

My Godchild's wedding

My recent trip to Chicago to celebrate the wedding of my godchild will always find a pride of place in my life as a priest.

First of all, to be asked to be a godfather for someone's child is always special. I know that parents when choosing godparents for their child always give lots of consideration as to whom may be most likely to have a continuing and significant role in the life of the child as he or she grows up.

My godchild, Katie Kerr, was born in Chicago on September 20, 1991. Shortly afterwards, her mother, Terry, called and asked if I would be willing to be Katie's godfather. I knew that, in the past, priests could not serve as godparents for anyone; but, after checking with a Canon lawyer, I was reminded that things had changed and priests could now be godparents for children. With that in mind, I accepted the honor to be a godparent.

Some months after my acceptance, I was able to see my godchild in person during a trip to Chicago. Then, I encounter a bundle of joy and determination. I had a few "what if's..." come to mind, wondering if they might become real in some distant future time.

My first "what if..." bore fruit on April 24, 1992 when I had the privilege of baptising Katie at St. Thomas Church, Hattiesburg where I was pastor then. Her baptism was the first baptism in the new church there.

Years later, retirement from the priesthood beckoned. Katie's parents, John and Terry, came from Chicago to Bay St. Louis for my retirement party. Katie was not able to come because she was spending the spring semester studying abroad at University College, Galway, some fifty miles from my retirement home.

Katie's parents came to visit me and their daughter during the summer of 2013. We treasured that visit as we travelling to places of interest and did nots of late night visiting.

Years passed. Communication became more sporadic until one day I received an email from Katie on February 23, 2021. She had met the love of her life and was planning her upcoming wedding. Was another "what if..." about to happen, I wondered.

Looking for a priest to perform the ceremony, she said ". I immediately thought of you and how incredibly special it would be to have you preside our ceremony." A "What if..." was now becoming a "why not!"

I was at the baggage claim area of O'Hare airport, when I heard a distinctive voice say, "Fr. Mike." I knew that another "What if's..." was about to become real. Moments later, I met her fiancé, Tony, and their daughter, Olivia Jean.

A long weekend was to follow with reunions with her parents; meeting extended family; events to participate in, rehearsals to attend., buses to take to scheduled places and events, deadlines to be met, tasting Chicago cuisine, being pampered with treats and king size beds to sleep in after hectic activities packed into a weekend.

The livestreamed wedding was a treasure to discover, an event to celebrate, a time that became timeless because it was filled with memories, experiences, reflections, discoveries yet to be embraced.

The morning after the wedding, I sat with Katie's parents, and Katie and Tony at a breakfast table as they fortified themselves with some scrambled eggs, fruit bowls, bacon scrips and water. I gave Tony and Katie the wedding present I had brought them from Ireland and they gave me one. Minutes later, Katie said, "We would like you to open your gift." As I did, I discovered something I had forgotten about. On a slender metal sheet was a column I had written for "Gulf Pine Catholic" about being chosen to be Katie's godfather. The column was embossed into the metal sheet.

On reading the column, written back decades earlier, I was surprised when I read the following from it: "I wonder if, twenty years from now, I will receive a call from Katie, asking if I will perform her wedding ceremony. How interesting it might be to be both godparent, priest that baptised and priest that performed the wedding ceremony of the same person."

Who says, "What if's" can't become real. They can! I know!