

State College, PA

Suzanne Pohland Paterno Catholic Student Faith Center

Mass of Blessing

Saturday, April 8, 2012

*Something old, something new  
Something borrowed, something blue.*

I am sure that at least some of you are thinking, “Where is he going with that as an opening for the homily today. Doesn’t that verse have something to do with a wedding?”

Before I answer, I have to tell you that I almost forgot that there is one more line to this often quoted verse. It goes like this:

*Something old, something new  
Something borrowed, something blue.  
And a silver sixpence in her shoe.*

Many accounts say that this whimsical verse originated in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was certainly in use by the late Victorian period and was printed in an 1894 edition of the Pennsylvania newspaper *The Warren Ledger*, where it was listed as a 'Puritan Marriage Custom'.

Each item in this poem represents a token of good fortune for the bride:

- *"Something old"* symbolizes continuity with the bride's family and the past.
- *"Something new"* means optimism and hope for the bride's new life ahead.
- *"Something borrowed"* is usually an item from a happily married friend or family member, whose good fortune in marriage is supposed to carry over to the new bride. The borrowed item also reminds the bride that she can depend on her friends and family.

- “*Something blue*” is a color that has been connected to weddings for centuries. In ancient Rome, brides wore blue to symbolize love, modesty, and fidelity. Christianity has long dressed the Virgin Mary in blue, so purity was associated with the color. Before the late 19th century, blue was a popular color for wedding gowns.
- “*Silver sixpence*” in the bride's shoe represents wealth and financial security. A sixpence is a coin that was minted in Britain from 1551 to 1967. It was made of silver and worth six pennies.

As I reflect on the Word of God for this liturgy and as I look around this magnificent place, I see something old and something new. I see something borrowed and something blue.

What is both old and new is the Catholic faith that has been handed down to us from the time of the apostles. It is a faith in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who we are reminded in Nehemiah, is the reason for our rejoicing today, for it is the Lord who is our strength!

In the second reading St. Paul speaks in plain terms about what is old; he’s talking about demons. All of us here have heard more than we care to about demons. There is a real temptation for people to become cynical or at least overwhelmed over the endless stories of human suffering or natural disasters and the list goes on.

But St. Paul also speaks rather plainly in the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians about what is new. The image he uses to capture that newness which we long for in our lives is the table of the Lord. And here is that table of the Lord in plain sight, this table which will be blessed and used for the first time in this Eucharistic celebration.

This table of the Lord; this altar of God will always be a bridge through which we can encounter the most profound mystery of our faith; the saving passion and death of Jesus which is the source of our sharing in God’s eternal life.

Here at this table, this mystery of faith becomes real to us in sacramental signs. It is the same mystery but its effects are always new. In every celebration of the Holy Eucharist we are united over and over with Christ who understands our passion and our suffering and our struggles not to be

overwhelmed by darkness. Instead, Jesus calls us in the Gospel reading to walk in the light; his light.

When I look around this magnificent place I see something borrowed and something blue. What is borrowed are the Stations of the Cross that are here for Penn State students as they learn to walk along with Christ who always walks along with us. The way of the cross is the way of the Christ Jesus who is the way, and the truth, and the life.

These Stations of the Cross and some of the stained glass windows are borrowed from another place of worship and from this day forward they become an integral part of this student faith center.

In particular, I am drawn to the image of the Holy Family, the title under which this chapel is blessed today. While this window has been “borrowed” from another place of worship, it is complemented by another window in this magnificent place that depicts the purpose of the Suzanne Pohland Paterno Catholic Student Faith Center.

This magnificent place was conceived as a place where the Catholic faith of Catholic students who are members of the Penn State family will be awakened, nurtured, and deepened. As they grow in the knowledge gained in the classroom; here they can also continue to grow in the knowledge of the love of God that is perfectly expressed in the person of Jesus Christ, the central member of the Holy Family.

So I mentioned something old and something new, and something borrowed. What about something blue? Of course! Penn State blue! Right? It is a color of blue that expresses the identity of the Penn State family.

That color blue is evident in the new stained glass window which shows students who represent the Penn State Catholic family. And that color blue is evident in the Holy Family, especially in the person of the Blessed Virgin Mary who is dressed in blue. And as I mentioned, the whimsical verse which mentions “something borrowed and something blue” contains an allusion to the purity, the holiness, and the profound goodness of the Mother of God, who is also the greatest example of what it means to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ.

