

FAITH OF OUR ANCESTORS

Our Great Grandparents, Johann and Barbara Blaschke, arrived in this country in 1852 with strong religious belief in the Catholic faith. To combat the rigors of adapting to a strange land with strange new customs, it is no doubt that faith was a reality in their daily lives, and provided needed comfort and courage.

It isn't difficult to imagine that our ancestral families gathered together with others who came to this country at the same time to form the communities with the same cultural roots and beliefs, and together developed the traditions that provided the character, identity, and local pride that reflected their lives and background in Europe.

One of the first acts to form such a community when they arrived in Waterloo Township in 1863 was to build a log church, fashioned after the East-European style they had known in their homeland. This church was built solely by hand, felling the trees that provided the logs, making the mortar to bind them, and hand-hewing the wood flooring, confessional, altar, and the pews, hand-hewn by our Grandmother Blaska's father, Johann Fiedler. No one knows, but it would be interesting to know if they had friends in Europe send the framed pictures of the Stations of the Cross that are the only adornment on the walls of the church which are covered with "whitewash". The church still stands in Waterloo Township, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in Wisconsin, and in the Wisconsin Registered Landmarks. Grandfather John Peregrin Blaska and Anna/Ludmilla Habermen Fiedler were married in the church on 7 July 1884.

By 1926, John and Rose Blaska already had 7 children, several of them in school.

At that time, communicable diseases, measles, mumps, whooping cough, scarlet fever, diphtheria were common, and inoculations had not yet been perfected to the degree that they are today. When one child became ill with such a disease, the house was quarantined until all in the family were again well. To avoid missing school, those children who had not contracted the disease were sent to live with Grandma Blaska so that they could attend school. Those of us who spent those periods in our grandparents home were very impressed. Not only did we eat in the dining room, instead of in the kitchen at home, but we were introduced to a formality we had not known at home. Grandfather Blaska sat at the head of the table, and Grandmother opposite. It was he in his home, instead of our mother in ours, who presided over the ritual of the meal. It was always begun with the recitation of the prayer before meals, "Bless us O Lord, and these they gifts which we are about to receive through Christ, Our Lord, Amen." This was followed by the Hail Mary, recited in German--Hielig Maria, etc. (Find the German translation.) After meals, the prayer of Thanksgiving was recited. "We give Thee thanks, O Lord etc.

Despite his exposure in his father's home, our father apparently did not assimilate the same value his father had for the efficacy of prayer. However, no matter how rushed she was to feed the working men, and her large brood of children, when the food was on the table, she said the prayer before meals. And, usually, no one started to eat until she was finished with the prayer.

Today, the attitudes of the Catholic Church and its members have changed in relation to attendance at Mass, special devotions, confession, fasting during Lent, etc., all no longer observed as religiously as in our ancestor's day, or as when we were children in our home. A concerted effort was made by our mother to have us attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. If the snow banks were too high for the horses to get through in the wintertime, or we otherwise couldn't get to church, our mother would have us kneel down around the kitchen while she was preparing the noon meal, and assign one of us older kids to read the mass prayers from the missal. We didn't eat meat on Friday or on other "meatless days" requiring abstinence, and we were expected to give up something for penance during Lent. In 1966, Pope Paul VI made a pronouncement to end mandatory penance, inviting between the ages of 18 and 59 years of age to have only one full meal, & meatless Catholics to voluntarily fast and abstain with only two days of fasting required—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—regulations in the United States. While fasting and penance is now considered to be more of an individual effort to be more Christ-like in ~~their~~ our lives, and have more concern for others, making reparation for sins, it seems that observance of the traditional fasting and penance has largely lost its/^{former} meaning, and often is disregarded entirely. Personally, I have found it difficult to comply with even the lessened requirements, and mostly fail in doing so. Additionally, the new liturgy with congregational singing, much of it off-key, praying aloud as a community, shaking hands which I resist as I feel is the most common means of transferring germs from one to another, all have little or no meaning for me, and I continue to wish for the resumption of the

Latin Mass, the beautiful Latin church music, an art form in itself, and the quiet congregation taking part with the priest through silent reading of the mass prayers as he offers the mass.

But, during the introduction of the new liturgy, I was struck with the Penitential Rite, at the commencement of the Mass, where the priest calls us to repentance, to reflect on our sinfulness, and to ask for God's mercy. It is a constant reminder to me that one must always do for others what is indicated by the circumstances, at any given time, lest the opportunity is gone forever, and one is left with just the regrets. Therefore, because of my regrets, the following penitential rite of the Catholic faith is recorded here for your daily consideration:

I confess to Almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault--in my thoughts, and in my words,
in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do;
And, I ask the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, all the angels and saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.
May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life, Amen.

I can recall so many times in the past when I was so selfish and small in my reaction to circumstances I have found myself in, both with family, friends, and coworkers, that I am truly ashamed and regretful, ~~and would have asked for forgiveness~~ But unfortunately, it is too late to ask forgiveness of those I have hurt, or forsaken when they were in need, or, ~~or~~ ^{or caused sadness} because of my false pride in relating to others. Too late now to redress my wrongs, and I can only hope I can do better now given like circumstances.

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As an example, I recall the very short time that our brother Johnny lived after we learned that he had lung cancer--just four months. And, where was I as he agonized through those painful weeks and months? In Florida. Afraid, ashamed, detached from Johnny through the years, and for whatever reasons I had at the time to excuse myself from going to be near and helpful to him are empty and inconsequential. When I flew home for our mother's funeral, just one month before Johnny's, I saw him at the wake, barely able to walk, and then later at the hospital, in bed, in acute pain. At the time he asked if I had to go back to Florida, I said I had to return to have pins removed from my ankle, and would then drive back and stay for the summer. He asked if I couldn't have the pins removed in Madison, in effect, asking me to stay. But, I didn't. Despite the doctors and nurses indicating that he wasn't critical, I thought he was very, very ill, and would not live long, but I didn't stay to be near him. To my everlasting regret, I left then, and in three weeks, returned in time to see him in a casket before his burial. I simply did not do what I could easily have done for him as a sister--to care enough to be near, at the least. And, I surely could have done more for our mother after I retired, and she was growing older. But, I didn't do enough for her either. With these dreadful regrets uppermost in my mind during the weeks following the deaths of both mother and brother within a month, I returned to the church for forgiveness and solace after an absence of ten years following the change in the liturgy which I couldn't comprehend, didn't like, and didn't adjust to. (I often recall the Sundays, too, when I was caring for mother in Evelyn's home following her fractured femur, I wouldn't go to church Mass, and wouldn't even watch it on television with my mother while Evelyn was at Mass. My mother never commented, but now I know she must have felt troubled and hurt with my defiant behavior. So unnecessary, small and cruel, of me, I now think, but, it is all too late. So, I include this act of repentance in this narrative to urge you who are reading it to assure yourself that you do for others, at the opportune time, so that when it is gone you will not be reproaching yourself for what you failed to do.