

“GOING HOME” ONE FINAL TIME: THE POWER OF MEMORIES

Once, when Archbishop Ireland was sailing to Ireland for a visit, he met an elderly lady on deck. “What brings you back?” She candidly replied, “I’m going home to die.” Our roots run deep. Last week I **returned** to Cape Cod, MA, the site of my maternal grandparents’ home (first for summers, then year-round) for the funeral of my uncle **Pierre Lavedan**. Incidentally, that’s the “L” in my middle name, my mother’s maiden name. He wanted to be buried next to his parents in Cape Cod, even though he had moved away decades earlier. It was a privilege to preside at his funeral. Since my grandfather died when I was 8 years old, my memories of the Cape are early ones, as I made my last visit when my grandmother sold the house at Old Mill Point in West Harwich, MA in 1976. It’s tough enough raising a family, much less managing a property 1,456 miles away. I get it, but oh how I wish we had held onto that home!

After college my mother moved to Saint Paul to begin an industrial engineering job, living with her aunt. At a party (i.e. a set up!), she met a man named Frank. Within a year, they married and soon enough her trips to New England would feature young family in tow for month-long visits every other summer. Those **roots remain deep**, even if my memories have faded with the passage of time. The changes in Cape Cod since 1974 are immense. The population increased 120% from 1970 to 2000, radically changing the “feel” of the Cape. Aside from the Post Office and miniature golf course, I recognized next to nothing, though the street names were familiar: Upper County and Lower Country Road, Strandway Ave. I recall the Rotary at the foot of the bridge near Buzzard’s Bay separating the Cape from the mainland. This is the bridge that I mistook for the old I-94 bridge crossing at Hudson. Evidently, after crossing into Wisconsin I repeatedly asked, “Are we almost there?” Hey, the two bridges look alike, even if 1500 miles apart! My sense of time and distance only slowly developed!

Even as a five-year-old, I was an early riser, **blissfully running** through the automatic sprinkler system in my pajamas at 5:00 a.m., much to the chagrin (or delight?) of my mom, who awoke to see me frolicking across the lawn. I had never seen such a sprinkler system before and was **mesmerized** by the **control panel** in the garage. Underground irrigation systems were new technology for residential use at the time. Lazy days spent on the beach, digging sand forts, collecting seashells, miniature golf in town— I did not fully appreciate those days, until they were gone. TV— are you kidding me? My mother clearly indicated that this would likely be her last visit to Cape Cod, as she is now the last surviving family member of her generation. “Our” house was replaced with a larger one in the 1990’s, but I recognized the spot instantly because right next to the house was the access path to the beach used by all the neighbors. The fence and path looked identical— it all came back in a flash.



View towards Old Mill Point—ca. 1974

It was wonderful to reconnect with cousins and in some cases, to meet their children for the very first time, spread out as they are all across the country. The ties of blood are thick and as we gathered for a communal meal the night before the funeral, smiles abounded, and the stories flowed easily and effortlessly. I began wondering who will keep the family tree in the future? “To whom will we look for the family history, etc.?” Ancient societies kept their **family history** alive by means of stories, passed from generation to generation. That still happens but perhaps less intentionally so. If we do not deliberately speak about our family history, it will surely fade from the collective of family consciousness within a generation. With each passing year, I realize that a generation is not as long as I once thought.



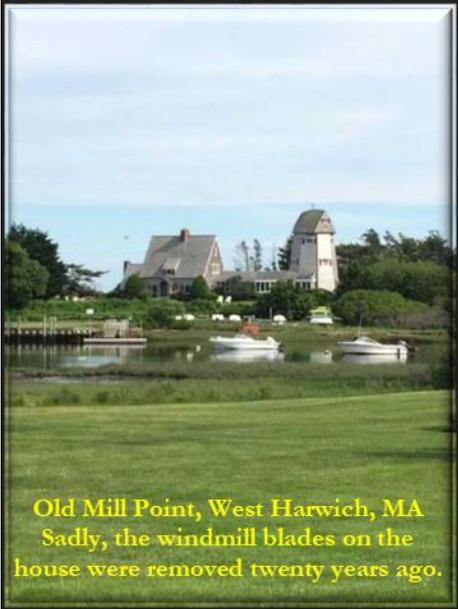
View towards Old Mill Point– 2019
Photo re-creation courtesy of cousin Nick Scott

The same principle holds true for our Catholic faith– we pass along the sacred story of our faith to a new generation. Absent this deliberate effort, the **Catholic ethos sputters** and will eventually dissipate. Funerals serve a dual purpose of offering great comfort but also of encouraging the mourners to be more reflective about the finitude of life and of our need to be prepared to meet the Lord. Increasingly, extended families disperse across our great nation and we easily lose touch. Laying a loved one to rest is a corporal work of mercy and when we comfort the sorrowful, we are engaging in a spiritual work of mercy. Sacred acts to be sure– but a family funeral can also serve to draw people closer together. Here, its purpose is dual: prayer for the deceased and thanksgiving to God for the gift of faith and family. And yes, a chance to re-connect. Indeed, God is good!

- The path has been cleared for Fr. Augustus Tolton to become **Venerable Augustus Tolton**. He was the first African-American priest to minister in the United States. **Born into slavery** in 1854, he escaped slavery with his family from Missouri during the Civil War by crossing the Mississippi River into Illinois. Since no U.S. seminary accepted him, he was sent to Rome for studies. But when he returned after his ordination in 1889, thousands lined the streets to welcome him home, black and white alike. He spent most of his priesthood in Chicago, IL.
- Our fiscal year is drawing to a close– just two Sundays remain. I am asking for your help to help cut into our **nearly 5% deficit** in Sunday stewardship. Many parishes have experienced this phenomenon, and though we may be shy in admitting it, you have a right to know of our situation. I am deeply grateful for your generosity and pledge to be a prudent steward of your gifts
- Two hundred years ago this past Thursday (20 June 1819), the SS Savannah arrived at Liverpool, England. It became the **first steam-propelled vessel** to cross the Atlantic. Though a hybrid (it also had sails), it demonstrated the advances in technology that would soon enough revolutionize trans-Atlantic voyages.
- We just observed the year’s **longest day**– June 21 boasted **15 hours, 37 minutes** of daylight. We gained 6 hours, 51 minutes of daylight since the December Solstice. From now on, winter is inching closer **every single day!**

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector



Old Mill Point, West Harwich, MA
Sadly, the windmill blades on the
house were removed twenty years ago.