

January 1, 2017  
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God  
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They call it the “Potato Chip Scene.” And it haunts me to this very day.

In 1975, when I was 12, I saw a movie called “The Other Side of the Mountain.” It was a true story, based on the life of the American skier Jill Kinmont.

In 1955, Jill Kinmont was the American champion in downhill skiing. Just before her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, she had a terrible accident on the slopes. Her spine was severed. She could not move her arms and legs.

There was nothing the doctors could do.

She would never walk again. But the movie shows us months of painful physical therapy. And Jill learns how to do a simple movement with her right arm. She calls her boyfriend, and tells him that she has a miracle to show him.

He arrives at the hospital, full of expectations. Jill is wheeled into the waiting room. Mustering every ounce of her physical strength, she slowly moves her right arm. She places it into a bowl of potato chips which is positioned on her lap. She wiggles her hand just enough so that a chip becomes lodged between two fingers. She lifts it to her mouth, and eats it. We, who have watched the movie up to this point, know what a miracle this is.

Her boyfriend, however, stares at Jill. He is waiting. Finally he says, “Well? Is that all? Aren’t you gonna walk?” Jill’s face falls, and she says, “No, I’m never gonna walk.”

The boyfriend’s face is full of disappointment. He had driven to the hospital, expecting a miracle – expecting her to WALK. But all she could show him was... a potato chip.

The pain on Jill’s face is riveting. And all these years later, I think I remember that scene so well because, even at the age of 12, I was beginning to understand how easy it is to miss the real miracles that are happening all around us, simply because we allow our own expectations to blind us and set us up for disappointment.

In the movie, the boyfriend asked, “Is that all?” A potato chip? It WAS a miracle... but her boyfriend could not see it, because he was expecting something more... miraculous.

Fortunately, in today's Gospel we see people who teach us how to recognize the miracles of God, even when those miracles don't match our expectations.

We see Mary. When the archangel Gabriel appeared to her at the Annunciation, he told her miraculous news. She was going to give birth to God's own son. A divine child! Gabriel said, "He will be great and will be called son of the most high. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Talk about miraculous expectations! She is going to give birth to the king of kings and the Lord of Lords!

And what does she get? She gets a ride on a donkey to Bethlehem. No room in the inn. She gets to give birth in a stable full of animals. She gets... a baby boy. Who cries, just like every baby. Who needs to be fed and changed, just like every baby. A boy who confuses her when he becomes a teenager. Who breaks her heart when he is an adult. She was promised that his reign would never end... but he was born in a stable, and he died on a cross. Maybe not what she was expecting from the king of kings. Is this the miracle?

And we meet the shepherds. Their night watch is interrupted by an angel who told them news of great joy. A savior is born to you! The messiah. The Lord! "Glory to God in the highest!"

So they went to Bethlehem to see this savior. And what do they see? A baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Now, frankly, if someone told me that the savior of the world had been born, and I went to see it, I would probably go with lots of divine expectations. And if all I saw was a baby in an animal barn, I might be tempted to say, "Is that it? Is this the miracle?"

I expected to see divinity, and all I get is... a potato chip?

The shepherds look at this baby, wrapped up in cloth, and they are not disappointed. They can still see that he is, in fact, a miracle. How? Because they believed the message that God had sent them. God told them, through the angels, that the miraculous savior would be found in a very ordinary situation. A mom, a dad, a barn, a baby. They had been told. And they believed it.

*Do you believe it? You have been told the same thing. Jesus said, "Behold, I am with you always."* Do you believe that, in 2017, the miracle of Christ's presence is going to be revealed in your most ordinary circumstances? In your working and your resting, in your laughing and your crying, in your biggest meals and your potato chips... the miracle of Jesus' presence has been promised to you. Do you believe what you've been promised?

And Mary? She was able to look at this crying, hungry boy, and see God's greatest miracle. How did she do it? Well, Luke tells us that Mary 'kept all of these things, reflecting on them in her heart.' Aha. That's why Mary is able to see the miraculous in the ordinary. She took time to think. She took time to ponder. She took time to reflect. She took time to be silent. She took time to review what had happened in her apparently ordinary day, and she saw the miraculous power of God at work in her son.

If we do not pause and ponder, then we will be blinded by our expectations. Too many of us never pause to pray, so we tell God that if he is going to reveal his presence to us, then he had better make it big and bold, because that is the only way that we will pay attention. If you are driving too fast, the stop sign has to be very big in order for you to see it.

Our expectations blind us. And, like the boyfriend in the movie, we can stare a miracle in the face, and still say, "Is that it?"

Saint Ignatius of Loyola taught to all the members of his religious order a simple way to pray. It is called the "*examen*." It's very simple – yet it could change your life in 2017 if you do it with consistency. How does it work?

Well, at the end of each day, you do two things. First, you review all of the events of your day – all the ordinary stuff that happened. And you ask yourself, "Where did I see Christ at work in each of those ordinary situations?" The more you look for him, the more you will see him. And that's a miracle.

And then you ask, "how did I fail to behave like Christ in all of my ordinary interactions today?" And you ask for forgiveness and the grace to do better tomorrow.

Pondering – like Mary. Reflecting. Choosing to see the miracle in the ordinary. Christ promised to be there. He is. Why ask for more?