

ATTACHMENT 3: THE COFFEE WILL ALWAYS BE FREE

Fr William Bausch writes:

A priest friend of mine, Fr Vincent, is stationed at a parish in Manhattan. Every morning he would have breakfast at a little deli downtown. An every morning, he would see the same crowd who also started their day at that deli. One day, Fr Vincent walked into the deli and introduced himself to the crowd, then asked everyone there to also introduce themselves to each other. In doing so he was just hoping for a more friendly atmosphere in the place – and it worked.

But interestingly, it worked for everyone but the owner. All he would reveal of himself was his name, Harry. After a few weeks, all the regular customers had become friends and Fr Vincent continued to pressure Harry to reveal a little more about himself. Finally after much persuasion, Harry decided to take a risk. He reluctantly announced to all that Harry wasn't his real name; it was Hazim, and he was from Baghdad, Iraq.

The risk which Harry took was considerable. He could lose his customers – the majority of whom were Jewish – and his business he had spent so many years building up. You see, this was at the time when Saddam Hussein was a real threat to world security, and he had missiles trained on places like Tel Aviv. Tensions between Arabs and Jews were running high. Naturally, all the customers in the deli froze when Harry announced his national origin. No one said anything, but people drifted out one by one.

The next morning, as Fr Vincent was shaving, he heard a radio report that the U.S. had begun bombing Baghdad. Father Vincent dropped what he was doing and ran to the subway, hoping to reach the deli before Harry opened that morning. Above all, he wanted to reassure the man of his friendship and love – and perhaps even protect him from the crowd.

As Fr Vincent rounded the corner to the deli, he saw the regular morning crowd lining the sidewalk, waiting for Harry. When Harry arrived, he hesitated, almost turning back. Why had he taken the risk of revealing his real name? But while he was deciding what to do, all of Jewish customers ran toward him and surrounded him with hugs and words of affection and encouragement. He wasn't the enemy; he was Harry. Wiping a tear from his eye, Harry said gruffly, "You know, you still have to pay for the doughnuts. But from now on, the coffee will always be free."