

REFLECTION

Dollar in the Basket

By Guillermo de Carndonagh

In a valley bound coal town the air hazy with the fumes and smoke of the smothering culm the young lad moved briskly down the street delivering his ninety plus papers. On the north south streets running parallel to the hill he hit a steady rhythm fold, hard toss up two flights of steps to the porches above, fold, low under hand across the narrow street to the ground level porches. After collecting on Friday evening and Saturday morning, making up the envelope with twenty seven dollars to pay for the papers he has five or six dollars for himself.

On Sunday morning he stands in the back of the packed Church with the other young and single men. Some with their lungs torn by the hard grit of the granite and anthracite dust. Others with their faces permanently ruddy from the heat of the furnaces and hammers of the foundry. As the basket is passed among the "boys" the young lad is proud to put his dollar in the basket. Not change like a little child, but real folding money, like the men amongst whom he stands. Soon the bells on the altar call for his attention and as if struck by the foundry hammer he and all the men about him drop to their knees on the paving tiles. A peasants faith, perhaps, a faith cemented by the good and the bad: the schoolyard scraps at the taunt "mackerel snapper", defiantly refusing to say the Protestant part of the "Our Father" each school day, the camaraderie of the neighborhood, and the love and Faith of family.

A war, a college degree! a wife and thirty six years place the man who was the young lad a long ways from home. Now he sits in the seats of a half full church. As the usher sticks a basket down the empty row of seats he puts in a check, which while much more than a dollar is much less of what he has than the young boy gave decades ago. In his defense he gives now to two churches this one where he worships and the territorial parish in which he lives. He drives thirty miles now so that he can kneel at the call of the bells, thirty miles passed "renewed" churches none as full as those of his youth. And he wonders can this enterprise succeed this defiant attempt to preserve the sacred, when the collection basket holds so little.

Mark 12 {RSV}

42 And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living."