

364 - 72nd. Street  
Brooklyn, New York  
January 10, 1982

Dear Frank,

Bless me, Frater, for I have sinned. It is 370 days since your last letter. I said my penance and went to Holy Communion.

You are correct in assuming that Mrs. Duffy and I summer and winter in different places. We spend from mid-June to mid-September in East Bridgewater and the rest of the year in Brooklyn.

We no longer get out every day to lunch at Bay Ridge Fish House, as we used to. Not so much the cold weather as those 24 steps to be climbed to our second-floor apartment deter even this iron-willed lady, voluntatis gargantua. In summer, with our rented car, however, every day was out-day. She is completely deaf and cannot talk, but "... Truth, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ." Being with her all these years, simply as friends, no more, has been the most pleasing as well as edifying experience of my life.

The East Bridgewater house has received no internal improvement or decoration during, at least, the thirty-two years I have held it - not one coat of paint. When you come, if you come, you will find a house that has changed not at all... and a man who has changed very much. Nevertheless, you have always been welcome and will always be. But, if you do wish to see me, I would not wait for too many more years.

This year, the event that has occupied my interior mind has been - not ill-health: I am happy despite that - but my perennially renewed and perpetually undone effort to slough ingrained bad habits. If Death is to be the adventure I allow it to be, my baggage must be virtue. The event that chiefly occupied my exterior mind was the impingement of Yoyager II upon the Saturnian system. I ravished every hour that TV dedicated to that, the repeats and re-repeats. I still can see vividly (How some things linger!) the illustration in a book which must have strayed into the Children's Section of the 95th. Street library when I was young enough to be confined to that sec-



tion. The book was titled Astronomy; the illustration, Saturn with its "three" rings against a pitch-black background. Never had I seen, never felt the impress of, such Olympian majesty. All the wonder of childhood - later, alas, lost - poured itself from me into that page, more wonder, I have little doubt, than Carl Sagan, the adult Carl Sagan, can muster. Oh, how I wish that life had followed wonder into that page! The child would have bargained ten years of his life just to know that he would see some day the pictures that I saw last summer. And I, today, in gratitude for having seen these pictures, would bequeath only one week of a life of much diminished value. Such the chasm between a child's and an invalid's wonder. One week surely is not much, but, then again, it is not nothing.

To revert, I would be glad to meet Anna and any of your children who accompany you. God has blessed you with two good wives, and with many children to guide into the few conduits of good action in this polluted world. Your archetype is Patriarch; and your children, deriving from the Covenant set between you and Honor since the days of your youth, will multiply as the stars of Heaven.

( Well, French-Irishmen are permitted to exaggerate.)

I believe I left the President this week. I endured complacently the loss of half my assets in precious metals, a loss attributable in great part, I believe, to Reaganomics, for I reasoned that it was preferable for cargo to go overboard than for the ship to sink. When he violated his promise not to "touch" Social Security, my loyalty teetered (I being 58 and on Social Security Disability since my fall) but recovered its balance. He is, bless him, so pro-defense and so anti Boogie-Jew... But now that he has jiggled the determining factors of the cost-of-living index downwards, and is tinkering with Medicare to make us pay 20% of our hospital bills, I must conclude that Reagan is not only an enemy of the poor (fine!) but also an enemy of the middle-class - not so fine! I believe he is allied to the rich, who entertain him and support him. I suspect that he, who is 70 and ruler of a nation, disdains those of us, under 70, who do not work. Purcell, Republican leader of Nassau County, speaks for me when he said this week, "Reagan is on the right track, but he wants to go too fast." It was a serious error of judgment to attack all sides at once: the old, the poor, labor, and others. To attack the old was unjust as well as ~~ill-advised~~



impolitic. Unfortunately for Reagan, the old are many, are alarmed, and have long memories.

Also, contrary to the pronouncement of all economic advisory bulletins, never mind all media forecasters, I do not think inflation is being reversed: accelerated rather. I base this conclusion upon the evidence of my senses.

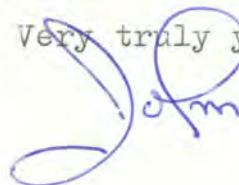
Now, did I hear you ask what I am reading? I read economic reports that I do not understand, history that I do not remember, and biography that I do not emulate. Of scientific studies I savor the romance but abhor the drudgery. Philosophy is fruitless, for I trust my own experience and logic more than anyone else's - except, possibly, people holier than myself, who are also intelligent. If Plato (not especially holy) reached my age, he was either not writing at all or writing tongue-in-cheek. Novels are unrealistic, particularly realistic ones. The classics are old hat, and poetry frays my patience. I don't mind reciting to myself, in the right mood, a few lines memorized ~~years ago~~ many years ago. Then poetry, for me, manages a sacramental shudder, coming up blood-bathed, bone-chewed. The occult titillates me, though it be bunk. Books on travel, which I can no longer do, slip me a vicarious and illusory freedom. Religion - are there any good books on religion? Except when I read ten verses at a time, and then close the book, the Bible bores. Pornography is my game, but I'm too old now for even that to give me a lift. (I'm not ashamed to say, though perhaps I ought to be, that if I were young again, I would lead an immoral life.) My favorite book is the human face, just as I get better music now from people's voices than from strings and woodwinds.

So much for reading, and so much for this letter. Ego-centricity has made it almost Biblically boring, but we do not have continuity of recent shared experience; so I must talk about me.

I will, however, be fueled for objectivity if you'll tell me something about your work, about Anna, and about your children. I should like to become reacquainted, too, with the locales and life-styles of brother Joe (whom I never encounter) and of your sisters. If you give me Mom's address, I shall send her a card. Ever hear from Gene Dembinski?

Well, enough is enough, as Lot remarked after his daughters' visit. Glad to have this chat. Regards to Anna.

Very truly yours,



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