

When my nephew Bryan applied for the Peace Corps a few years ago, he composed an essay about his college internship in West Africa. He wrote, "I was raised on Nickelodeon and Tang and I had not been exposed to anything more foreign than a St. Patrick's Day parade." He worked a summer as a 19-year old TV reporter covering Parliament and soccer matches in Ghana. He made friends, visited their homes, and helped them butcher chickens for dinner. He ate bowls of fufu and peanut soup. He shot hoops with local basketball players, and conversed about US foreign diplomacy. He wrote, "[One day, a]bout half way to Kumasi our van ran over a pothole and both back tires blew out while traveling at nearly 70 miles per hour. The driver of the van, who could not have been over 20 years old, deftly kept our swerving van from tipping off the side of the road – all the while he managed to continue gnawing on the corn cob in his left hand." Bryan wondered, "Was this something he had done before?"

In our family Bryan has a reputation for living on the edge, seeking freedom and all the excitement life has to offer. He told Peace Corps he wanted to work in Eastern Europe, so they offered him Bulgaria. After teaching high school English for two years, Bryan fell in love with Bulgaria, and more specifically he fell in love with Maria Dimitrovi. On Wednesday this week I'm flying to Sofia, Bulgaria, with several members of my family. My brother Tom was planning to go, but now he says he'd rather have a root canal than fly to Bulgaria. Literally. His tooth aches so much he's having surgery this week and canceled his trip. I arrive there on Thanksgiving Day. Friday is Bryan's 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. Saturday is his wedding. Sunday I'm flying home. Bryan's love for the fast life is contagious, even among those going to the wedding.

When I saw him last fall, Bryan seemed changed. He still enjoys every moment of life, but he does not enjoy it without Maria. He has given up some freedom because it doesn't mean as much to him as love. Bryan has found a new center for his life, and she means all the world to him.

Our responsorial psalm today is all about making God the center of your life. "You are my inheritance, O Lord!" God means more to us than our territory, our possessions, even more than our freedom. "I set the LORD ever before me," the psalm goes, "with him I shall not be disturbed." This psalm prophesies the resurrection. In today's gospel, Jesus predicts the coming of the Son of Man amid ominous signs. In the first reading Daniel also predicts a time of great distress, but he says, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever." And the psalm goes, "You will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption."

God is the center of our life not just in the present, but also in the future. We are distracted by many things: by work, lust, sports, and possessions – things that do not satisfy, things that move us off the center. A good friendship can keep us focused on what is important in this life and in the next, especially if that friend is God, the center of our life.