

“IT’S HAD A GOOD LIFE” REQUIEM FOR A FORD ESCAPE

“It’s had a good life.” Those are never welcome words emanating from someone who has just looked at the underside of your car. Yes, I imagine that 13 years is a “good run,” but by the same token, not one that I was prepared to see end. But the sudden “thumping” sound (initially, I suspected failing shock absorbers) turned out to be much more. In fact, the entire underside had rusted from within, separating the uni-body frame from the struts and shocks. I discovered an entire “community” on the internet of owners who had the exact same problem, on the same side of the car. Hmmn, strange. Obviously, the Minnesota winters do not help with rust, especially the salt. So when the man at the Body Shop emerged, he basically said, “I’m so sorry, but it’s not good.” It would need a major fix, one that could cost as much as the car is worth. *Requiem aeternam, Dona ei requiem.*

Are you attached to your car? Perhaps, but I suspect that most people today are not. Let’s face it— it’s a means of transportation, plain and simple, and not something to which most become attached. Personally, I feel differently. I can think of these past **thirteen plus years** in many ways, including some of the best and even most challenging years of my priesthood. This car has been there with me for nearly all of them. The car faithfully brought me to hospitals at various hours of the day or night to anoint, it successfully led me on a few trips across the Midwest, and idled patiently while I got up the nerve to enter a meeting with potential donors, seeking to enlist their support for Catholic education and a host of other personally memorable moments.

Having sold my previous Ford Taurus to a cousin, I purchased my black (of course!) Ford Escape in December 2004, as I was settling into my ministry at The Saint Paul Seminary. I fell in love with it during the test drive, and that’s all she wrote. Less than a month later, I was summoned to meet with Archbishop Flynn on a day’s notice. Surprisingly, the Archbishop asked me to fill-in for a six-month period as **interim Rector** in the wake of Bishop Fred Campbell’s impending transfer to Columbus, Ohio. I was shell-shocked, not having had any administrative experience; in fact, I was the most recent addition to the faculty. Following the meeting at the Chancery, I got in my car and turned on the Country Music station. Kenny Chesney’s “There Goes my Life” started playing, an anthem about a young man who learns he is going to be a dad and how, in an instant, that changed everything. Let’s just say that those lyrics hit home as I drove the length of Summit Ave. back to the seminary. What just happened?

My stint would last six months (by design) until the arrival of Msgr. Callaghan. Then, I was off to Rome in the fall, ostensibly for a two-year study leave to receive a degree in Patristic Spirituality. I had arranged for my brother to be a caretaker of the car during my absence, with **strict rules** governing food and drink in the car! I am guessing you could probably predict the specificity of said rules without me detailing them! But after about seven months, that loan was called in, as I was unexpectedly brought home to prepare for a new assignment to begin in June at Saint Agnes. The study leave was over— I was now a pastor and Superintendent of a K-12 school! My baptism by fire having begun, I had an eventful (and at times difficult) six-year term at that wonderful parish and a school.

I was tremendously blessed during my six years there. I drove on vacation to northern Minnesota and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, travelled to retreats, to the new Target Field, even to a state championship baseball tournament in Jordan, MN. I vividly recall the moment when I was attending a Presbyteral Council in late April, 2012 at the Chancery. The Archbishop inquired if I had five minutes to chat after the meeting. It was then that he asked me to transfer to the Cathedral, completely taking me by surprise. The 1.5-mile drive back to Saint Agnes that afternoon is little more than a blur. Ready or not, change was coming once again.

Think about how much time you spend in your vehicle: driving on the open road, listening to your favorite CD, perhaps furiously stuck in traffic, or even involved in a fender bender or two on a slippery winter road. These United States are blessed with incredible scenery— I’d rather drive than fly anywhere within a ten-hour radius. I recall outrunning a horrible storm on the way back from St. John’s University, listening on the radio to the reports of hail, any car’s worst nightmare. As I finally reached the I-94 exit onto Dale St., while on the bridge, I looked west to see the ominous clouds approaching. The demarcation line between dark storm clouds

and the sky was as stark as I ever recall in my life. I kid you not, I made it to the garage at the rectory literally 90 seconds before the hail began. It was a race against time, and I (or should I say my roof?) won, but just barely.

My car has been a peaceful and quiet refuge— okay, I can sense that all parents with young children are shaking their heads right now. Hey, celibacy has its advantages! For now, it's sinking in...it's the end of the road, it's had a good life. I will be attending a fundraising dinner next Saturday evening for Saint Agnes School. I just bought my raffle ticket. The winner receives a brand new Ford SUV! I'll just say it— I'm feelin' good!

- Sadly, the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act (it would ban abortions starting at 20 weeks after fertilization) failed to pass the U.S. Senate. Cardinal Dolan rightly called the failure “appalling,” noting that late-term abortions “usually involve brutally dismembering a defenseless unborn child, while also posing serious dangers to his or her mother.” He added that “the United States is currently **one of only seven countries** that allows abortions beyond 20-weeks. The other six are North Korea, China, Vietnam, Singapore, Canada and the Netherlands.”
- Wow! Tickets for **Super Bowl I**, held on **January 15, 1967** averaged \$10, (\$75, inflation-adjusted), compared to the lowest price of **\$3,700** for tonight's tilt. At bulletin press time on Wednesday morning, there was still one luxury Suite available at U. S Bank Stadium for Sunday's game. Price tag— \$325,000. Not to worry—food and drink for you and your 23 closest friends (or 22 friends plus a chaplain) is included in the price. I think I could clear my schedule.
- In all seriousness, we **welcome any and all out of town visitors** to the Cathedral. If you are here for the Super Bowl festivities, thanks for stopping by to pray with us. We hope you receive a warm and gracious welcome, even if it does not feel that way outside this morning!!
- The **Catholic Services Appeal** is worthy of your prayerful support. I am edified by the generosity of the people of this parish, and ask for your help once again this year.
- I am hopeful, following the State of the Union speech, that some real and substantial progress may be made in the area of comprehensive immigration reform, a thorny issue that has eluded legislative resolution throughout several presidencies.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,

Rector