

August 9, 2015

THE HIGH PLAINS PREACHER

Clear as Mud

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

This spring, when sections of the Panhandle received high levels of rainfall, I proudly displayed layers of mud on the fenders of my truck. Since moving to the Diocese of Amarillo, I have come to love the sight of mud. After three years of drought, despair and handing out rolls of money for round bales of hay, I consider a muddy truck a beautiful sight to behold.

A certain county deputy does not share my aesthetic sensibilities. One night, on the way back to Amarillo from a meeting in Hereford, a deputy pulled me over. I glanced at my speedometer. I hadn't been speeding. I glanced at my windshield. My inspection stickers were up-to-date. I glanced at my rearview mirror. In the glow of my tail lights, I saw a deputy walk toward my pickup with a disgusted look on his face and I couldn't figure out why.

I rolled down my window, "Yes, sir," I said, making sure he saw my Roman collar. "What's up?"

He aimed the flashlight in my face, then he stepped back and swept the beam from the headlight to the tailgate.

"When was the last the time you wash this thing?" he asked.

I figured the guy was a Protestant. If he were Catholic, he'd know I do not have a wife and, therefore, no one to hound me about keeping my truck clean.

"Would you like to see my license?" I asked.

He held out his hand, shown the light on the picture, then back on my face, then back on the license.

"Insurance card?"

I located the card and handed it to him.

He glanced at the card, then looked at me with barely disguised contempt. "I can read your license number," he said. "And I can read your insurance number. But..." he pointed to the back of my truck. "I can't read your tag number.

"Too much mud?" I asked.

He nodded, told me to wash my truck like a decent citizen, then wrote me a warning ticket.

I thanked him and put the ticket in my pocket. When I got home, I taped the citation above my kitchen sink. If it works for mud on a truck, I told myself, it might just for pancake batter on a skillet as well.

