like a fish." I expected him to say more but instead he blurted, "Do you like Twenty-one Pilots?"

I shook my head. I'd heard of them, of course. I could only imagine what they sounded like. I didn't have long to wait. Fishing in his pocket, Kevin brought out an iPod, flicked it on, and pressed the tiny headphones to my ear. I listened for a few moments.

"Not bad but I'm more a Green Day fan myself," I told him. Over in the corner, Pinstripe rattled his paper.

"How old are you?" Kevin asked, putting his head on one side and giving me an appraising look.

I raised my brows. "How old do you think?"

"Seventeen," he decided.

"Seventeen!" I spluttered.

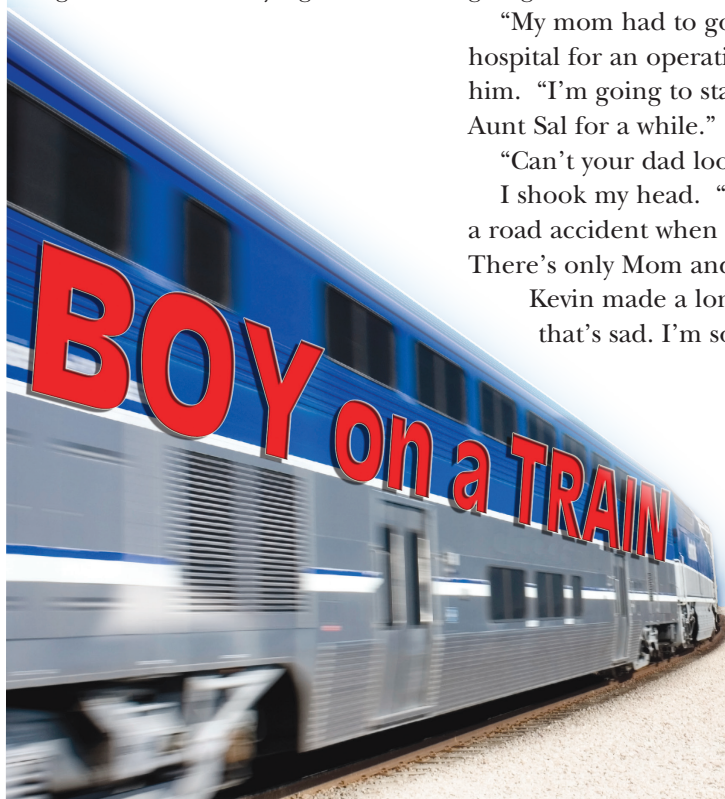
"Mmm. Pretty, too."

I felt myself starting to blush. "I'm fifteen."

Across the carriage, the woman in beige smiled.

"I'm seventeen," Kevin announced. "Well, I will be on Monday. No party though; too old for parties."

He sounded about as convincing as Homer Simpson refusing a donut.



"I suppose it would be hard to have a party anyway, without your friends around," I remarked. Even as I said it, I knew what was coming. "You could come."

Instantly, the atmosphere in the carriage changed, as every single person awaited my reply.

"What, just the two of us?" I muttered. "That wouldn't be much of a party."

"A McDonald's then?" he persisted.

"I, umm, don't think they've got one where we're going," I offered feebly.

"Well, what about the zoo?" he asked, dragging a dog-eared pamphlet for Baton Rouge Zoo from his pocket. He clearly wasn't about to give up.

"The zoo?" I said levelly. "You want me to go to the zoo with you?"

He nodded, his eyes pleading about like Granddad's dog when I'm eating a chocolate brownie.

"W-e-l-l," I hedged, "I'll have to check with Aunt Sal..."

"YES!" Kevin said, punching the air with delight. Around us, half a dozen smiles materialized. Even Pinstripe managed to crack his face.

"Look, Kevin, I'm not promising," I warned. "If I'm not there by ten, you go on in, okay?"

"Okay," he agreed.

The train pulled into the station and I saw Aunt Sal on the platform with my cousin, Jessica. I slipped into my backpack when the woman in beige stood up.

"Thank you for that," she said, speaking softly, "it was kind of you."

