

Receive the Gift — a Modern Day Parable

(inspired by John 20:19-23)

They carried his wife's silent and still body out. This past year had been a very trying one for John and his beloved wife, Carole. Five bouts with cancer had taken its toll on her. She fought like a warrior over the past 13 years, but this last round was too much for her.

When John first met Carole, they were only 16-years-old. He had never seen eyes that shade of blue before, and hers seems to sparkle. It was love from that first day. So many told them they were too young for a serious relationship, but their hearts told them otherwise. After graduation, they had a quiet little wedding in a small country chapel, and began to build a lifetime together.

This day, they finally parted ways. After the funeral, Fr. Hadley and a handful of friends from the Parish brought food and sat with John for a while. He looked tired and strained, but smiled and graciously thanked them for the visit. Fr. Hadley was the last to leave. He prayed with John and made sure he had his personal phone number in case he ever needed anything. As they walked to the door, the young priest reached into his pocket and handed John a small white boxed tied with a red ribbon.



"Carole gave this to me soon after her diagnosis last year," Father said. "She asked me to make sure I gave you this last gift from her once she passed. She said, 'Be sure to tell John I sealed it with a kiss.'" Fr. Hadley smiled and handed the box to John. He saw a single tear make its way out of the corner of John's eye. "Peace be with you, John," he said. "Receive this gift with Carole's love." The priest turned and left. John locked the door and turned to face the emptiness. He was all alone. He had no family — the couple never had children. They wanted a house full, but it wasn't meant to be. He felt the weight of this space that once was filled with Carole's beautiful smile and sparkling blue eyes. He sat at the kitchen table and placed the small box in the center.

It was hours before John moved. Fear of life without Carole seemed to paralyze him. The sun had set and the room was dark, except for the small light over the sink that had not been turned off since their first night in their new home. John stood to go to bed. This was the longest day of his life. He picked up the small gift, carried it to the bedroom, and placed it on the nightstand. He decided to wait till morning to open it. He patted the red ribbon and pulled up the covers. "Goodnight my love," he whispered before drifting off to sleep.

Weeks passed. Then months. Finally a full year had gone by. Each morning, John looked at Carole's gift and softly patted the ribbon. Every night, he would pat the ribbon as he climbed into bed. He just couldn't bring himself to open it. That would make all too final the fact that Carole was gone forever. That their beautiful relationship of nearly 60 years was over. John couldn't bear it. Untying that ribbon felt like letting go of her, and he couldn't face it.

John spent his days tooling around the house making small repairs and tending the garden which had been neglected since Carole's illness demanded so much time and energy. He pretty much kept to himself, and left home only for his weekly trip to Mass and to the grocery. Three years to the day of the funeral, paramedics were called to the house when a neighbor found John unconscious in the garden. He had gone quickly from a massive heart attack. Fr. Hadley held a small, private service and accompanied John's body to his final resting place, next to

Carole. He laid a rose on each grave and smiled. "You two are together again," he sighed. "Peace be with you both."

Since there was no next of kin, Fr. Hadley and some members of the Parish went to pack up and clean John and Carole's house. John had left very specific instructions to sell the property to a young couple who were just starting out. He wanted their home to be filled with love and happiness once again. All proceeds would go the Church.

As the team was busy packing everything into boxes to donate to a local shelter, one of the ladies called out to Fr. Hadley. "Look what I found on John's bedside table." It was the small white box still tied with the red ribbon — Carole's parting gift to her beloved husband. John had never opened it. He had never received her final gift of love.