

COMMENTARY

# David McGrath: At Easter, I celebrate the godliness I see in many people

By David McGrath  
Chicago Tribune

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Apr 07, 2023



Author David McGrath's wife, Marianne, with son Mike. (Family photo)  
**Not till our first child was born did I start thinking seriously about Easter.**

**Michael's was a posterior birth, meaning that he emerged face up, resulting in a lot of unfortunate bruising. Staff at Little Company of Mary Hospital in Evergreen Park assured us he was OK, and they apologized for not taking his picture for a newborn's customary first photo.**

When Marianne and I drove home with him on a snowy day in February, I was ecstatic but also dizzy with the new and weighty responsibility of a tiny life. We were suddenly alone in our one-bedroom apartment with none of the nurses, doctors, machines or medicines instantly available at the hospital.

The next day, as the baby cried, and the contusions on his head and face seemed more discolored, I carried Michael Steven to the kitchen sink and poured a half-cup of tap water onto his head, while saying out loud: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

I was not religious. I had, in fact, lost my faith in Catholicism before Mike came along. Higher education turned me into an empiricist, compelled to reject the magic, the contradictions and the corruption in the church.

Yet I still remembered the intriguing provisions for baptism: that a priest wasn't required and that any Tom, Dick or nonbelieving Harry could pour the water and say the 18 magic words to administer the sacrament and ensure a baby's entry into paradise.

Granted, I wasn't sure there even was a heaven. Hell, at 25, I wasn't sure about a lot of things. But when it came to the warm, squirming 8 pounds of amazing life in my arms, I wanted to cover all the bases.

After a week, the bruises disappeared. Today, Mike is perfect and living out West as a doctor.

And all these decades later, while I'm still unsure about many of life's mysteries, I have regained my faith in a certain kind of godliness that I celebrate at Easter. I do not mean the godliness people seek inside a church. Nor is it what the Romantic poets sought in clouds, flowers, snowflakes, hillsides and other natural wonders.

What inspired my faith, instead, were the many other amazing lives I've encountered during my lifetime.

Early encounters were brief but obviously significant, since I can recall them from childhood. Like the tears I saw in my first grade teacher's eyes when she was compelled to punish me by denying me recess for the rest of the week, after I carved my initials in my desk.

Or a year later, when Peggy Mitterman, a nurse in the house across the street from ours, tended to my injured hand, not caring one bit about my muddy tennis shoes on her beautiful carpet.

Or something more recent, when my new neighbors Dick Nolan and Michael Champagne showed up in the morning, uninvited, then spent their next two days repairing storm damage to our home.

Or a few weeks ago, when Stan Gassmann insisted on driving hours out of his way to pick me up at the airport. Something that my sister-in-law Kathy Dickinson would do as well, as long as it wouldn't conflict with her after-school volunteer tutoring program or her work at the homeless shelter, or the food pantry, none of which she would quit even after spinal fusion, two knee surgeries and her latest hip replacement.

These are just some examples of innate human goodness from my very long list, near the top of which are people making extreme sacrifices, as when my Evergreen Park hometown neighbor Kenneth Dowdell received the gift of life in the form of a kidney donation from Lenora Salazar of Plainfield, one of some 25,000 donors every year in the U.S. who undergo major surgery often for a perfect stranger.

Every reader can create a similar list, adding up to hundreds of millions of manifestations of generosity and goodwill, as if we were all starting our day by drinking the same altruism power shakes.

Of course, there is no denying the enormity of suffering in the world from war, disease, poverty, crime and injustice with which we're confronted on a daily basis in the news and in our own lives. But decades of experience have shown that no matter how bad things have gotten, the majority's predisposition for human compassion, for good, for fairness and for right over wrong, creates a powerful global momentum toward resolution and triumph over the afflictions.

Which is why at Easter, the season of spring and of new life, I celebrate hope. Hope particularly justified this past year, for example, by our excruciating survival of the pandemic; by the long awaited arrival of new cancer treatments currently saving and prolonging the lives of my sister and her husband; by global unity in support of Ukraine's defense against a war criminal; and our own country's prevailing over attacks against democracy by holding the perpetrators, at long last, accountable.

Embracing hope can be costly, and I'm sure there are readers who would rather hedge their bets with skepticism. But the godliness in our collective human heart abounds and historically triumphs, with good reason for a happy Easter.

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