"It's okay," I answered, "I'm looking forward to it."

She seemed confused.

"Monday," I prompted, "the zoo?"

"You will actually go?" she asked, wide-eyed.

"Of course," I said, "I'll bring my cousin, too. She and Kevin will hit it off."

Jumping from the train, I ran across the platform and flung my arms around my beloved cousin. As I looked back, I saw understanding dawning on the woman's face. She just realized that Jess has Down's Syndrome, too.



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LABELS

Can

CHANGE

By Paulina Sussman

Palm Springs High School students only went near Room 303 to ditch school, using the "Retard Door" to leave campus. Room 303 was the Special Ed class. Maybe we made fun of these kids to hide the fact we were afraid of what we didn't understand. Even the Associated Student Body (ASB) never really included them in any school activities. When I became ASB Commissioner of Recognition, I wanted to change that. I started visiting Room 303.

When I entered the room, I noticed a huge rug map of the United States on the floor. I saw the wall ablaze with Day-Glo finger paintings. Mr. Walters, the teacher, was reading a story.

"Hey there, pretty lady," a student that I came to know as Bill blurted out, somewhat thick-tongued.

The teacher apologized, and I introduced myself. I began daily



visits to 303. I asked friends to come along. "Maybe tomorrow" was the usual answer. Finally my friend Laura agreed.

"You are one pretty lady," Bill said when he saw Laura. Then he kissed her on the cheek. Mr. Walters rushed over and made Bill sit down.

Later at lunch with our friends Laura did a feeble impersonation of Bill. I felt as if I'd been sucker-punched. The bile rose in my throat, but I wasn't sure if it was from disgust at her imitation or at myself for remaining silent the whole time.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus says love is the whole law.

NARRATOR: One day a scribe, a teacher of the Law, challenged Jesus to answer a trick question about the 613 commandments in the Law of Moses.

TEACHER OF THE LAW: Which is the greatest of the Commandments?

JESUS: This is the greatest: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord your God is Lord alone. Therefore, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your

soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." And this is the second: "Love your neighbor as yourself." No other Commandment is greater than these.

TEACHER OF THE LAW: What a great teacher you are! You are right, "The Lord alone is God; there is no other." Yes, "to love the Lord with all our hearts and all our minds, and all our strength, and our neighbors as

ourselves"—this is worth more than making burnt offerings or sacrifices of animals.

NARRATOR: Jesus approved of these wise words and told the Teacher of the Law:

JESUS: You are not far from the reign of God.

NARRATOR: No one else dared to ask Jesus any more questions.

Mark 12.28-34

During my visits to Room 303, I noticed that one student, Brittany, was especially polite. She always said excuse me before she spoke. Bill was definitely best comedian. He liked to make people laugh with this impromptu dance moves. That's when the idea struck—superlatives for each of the students in Room 303. I could recognize them with certificates in front of the entire student body during lunch.

We had already labeled these kids. They had been called names their whole lives. Maybe recognition would give them a new way of thinking of themselves, a new label.

I decided to present the certificates in the quad in the center of campus. It had a stage we used for pep rallies and announcements.

When the big day arrived, the bell rang and my mouth went dry as I watched Mr. Walters and the Special Ed class walk to lunch tables. Kids who regularly ate at the tables raised their eyebrows. My stomach dropped. What if everyone booed or laughed?

I grabbed the microphone and climbed onstage. "I have an announcement to make." No one looked up. I swallowed hard.

"Today we recognize those who often go unnoticed."

Friends from the football team and the cheerleading squad slowly gathered around. I presented the first certificate to: "Bill, Best Comedian."

The quad was quiet. My best friend Malorie and I were the only ones clapping. I felt so embarrassed for Bill. But when I looked over at him, his face had lighted up.

"Me?" he shouted. I nodded and smiled. Bill ran over, took his certificate, and started dancing.

More students started to notice. Bill bowed, and a growing throng of onlookers cheered.

I continued to call out names: "Jessica, Best Dressed." "Aaron, Most Helpful." Some walked to the stage, some danced, some sadly could not grab the certificate on their own. Still they beamed when I called their names.

