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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.

Flowerbeds

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

“Those who put their hand to the plow and keep looking back, are unfit for the Kingdom of God.”

As a boy, this particular gospel verse always disturbed me. As most of you know, I was raised on a farm. And I loved the farm. And a part of me wanted to stay on the farm. Yet, at the same time, I knew I was called to be a priest. So this passage about leaving the farm and not looking back always troubled me.

At the time, I didn't understand that there are *two ways* to look back: You can look back with *regret* for what you are leaving behind. Or you can look back with *gratitude* for what you've been given, then take “what you've been given” along with you.

Let me give you an example. This past week, I stopped at the farm of a young couple named Michael and Leah. They are a young couple with one child and another child on the way. In the front yard of their house is a flowerbed with a statue of St. Isidore, the farmer. This statue is surrounded by yellow roses and, directly behind the statue of St. Isidore, is an old, horse-drawn plow.

Now, that old plow is more than a lawn ornament. It is more than an antique. That plow, along with the statue of St. Isidore, their patron, are reminders. Important reminders.

They remind Michael and Leah that they are part of a long and proud tradition. And the two of them carry that past within them. On most days, that past is noble and inspiring and it beckons them to live up to the examples of their parents and grandparents. But, other days, that farming tradition will feel heavy and burdensome. Because, as any farmer will tell you, some *days* are long...and some *years* are horrible. As when the market is down and the sky don't rain and the debt get deep and the equipment breaks down and resentment builds up.

On a farm, hard times hit hard and, when they do, this young couple is going to wish they could turn their backs on their past and never look at the old plow again!

But the plow isn't the only item in that flowerbed. There is also the statue of a saint. And that statue of St. Isidore will remind them that it is God's hand resting on that plow, not theirs. And God will get them through.

