

Tradition!

Written by Angela Anno

Our family celebrates Groundhog's Day. We mark the arrival of the Great Groundhog with gifts, candy, decorations, and silliness. That tradition grew out of an experience that my late husband had when he was 10 years old. He had a crush on a little girl and saved money from delivering newspapers to buy her a gift. It was late January and he bought her some Valentine candy, but he just couldn't wait until February 14. Reasoning that Groundhog Day was a holiday, he gave it to her then. Her mother snickered and his mother giggled. His feelings were mightily hurt. He promised himself that if he ever had a company when he grew up, Groundhog Day would be a paid holiday. He did have a small company for a while and Groundhog Day was a paid holiday. In fact one employee got married that day. It's been 14 years since his death, but we still celebrate Groundhog's Day.

When someone in our family marks a special event like a birthday, anniversary, an achievement of some sort—or when someone is not feeling well or has a rotten day, they are the honored person at dinner and are served on the “yellow plate.” The plate once got a chip on it and I replaced it with a more elegant plate. “I don't want that plate,” my daughter-in-law said on her birthday. “I want the yellow plate, chip and all—it's tradition.” We also have a rotating gallery of recent family photos on the shelves of our secretary desk and everyone checks to see if they're in any of the new ones. We also change front door decorations with the seasons and put “happy birthday” signs there to let all know we're celebrating someone special.

Traditions are important in every family and culture. The famous song of that name from *Fiddler on the Roof* states just that. Our Hispanic and Burundian families are sharing the richness of their traditions with us. Our Guatemalan parishioners are teaching us about Our Lady of Guadalupe who appeared in native garb to a poor young man, someone just like them, and a sure sign that God is present with them in their struggles. As part of the wedding ceremony, the couple is literally bound together to show the unity of marriage. Our Burundian community celebrates New Year's with gifts and gathering and review of the past year and hopes for the year ahead. Christmas is noncommercial, a celebration of Christ's birth. There is such joy when someone is baptized that a festive song and dance follows the sacrament. There are no last names in their culture. The first name is their given name; the second, an African description of their character. As we grow in diversity, our traditions grow and are enhanced.

We have traditions as a Catholic parish community, too. We celebrate Epiphany each year with evening prayer and an international potluck dinner. On Palm Sunday, we march in procession around the church carrying our palms. Many “walk the steps” in Mt. Adams on Good Friday. We gather petitions and take them to the prayer wall where we pray and place them in the crevices, much like people do at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. On the National Day of prayer in May we gather with other neighborhood churches in a prayer caravan, enfolding our community in prayer. As we deepen our relationships with our partnering parishes we are creating new traditions with them.

As Catholics, our most important tradition and opportunity is gathering each Sunday for Mass to worship God, to listen to the Word, and come to the Eucharistic table where we are nourished with the body and blood of Jesus. Can anything be more worth repeating and becoming an integral part of our lives than that?