It's no coincidence that the Penn State blue and blue garment of the Blessed Virgin Mary suggest that this Student Faith Center is to be a place of for all the members of the Penn State Catholic Student family to inspiration to come to recognize and deepen their identity as disciples, students, or followers of Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned, the well known verse is "*Something old and something new.*" "*Something borrowed and something blue.*" But the not as well known verse says, "*And a silver sixpence in her shoe.*"

More than a silver sixpence has been placed in this shoe. As Bishop of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, I am most grateful to all who have contributed to this worthy cause and those who will contribute to the endowment that we need to establish in order for this place to be the spiritual home for our Penn State Catholic Student family that it is intended to be.

As I look around this magnificent place, I am reminded of another silver sixpence that was placed in the shoe of this bride. Some of you were here the day it happened. Do you remember? We gathered right here for the blessing of the cornerstone which is now in its proper place outside.

On that cornerstone Bishop Joseph placed the medal of the Servant of God Demetrius Gallitzin; the Gallitzin Cross which represents the commitment of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown in this Student Faith Center. Then Archabbot Douglas placed a medal of St. Benedict which represents the commitment of the monks of St. Vincent Archabbey which continues to be expressed in a special way in the service of Father Matthew and Father David in our Penn State Catholic Campus Ministry.

Last but not least, the final silver sixpence was placed on that cornerstone by Suzanne Pohland Paterno. Actually, Sue placed three religious medals that represent not only her commitment, but the commitment of all of you who have been inspired by her vision and commitment to make a home for our Penn State Catholic Students.

One of those medals is the medal of St. Jude the Apostle; who is revered as the patron saint of the most difficult of challenges that anyone can ever face in life; even those experiences that some people would refer to as hopeless cases.

Sue Paterno's devotion to St. Jude shows an understanding and faith in what the Word of God tells us in the readings we heard here today. In the face of whatever the demon may be, there is also before us the table of the Lord. That includes the table of this house of worship where we can be nourished and sustained by the Holy Eucharist of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The faith and understanding of Sue and others who have made this Catholic Student Faith Center possible is grounded in what Jesus says in the Gospel today. Our Lord encourages us by saying that we are to not be overwhelmed by darkness, and he challenges us to walk in the light of the Catholic faith that is a gift to us from the Son of God.

This understanding and faith in God's word is what Nehemiah announces in the first reading, "Today is holy to the Lord. Rejoicing in the Lord is our strength!" It is that strength that comes to us in Christ Jesus and through his Church that has made this magnificent place possible and will continue to sustain it for years to come.

*Something old and something new.  
Something borrowed and something blue.  
And a silver sixpence in her shoe.*

I know that this whimsical verse applies to the bride on her wedding day. But it may not be totally misplaced, since the image of a wedding, and a bride and a bridegroom is a very traditional image for the Church. Christ Jesus is the bridegroom and his bride is the Church. This chapel and those who will come here to be one with God in prayer, and worship, in the Word of God and in the sacraments, is representative of his Church.

In a reflection on this image, Blessed Isaac of Stella, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian abbot wrote: "Whatever Christ the bridegroom found in his bride to be alien to her own nature, he took from her and nailed it to his cross when he bore her sins and destroyed them on the tree. He received from her and clothed himself in what was hers by nature and gave her what belonged to him as God."

In other words, it's all about God's transformative love; that he became like us in the person of Jesus Christ in all things but sin, so that we could become like the one who was sent to redeem us; to make us new.

It's all about

*Something old and something new.  
Something borrowed and something blue.  
And a silver sixpence in her shoe.*

I know that this whimsical and trite verse may not compare to the classical Roman poetry recited from memory in the original Latin by a football coach who was part of the Penn State Catholic family.

But I think you get the point. As I look around this magnificent place, I not only see you and all that you have done to get us to this day. I see the future, when this place comes alive as the spiritual home for our Penn State Catholic Student family.

They may not always remember the silver sixpence in the shoe, but when our Penn State Catholic Students look around their spiritual home, they will discover and rediscover their Catholic faith which is ever old and ever new.

And they will notice what is borrowed and what is blue and that it represents what really defines them as a human person; the beauty, the holiness, the purity, and the dignity that is theirs as a gift from God in whose image we are all made and in whose only begotten Son we are all redeemed.

Today is indeed holy to the Lord. We rejoice in the Lord today and always. The Lord Jesus is our strength!