

5-26-2020

The Shoemaker

Meghan E. Stretar

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, mestretar@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/obsculta>



Part of the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

ISSN: 2472-2596 (print)

ISSN: 2472-260X (online)

Recommended Citation

Stretar, Meghan E.. 2020. The Shoemaker. *Obsculta* 13, (1) : 156-159. <https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/obsculta/vol13/iss1/15>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Obsculta* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

ABSTRACT:

Storytelling has always captivated my attention and strikes me as being an incredible tool in which to deepen the understanding of the Gospel message. This piece begins “once upon a time there was a man named Herschel...”. Herschel is an imaginary character born out of the imagination of my childhood priest. He is brought back to life in this homily written for Christ the King Sunday.

The Shoemaker

by Meghan Stretar

When I was a child, my priest captured the attention of my entire parish during his homilies by telling stories that began with these magical words: “Once upon a time there was a man named Herschel.” What a character Herschel was, always finding himself in precarious situations. On occasion, he would act valiantly, bravely in the face of danger or adversity. No matter the situation, however, the trials and tribulation of Herschel would always, in the end, guide all of us into a deeper understanding of the Gospel message.

Today I find myself longing for Herschel’s profound wisdom.

So...once upon a time, there was a man named Herschel.

Herschel lived long ago, in a distant land, in a small village on the edge of a great castle, where a mighty prince lived.

The kingdom itself was filled with a great variety of people. The rich lived in grand homes closest to the castle. As you might have imagined, the poor lived far away from the castle. Herschel could see the castle from his kitchen window. Sometimes, if the wind was blowing just right, he could hear laughter coming from its windows. Each morning, as the sun was



rising, he would wish to himself, “If only I could go to the castle to meet the mighty prince.” Gazing at the castle as the moon was rising, he would wish the same. The village elders told stories of the prince’s greatness.

Herschel worked in the market, selling shoes he made by hand. Day-in-and-day-out, he would hear the stories of the rich, boasting of the days they first met the prince who lived in the great castle.

“What was he like?” Herschel wondered aloud one day.

“Oh, he wears only the finest clothing, surrounds himself with only the most distinguished individuals. You will never meet the mighty prince. You are just a poor shoemaker. You do nothing for this kingdom.”

Discouraged, Herschel gathered his things from the market and slowly walked back to his small cottage, where he sat down at his kitchen table. The moon was just beginning to rise, and as always, Herschel wished he, too, could meet the mighty prince.

As he sat pondering, he had an idea: he would make the finest pair of shoes he ever had, go up to the castle’s doors, knock, and present his gift to the prince. There was no way the prince could refuse to see him, Herschel thought.

He set to work; he worked all night and used all the materials he had. It was dawn, just as the sun was rising, and as Herschel was just about to state his wish as he did every morning, there was a knock at his door.

It was an old woman; someone he had never seen before. “What do you want?” Herschel asked, annoyed and worried about the interruption of his daily ritual.

“I am in need of a pair of shoes for my son,” she said.

“I am afraid I have no shoes and no materials to make a new pair,” Herschel replied, forgetting he still held the fine pair he had made that night.

“What about the pair in your hand?” she questioned.

“These are for the mighty prince. No one else is worthy of wearing such fine shoes,” came Herschel’s harsh response. “Now go away, I must rest to prepare for my journey to meet the prince.” And away she went.

As he set off, walking through the poor part of the village and through the market, he could not help but notice those who went without shoes. The old woman’s voice rang through his head. But still, he persisted, onto the mighty castle, choosing to ignore the poor.

• • •

In Paul’s letter to the Colossians, we hear that Christ is the “image of the *invisible* God, the firstborn of all creation.” All things were created through him and for him. *All things*. All of us here are also incarnate beings. This is significant; something Herschel did not understand. His story remains unfinished; his story is all of our stories. We do not know if he made it to the castle to meet the mighty prince, but the reality is he **did not have to** make it to the castle to encounter Christ as he so longed for. But Herschel did not see Christ, though Christ was present to him the entire time. This is our constant challenge in our world today: recognizing when Christ is in our midst.

The question then, **to whom does the Kingdom belong?** has a simple answer. It belongs to us all. Christ teaches us that his Kingdom does not just belong to those who seem to have the most power in this world, but to the poor and humble, to those without shoes (both literally and figuratively), those entering our church, those who are deemed unworthy of reaching the castle to meet the mighty prince.

Each day, we are called to live our lives in ways consistent with the belief that all people have inherent dignity and worth. We are called to be in service to God, making visible the Body of Christ. The ways in which we worship on Sunday cannot allow for us to deny Christ’s teaching in our actions during the week. Our words and presence must reflect the reality of Christ’s radical presence among us.

I want to end with the words attributed to St. Oscar Romero:

*We cannot do everything
And there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very, very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning.*

