

Under the Table at the Pope House

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas is a wonderful time for families! Our appetite for fellowship with our married and away at college kids has really increased. We were able to see all of them this past Thanksgiving and we'll be seeing most of them again at Christmas. Frankly, their mom and I are trying to make it "holiday friendly" around our house so that if our kids who don't think they can make it will change their mind, they will also feel welcome!

So in our attempt to make our home holiday friendly, we decided to repair and enlarge our kitchen table, by replacing the leaves that we used when the kids were all at home. Barbara and I have been using the same kitchen table for over thirty years. If that table could talk it would give you a pretty accurate history of the Popes. I have written many a sermon and Bible study on its plain pine wood color top. Our kids took their first bites around that table as well as family devotions, homework assignments and family gaming. Many a game of Monopoly, Chess, Checkers, Jeopardy, Trivial Pursuit, Candy Land, Chutes and Ladders, and Jumanji has been played on its lasting surface. We needed to restore some broken wing nuts and tighten a loose leg. So, we turned the table over and discovered an area we had not seen in a long time. The area in which I refer is the area under the table - the area beyond the vision and reach of the cleaning cloth. It was an area that was criss-crossed by little fingerprints. I looked carefully at the stains and believed I could recognize where spaghetti sauce, gravy, and maybe birthday cake icing from long ago had traveled. This table has been in our kitchen for thirty years. For my children who may be reading these words, don't get in a blaming mode, because there were traces at every place a kid sat, even where Dad sat, but I do need to remind my wife that I always wipe my hands on my napkin and maybe my pants once in a while, but never under the table. And for my mom who may be reading these words, okay after I was married I never wiped my hands under the table. (One sure has to be good and honest when writing things that family reads!)

Kids, you can still come home! We promise not to make you clean under the table when you get here this Christmas. It's done! As Barbara and I talked together in the process of cleaning under the table, so many thoughts filled my heart and mind. Allow me to share two of them with you today.

1. The marks under the table reminded us of a lot of living that took place above the table!

I never thought my heart would be touched by ten to twenty year old remnants of breakfast, lunch, or supper...but it was. I even thought it might be nice to make it a Pope museum piece. You know, maybe get the kids to sign where they sat. Michelangelo painted upside down under the Sistine Chapel roof; the Pope kids did their work during their meals! I didn't suggest making a masterpiece out of this art to my wife; I already knew the answer. The works of art would have to remain in the memories of their mom and me. As we cleaned the place where precious (albeit naughty) little hands roamed, my heart was strangely warmed. I began to put high little voices with every mark. As the suds began their soak and the marks began to lift after some scrubbing, the memories began to return. I heard the laughter, saw the tears, and heard the Bible verses. Once again, I looked across the table to the face of their youthful mother, thinking how lucky (providentially blessed) I am, to have the best wife and kids a preacher could ever have. I thought of all the living that took place to make our house a home. I can relate to the words of a poem written in the down-home, folksy manner of Edgar Guest in 1916:

*It takes a heap o' livin' in a house t' make it home,
A heap o' sun an' shadder (shadow), 'an sometimes have t' roam
Afore ye really 'preciate (appreciate) the things ye lef' behind
An' hunger fer 'em somehow, with 'em allus (always) on yer mind.
It don't make any difference how rich ye get t' be,
How much yer chairs an' tables cost, how great yer luxury;
It ain't home t' ye, though it be the palace of a king,
Until somehow yer soul is sort o' wrapped round everything.*

*Home ain't a place that gold can buy or get up in a minute;
 Afore it's home there got t' be a heap o' livin' in it;
 Within the walls there's got t' be some babies born, an then
 Right there ye've got to bring 'em up t' women good, an' men;
 And gradjerly (gradually), as time goes on, ye find ye wouldn't part
 With anything they ever used- they've grown into yer heart;
 The old high chairs, the playthings, too, the little shoes they wore
 Ye hoard; and' if ye could ye'd keep the thumb-marks on the door.*

I was certainly living that poem a few hours ago. But after second thought, it's good that we clean their little messes from yesterday. They are grown now and maybe it would be good for Dad not to "fingerprint" them, but let them grow up and leave some little dirty marks in the past. "...Love covereth all sins" (Proverbs 10:12).

2. Everybody has wiped something under the table.

Nobody is perfect; that was why Jesus had to come to the cross. Yesterday I heard on the radio that some unbelieving skeptics are having a problem with the new Disney release of *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. One of the critics bashed the idea of imprinting our children's mind with the ancient belief of the need for atonement to reconcile and change lives. No matter what packaging you place the cross, it will always be an offense! "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*" (I Corinthians 1:18).

We have all been caught having attempted to cover for our fingerprints under the table of life. The forgiveness supplied by Jesus has placed our sins now, not under the table, but under the sea! Yes, you can come home now, kids, we have cleaned your souvenirs you left us under the table. "*Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea*" (Micah 7:18).

Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you something else! Bring your kids with you; they are welcome to the same table, Gramma has plenty of cleanser!

- Pastor Pope -

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