

Christmas morning dawned bright and cold in 1985. I woke up not quite so bright and not quite so cold thanks be to God in the rectory of Nativity parish where the Zeikles have been members for years. Fr. Frank Lackamp here was then and is still gloriously reigning as pastor. I was sitting in the kitchen that morning looking over the paper because Fr. Lackamp had just given me the most wonderful Christmas present a priest could ask for: he took the early Mass.

The phone rang and I mumbled something jolly like, "Nativity of Mary Parish, Merry Christmas." You see, I had just returned home the night before; I'd been away at school for a number of years. That Christmas morning was the beginning of a whole new chapter in my life, but it took quite an effort to turn over the page. The voice on the other end of the line, however, was wide awake. "Father, we've had a death in our family." I woke up enough then to express my sorrow and to assure the family I would leave immediately for the hospital. I was already starting for the door before I realized I had not woken up enough to recall that since I'd just got home, I didn't own a car.

I did not know many people in the parish, but I knew one man who was not only a close friend, but a person I knew I could depend on for help in an emergency. That man wasn't available so I called Chuck. It was the only time I've gone to comfort the bereaved in a Corvette.

I don't mind telling you how much I've come to depend on Chuck especially these last couple of years. Not just for emergencies--I do own a car now. He's been one of the most important distractions in my life. We've become so familiar to the employees at the Bannister Square Six that they're going to bronze our chairs. But the most wonderful present he's given me is to introduce me to Denise Hoffman.

It's great to see them together, it's great to see how much they love each other, and how much they love the Church. I don't mean church buildings, although they do have a strange attraction for buildings needing a fresh coat of paint. But they love the people in the Church. They're part of the community, whether it be to rejoice with good news or to care for the dying. They know what it's like to depend on someone else, to depend on each other, to depend on God.

And that, my brothers and sisters, is what the Beatitudes are about, depending on God. To be poor in spirit means we can become rich only in God. To be poor in spirit we can be hungry, thirsty, persecuted, and insulted. We can have unhappy times, painful times, and they don't matter if we depend on what we own, and what we own is God.

Chuck and Denise, be poor in spirit. The gifts you have, share. The gifts you don't have, you don't need. The reign of God is already yours. Beatitude lies not in how much we own but in how little we own, when the little we own is God alone.