

THE GREETERS

Responsible members of the church should always secure substitutes if they cannot perform their duties at a worship service. Occasionally, there arises an exception to that standard of etiquette.

Pastor Fred Anderson

“Pastor, it’s for you,” said Alice Bonn, the church’s veteran secretary. “It’s Dominic Rastrelli.”

Taking the telephone from her, Pastor Anderson said, “Hello, Dominic. How are you?”

“Fine, Pastor,” answered Dominic. “I heard that the church needed additional greeters for the Sunday services. I would like to volunteer, and I wasn’t sure who I needed to talk to.”

“Actually, Russ Deaver is managing that, but I will certainly tell him you’d like to volunteer,” said Pastor Anderson. “Are you sure you’re up for it?”

“Yes, Pastor. I believe I can do it.”

“Well, I’m sure he’ll be glad to get you on the schedule.”

“Thanks, Pastor. I’ll see you Sunday. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Dominic.”

Pastor Anderson called Russ Deaver with the news of Dominic’s desire to serve in the capacity of a greeter. Russ called Dominic, thanked him, and scheduled him for the late service on the last Sunday of the upcoming month. When the sun rose on that particular Sunday, Dominic got ready by putting an extra spit-shine on his shoes. At 6:00 AM, he ate breakfast and went back to the bathroom. He took great pains to do everything quietly because he had weekend visitors and he didn’t want to disturb them. When he reached the bathroom, he felt very queasy. Within minutes, he could definitely qualify as sick. A very conscientious man, Dominic immediately tried calling Russ Deaver, but no one answered the phone. He then tried Pastor Anderson’s house, but the reverend had already left for the church. He told his wife, Angela, to get his nephew, Vincent, up out of bed and see if he would mind substituting for him, even though he had never been to St. Peter. Vincent,

being a very conscientious man himself, agreed to his uncle's request.

Although St. Peter leaned to the cosmopolitan side, being in a larger city and all, most of the congregants outside the church that Sunday could not recall a big, black stretch limo with darkened windows ever pulling up to the overhang at the end of the sidewalk before. In a scene that some later referred to as a reenactment of Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, the crowd of people from the early service seemed to unnaturally make way for the three gentlemen dressed in dark suits and wearing dark sunglasses approaching the doors to the church. Following the brief instructions given by Dominic at home, the trio positioned themselves just inside the doors.

The first victim, or rather attendee, to enter the door was Mary Anne Cole, a petite middle-aged divorcee.

“Good morning,” said Vincent. “I apologize for not knowing your name, but we’re just substituting for my uncle this morning. And who might you be?”

“Mary Anne,” said the woman.

“Well, Mary Anne, I’m Vinnie and these are my, uh ... associates, Sal and Bruno. We’s glad to have you today. Go right on in and kindly fill up the front pew first.”

As Mary Anne walked into the sanctuary, Sal followed her at a discreet distance. After Mary Anne seated herself in the back pew, Sal returned to the greeter’s position and whispered something into Vincent’s ear.

“She did?” said Vincent. “And I even said kindly, did I not?”

Sal and Bruno nodded in the affirmative.

Putting his arm out in a direction back towards the sanctuary, Vincent said succinctly, “Gentlemen.”

Sal and Bruno walked calmly into the sanctuary over to the pew where Mary Anne sat. They bodily picked her up and carried her up to the front pew, depositing her midway down the pew. They then returned to the greeter’s station. Vincent looked at them and they nodded in the affirmative.

The next individual to enter the narthex carried a clipboard and had a stopwatch hanging around his neck.

Firmly shaking the gentleman's hand, Vincent said, "Good morning. I'm Vinnie, and this is Sal and Bruno. And you would be who ... or shall I say whom?" Vincent looked to Sal and Bruno for affirmation of his grammatical correction. They nodded in a positive direction.

"Mortimer Jones," the man replied.

"Well, let me guess, Mort. May I call you Mort?" Mort nodded affirmatively. "Mort, I'll lay odds on the fact that you be Chairman of the Board of Elders. Correct?" Mort nodded affirmatively. "Timing the reverend's sermon, I bet." Mort nodded affirmatively. "Mort, the clipboard and stopwatch are giveaways, but I still like it. Keep up the good work." Mort left with a smile on his face.

Veronica Lovejoy walked into the narthex next. Vincent took note of the fact that four men seemed to grapple with each other over who would hold the door for her. To describe Veronica, one would have to say that the Lord must have spent a little extra time aligning her chromosomes. In a spontaneous act of Christian love, Vincent embraced Miss Lovejoy in a hug. Vincent's educational background never covered the etiquette of hugging, so he was unaware of how long such an act of love should last. After a while, the gentleman

felt rather warm; perhaps a response to the emotional power of expressing such Christian love; or perhaps a reflection of the fact that there were fifteen people backed up in line and with the door being held open for all those people, the heat from the brutal summer sun was blowing in like a furnace on high. At any rate, Vincent finally relinquished his grip, or rather hug, on Miss Lovejoy.

“Oh, by the way, I’m Vinnie. And you are?”

“Veronica Lovejoy.”

