

July 16, 2020

I have avoided in these posts the “chipper” uber-confident kind of behavior that some believers find as sure and certain markers of the validity of their religious beliefs or, at least, their formal religious identification as Christian or Catholic as I don't think chippiness and uber-confidence are realistic or useful in these times nor do I think they are authentic and genuine feelings.

I do not have a stiff upper lip my upper lip is rubbery sometimes.

The length of days that we have behind us and the length of days we have ahead of us call for more sober and careful consideration, in my mind, at least.

We are not through the woods, we may not even be half-way through the woods, as Dante wrote in the opening lines of his 13th century masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*:

(Halfway through my life)... I came to myself, in a dark wood, where the direct way was lost. It is a hard thing to speak of, how wild, harsh and impenetrable that wood was, so that thinking of it recreates the fear. It is scarcely less bitter than death: but, in order to tell of the good that I found there, I must tell of the other things I saw there.

The Divine Comedy covers just a few days, the evening before Good Friday until the Wednesday after Easter in the year 1300, and it takes Dante and his guide through Hell and Purgatory, Virgil, the ancient Roman poet.

His guide through Paradise to God is, of course, Beatrice, a girl Dante met only twice, once when they were 9 years old and again, allegedly on the Ponte de Vecchio which was cause for a rare agreement between the Nazi's and the Allies in World War II when both sides agreed not to bomb and destroy that bridge because of Dante and Beatrice.

Reading the *Divine Comedy* is tough, I spent one whole summer in a class in the University of Chicago Gargoyle series years ago and we just skimmed the surface. In that class all but two people were my age. Two Stanford University young women were taking the class for credit and even though I was old enough to be their grandfather we became friends and I often took them to lunch on our breaks.

That summer the movie, American Pie, was released, and I remember them complaining at lunch one day how their boyfriends dragged them to see that movie on the weekend and thought it was as hilarious as my female friends found it stupid.

As they told the story of their weekend disgust, I was smiling sheepishly, and then simultaneously they both looked at me and said, "No! You didn't, did you?"

I said, "Yes."

They laughed and told me I was just as stupid as their boyfriends which I loved and, truth be told, so did they. The memories of me and those attractive, very intelligent young women walking up and down The Magnificent Mile thrills me at the thought this day,

We remained good friends that summer and then all of us went our separate ways as is the usual course in life.

Even though, there are things we have to see that do not easily lead us to chipper and confident observations on life in the current moment with its pain and anger and confusion in so, so many lives and places and a real absence of compassionate intelligent political leadership, we can still find things that make us laugh at ourselves and that is good, indeed, it is very good.