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Soup Blessed Beyond Measure

Embraced by Christmas; Memories and Treasures

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It was Christmas. The year was 1935. I was 11 years old. In another month I would be 12. It seems so long ago - and yet it seems like only yesterday.

My father had been sick for about a year. It all started when he got pneumonia. The doctor gave him some medicine and ordered him to bed. He did everything the doctor told him to do but his condition never improved. Maybe a month or six weeks later the pneumonia developed into a serious lung condition.

In those days, so many years ago, there were no wonder drugs. You followed the doctor's instruction, you rested a lot, and ate as much as you could --- and you prayed; you and your wife and your children prayed. Somehow, it didn't seem like my father was improving at all.

Someone, a relative or a friend, suggested that we should consider St. Gabriel's Hospital, run by the Knights of Columbus and operated by a group of nuns. It was located at Saranac Lake in upper New York State. After further research. Mother received word that the Knights of Columbus would subsidize the entire proposition. What a Godsend! This might be the solution we needed. Maybe with the proper medical attention my father might recover his health.

My mother accompanied Dad on the train. It was a long ride but Mother and Dad were hopeful. The Sisters at the hospital just couldn't do enough for my father. This appeared to be the answer to our prayers.

Every couple of months, Mother would take one of us along to visit Dad at the hospital. It was a long trip and Dad seemed to be doing fairly well. I believe I made the trip with Mother some time in the summer month of August. We stayed at a comfortable home not too far from the hospital and we saw Dad three or four times during our stay. He was really happy to see us and, of course, we felt the same way.

My father wasn't doing too well after September. It seemed that his sickness was getting progressively worse. Mother got a call from the nuns in December that it would be good if she came up to see Dad as his situation was not good. Mother left immediately and stayed with Dad during his last days. With Mother at his side. Dad passed away peacefully on the nineteenth of December 1935.

In those days when a person died, it was customary to have the wake in the house of the deceased. And so it was in our case. Dad was waked at home and the Funeral Mass and Burial took place on December 24, 1935, the day before Christmas. December 24th

was also my older brother Joseph's birthday. In February of the following year, Joe graduated from High School.

After the funeral and the trip to Calvary Cemetery in Queens, I don't remember what I did the rest of the day. It was a sad day. I know I went to bed early that evening because I was just worn out. It was a tough day for all of us, especially Mother.

In the morning I got up and dressed without ever thinking about what day it was. I was heading for the kitchen to get some breakfast when I noticed a big Christmas tree in our dining room. It was all lit up with bright lights and bulbs and strings of tinsel and underneath these was a sled, and some tinker toys and several other gifts wrapped in eye-catching, colored paper. I stood there totally amazed at the transformation. It was unbelievable. Some time during the night, while I was sound asleep/ my two brothers, Joe and John, went out and bought a Christmas tree, and then they stopped in our local candy store and bought the gifts. They got the tree up, trimmed and decorated it, and then wrapped the gifts --- and did all this while I was sound asleep. It was so beautiful. I think I was the only one who received a gift that Christmas; but we all shared in the wonder and beauty of what had taken place. ^

I remember sitting near the tree as I tried to fashion something with the tinker toys. I happened to look up and I noticed my mother in the kitchen. Mother was busy making soup for the family. As I watched her I noticed tears rolling down her cheeks, going right into the soup. It was a scene I will never forget as long as I live. Even today it brings tears to my eyes as I remember Mother stirring the soup mixing it with her own tears. Mother always made great soup; but that day the soup was blessed beyond measure.

As I believe that Christmas is the most beautiful feast in our calendar year. It is beautiful because we remember that Christ became one of us. It is a feast every Parish and every family should celebrate with joy and enthusiasm. Blow the trumpet, bang the drums, sound the music loud, and share the happiness one and all. Let Advent bring God's goodness and joy and peace into our minds and hearts so no one need be sad any longer.

And yet, having said all that, I must tell you that I feel a tinge of sorrow and sadness and tears come to my eyes when I remember that Christmas many years ago in 1935.