“Yes, you are ... and these are my ... uh ... associates ... uh ... uh.” After Bruno leaned over and whispered something in his ear, Vincent said, “Oh, yeah. Sal and Bruno ... Sal and Bruno. Well, we’re very ... very glad you’re here today. Just have a seat anywhere your little heart desires.” Turning back to the people waiting in line, Vincent said, “It’s a tough job, but I’m willing to make the sacrifice.”

Before Vincent could begin greeting those in line again, a man approached him from the sanctuary hall. That man wore a clerical collar.

“Pastor Fred Anderson,” said the man.

“How’s it going, Reverend? My uncle Dominic fell ill this morning and he couldn’t make it.

He tried to get a hold of yous at home, but yous had already left for the church. So's not being able to reach anybody, he pressed us into service."

"Is Dominic going to be alright?" inquired Pastor Anderson.

"Yeah, yeah. Old Unc's gonna be alright. Meanwhile, we got things covered here. No worries, Reverend. By the way, my name is Vinnie, and these are my ... uh ... associates, Sal and Bruno."

But Sal and Bruno had abandoned their post next to Vincent. Apparently, something else had drawn their attention, maybe something of recent interest in the hall leading to the sanctuary.

"Sal, Bruno, get over here and greet the reverend properly."

"Uh, Vinnie, let me know if you need anything," said Pastor Anderson.

"Will do, Rev. Will do."

For the fourteen people remaining in line behind the reverend, Vinnie just gave a wholesale greeting of, "Yeah, yeah. Welcome. We's glad to have yous. Just have a seat."

Shortly after that group entered the sanctuary, a paper airplane came flying over Vincent's head. A young lad stepped out from the narthex hall and asked if anyone had seen an airplane flying around. Sal picked up the airplane and handed it to Vincent.

“What are you doing, kid?” asked Vincent. “Don't you know not to do that inside the church? I'm gonna hold on to this, so's just get on back into church.”

With there being a slight break in people coming in the door, Vincent took time to unfold the paper airplane. Noticing that the paper contained a great deal of writing, he began to read the words in front of him. Suddenly, he exclaimed, “Hey, this is the reverend's sermon ... kids today. Where do they learn this stuff?”

Out of respect for the reverend, Vincent folded the paper back into the shape in which he found it—an airplane. After carefully studying the aerodynamic features of the item, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a one-dollar bill. He held up the dollar bill in his left hand and his associates responded by pulling out one-dollar bills from their own pockets. Sal and Bruno then pulled out paper airplanes from their coat pockets and the three gentlemen engaged in a little aerodynamic contest.

Since Sal's airplane maintained the longest flight, he collected the dollar bills from his two fellow contestants. Their scientific experiment came to an end when the next man entered the narthex.

"Good morning to yous," said Vincent. "My name is Vinnie, and these are my ... uh ... associates, Sal and Bruno. And what name do yous go by?"

"I'm Bob," the gentleman replied. "I'm just visiting today from Minnesota."

"Well, Bob from Minnesota," said Vincent. "We's glad yous took it upon youself to cross the threshold of spiritual enlightenment here at St. Paul's." After Bruno leaned over and whispered something into his ear, Vincent said, "I stand corrected. I previously meant to say, St. Pe-ter ... at any rate, Bob from Minnesota, what they usually do when new folks grace the halls of this fine establishment is, they give them these little yellow crosses to wear so's the rest of the good folks that are members here can give them the proper welcome that they deserve. My benevolent uncle informed me that lately the fine folks seem to be having a hard time seeing those little yellow crosses, so's today we're gonna do something a little different ... gentlemen."

Sal then reached behind a table and pulled out a large poster board. He handed it to Bruno, who hung it about the visitor's neck. Bob appeared to be exceedingly moved by the large target painted on the poster board now hanging about his neck, as he began visibly shaking.

"That's good, Bruno," said Vincent. "You got the bullseye right about belly button level."

Bob remained so visibly moved that he required Sal and Bruno's assistance in seating in the sanctuary.

With only two minutes to go before the service started, Pastor Anderson felt a need to check on the greeters in the narthex.

"Hi yous, Reverend," said Vincent. "It appears as though we've done about as much damage as we can do today. Before we depart, I would like to put in a good word for my colleagues, Sal and Bruno. If the church ever has a need for assistance in the area of personal calls, don't hesitate to give them a jingle. They can handle any type of call from evangelism to elders to stewardship. And their rates are reasonable. Only ten bucks a head ..." As he proudly looked back at his colleagues, Vincent continued, "Twenty bucks a leg, and five bucks an arm ... just kidding about that last part,

Reverend. In my business, it never hurts to have a little levity. I have also found in my business that advice is worth its weight in gold. And I'm gonna give you a little advice right now. To succeed in this evangelism business, you gotta get through to the people in the pews. And it's really very simple. There's only two things to do. First, get them to read and follow the Manual that the Big Guy gave them. Second, get them to ... care about their fellow human beings. It has been most fortuitous that my uncle could not get a hold of you this morning. Arrivederci, Reverend."

As he walked back into the sanctuary to get the service started, Pastor Anderson said to himself, "Perhaps I would have worded it differently, but who can argue with that?" He then pulled out his little memo pad and made a note to give Dominic Rastrelli his cell phone number.