

Constancy of faith



It came like they all do in an Indiana summer afternoon. Off on the horizon of a blue and sunny sky, black clouds darkened like an old sinner's heart. It would hit us in moments.

My daughter and I were out driving in the near country not far from home. "The weather is just more reasonable in the South," the transplanted Midwesterner said as she looked to the sky.

I shrugged. I've lived north of the Mason-Dixon Line my entire life. She's in Georgia now with her family. Might as well be Lithuania to me.

The rain hit within minutes and in biblical proportions. My sister-in-law was visiting my wife a few miles away and had left her car windows open. The interior got what we call a Hoosier Express Wash. It might still be damp at the end of the week.

My daughter could barely see her way out the front windshield, and we pulled into a parking lot outside a Catholic church until the wrath passed.

We had been talking about young people as we drove. I thought of Paul Lynde complaining in "Bye, Bye, Birdie": "Why can't they be like we were, perfect in every way? What's the matter with kids today?"

Actually, we weren't so much complaining as confessing to being mystified. In many ways, my daughter was raised in a world not that different from my own.

I won't give her age – she'd have my head – but computers had only just begun to sneak into the home when she was little. She and her brother had a few hand-helds and an early TV game console as they got older, but solitaire was the only game on the big computer that I had at home for work. Just writing that I downloaded on a floppy disk. No internet or email.

Instead, she played outside. In backyards and neighborhood parks, it was tag, hide-and-seek, red rover. She walked everywhere or rode her bike. And she played with the girls as her brother played with the boys.

“I talk with someone 30 years older, and I know them,” she said as she watched the rain. “I talk with someone 10 years younger, and they are strangers. It's the social tech media. You can try to fake it, but you can't get past it or through it if you weren't raised with it. I'm not talking which button to push, app to apply, smartphone to use. Anybody can learn that.” (She obviously hadn't seen me trying it.) “I'm talking about how tech has totally changed how the young speak, write and, most of all, think. We haven't re-wired tech. Tech has re-wired us,” she sighed.

I knew where she was coming from. I retired just before the new tech rendered me useless. And now we are in stage two. Both the language and the thoughts that created my world are growing obsolete and unknowable to new generations.

As the rain eased up and we headed the final leg home, I wondered about what we have lost and how we can keep what's left. That evening we went to a local pizza place for dinner. The kids ordered a large pepperoni. As the lady placed it on the table, their dad said, “Time for grace!” My three grandkids made the Sign of the Cross, folded their hands and said together: “Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

It was grace as they learned it from their parents. As I learned it from mine. As my parents learned it from theirs. The Faith and the kids their parents teach: That's how the good survives.