

# THE HIGH PLAINS PREACHER

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher! Stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle.

## Backpacks

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

I drove down a street and passed two young men on bicycles. They wore white shirts and dress pants. Nylon backpacks jostled on their shoulders. And inside those backpacks, of course, were Bibles. And I thought to myself, *I hope they're not headed to my house!*

The next day, I mentioned to a friend, whom I'll call Bob, that I don't like talking to door-to-door proselytizers. "Talking to those people is like talking to a drunk. Nothing registers with them," I said. And as soon as I said it, I wanted to kick myself. Bob, you see, is a recovering alcoholic.

Fortunately, he didn't take offense. He looked at me a minute then said, "Gosh, Father, I kind of look forward to their visits."

I looked back at him and said, "Bob, I had no idea you were *that* lonely."

He laughed. Then he asked: "When those guys come to your door, Father, what do you argue about?"

"Religion," I said.

"Well, that's where you go wrong," he said. "When they come to my door, we don't argue religion. We talk about struggles. I tell them about mine and ask them about theirs."

Clearly, Bob is a smart man. You might say he attended the School of Hard Knocks and graduated at the head of his class. He lost some of the battles along the way, but those battles brought him back to Christ and back to the Catholic Church. And I'm sure the young evangelists who stop by Bob's apartment leave his place a lot smarter than when they arrived.

*We don't religion, we talk about our pasts.*

That statement says a lot about Bob. Instead of running away from his past, he accepts it, he embraces it. He uses the lessons from his past to navigate his future. He looks back to help him look ahead. In other words, Bob views his past

not as a burden but as provisions. Rations from a time when his life was hard and soup was thin. And the memory of love was nothing more than the refrain from a sad country song.

Bob shares those provisions with young missionaries who come to his door. And when those missionaries leave his table, they hit the road well-fed.