Afterwards Mr. Walters came up to me. "You have no ideas what this means to my students."

The truth is he had no idea what their responses meant to me.

Since that day things have changed at Palm Springs High School. ASB throws bimonthly dances to which Bill, Brittany, Jessica, Aaron, and all their friends look forward. Whenever

QUESTIONS

- 1 How would you react if you were Karen and Kevin initiated a conversation on a train or bus?
- 2 Why do Pinstripe and the woman in beige pay attention to the conversation?
- 3 What makes Karen so willing to talk with Kevin?
- 4 What labels like Room 303 do you have in your school?
- 5 How can you change the labels, Spread the Word to End the Word?
- 6 What differently-abled friends do you have?
- 7 Why can't we love God without loving one another? Why can't we love others if we don't love ourselves?
- 8 What is a way you show love of neighbor?

someone says "Retard Door," someone else says, "Chill." I check on Room 303 occasionally. I've made friends within a classroom I was once afraid to enter. I see people differently, each of us with something special to contribute. And we can change labels.

The Church: People of God, Body of Christ

The Catholic Church has a purpose: to spread the light of Christ to all peoples and continue Jesus' mission in the world. In the first words of their document on the Church, the bishops of the Second Vatican Council proclaim, "Christ is the light of all humanity." The first words give each document of Vatican II its name. In Latin the first words are *Lumen Gentium*; in English, light of all people. The Council likens the Church to a people and to a body.

First, what makes a people? A people share laws, language, rituals, leaders, history, purpose. We talk about the American people, the French people. The Church is the people of God. The Hebrew slaves become the people of God when God makes the covenant of the ten commandments with them. Jesus' followers become a new people of God when he makes a new covenant in his death and resurrection.

The Second Vatican Council says, "God has willed to make women and men holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bonds between them, but rather to make them into a people who acknowledge God and serve God in holiness (*Lumen Gentium*, #9).

From the beginning of his ministry Jesus gathers a community of disciples. After his death and resurrection, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit upon them, and they spread the good news of his death and resurrection to the ends of the earth.

It is the Holy Spirit, the forgotten member of the Trinity, who renews the Church and inspires each Christian. "The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple, prays and bears witness in them... constantly rejuvenating the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* #4).

Christ is the head of the People of God. The law is his new commandment to love

as Jesus loves. Christians possess the freedom and dignity of daughters and sons of God in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells. Its destiny is the kingdom of God, begun on earth and brought to completion in the end of time when Christ will appear.

The Church is a "seed of unity, hope, and salvation for the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium* #9). The Church makes communion with God visible and acts as an instrument or tool for the unity of the human race.

The People of God have the special vocation of living Jesus' good news in the world, to be like leaven in society. The Council writes, "Each individual lay person must be a witness before the world to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus, and a sign of the living God. What the soul is in the body, let Christians be in the world (*Lumen Gentium* #38).

Second, how is the church like a body? The apostle Paul compares the Christian community to a body in his letters. Every part of a body works together, just as all Christians contribute their gifts and talents to the whole.

The Church is the Body of Christ. In Baptism we are formed into the likeness of Christ. Baptism calls every Christian to holiness.

In the Eucharist we become members of Christ's Body. The head of the body is Christ, who is the image of the invisible God and in whom all things came into being. He is the head of the body, the Church.



The Church has a hierarchical organization. Bishops, priests, and deacons serve, unify, and sanctify the People of God. The bishops continue the teaching of the apostles. The pope leads and unifies the whole Church.

"All Christians in whatever state or walk in life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of life here on earth" (*Lumen Gentium* #40).

Seeing the Church as the People of God and the Body of Christ gives Catholics a strong sense we are the Church. The Second Vatican Council calls us to shine in the world with the light of Christ.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Invite to class or visit some of the oldest people in your parish. Ask these elders to tell you about the history of the parish, especially about some of the holy people who made a crucial difference in your community.
- 2 Compare your parish community to the human body. Who speaks out and steps up to make things happen? Who reaches out to others with open hands? Who has vision?
- 3 Write a mission statement or a covenant agreement for the young people of your parish or high school.