

For many years, my dad was part of an Italian social club in Jersey City, and for those who don't know what an Italian social club is, it's a bunch of older Italian guys playing cards and smoking and laughing and just enjoying being with one another- a thing beautiful in its own unique way that unfortunately is becoming more and more rare.

I can picture their meeting space vividly- a storefront with no sign outside and a good size room with not much in it- just a TV always showing RAI (the Italian network), a stove with an old-fashioned espresso pot on it (the one you have to turn upside down), a table with lots of ashtrays, a calendar with the Pope from a couple of years before, and bottles of Cynar, an Italian liqueur, and it always fascinated me that it was made from artichokes, believe it or not.

Right out of *The Godfather*, or at least that's what these guys hoped it would be.

The first time I went there I was ten years old, and my dad presented me to his friends there. I remember that very well too- my dad's arm around my shoulders and he says, "*This is my son*", and he's proud beyond belief. Now this was a very quiet and a very reserved man who hardly ever said a word, and this was a nerdy boy- tall for my age and thick glasses and curly hair and a bad stutter and clothes that I was embarrassed about even then. And I felt one with my dad in that moment and I was proud of *him*- "*This is my dad*".

Fast forward 45 years later and in a different part of Jersey City- I was visiting my parents and my dad introduces me to the members of his new social club near where they lived then, and he says the same thing, and me as goofy and as imperfect as ever- and he says "*This is my son*". And he was as proud of me as ever, and I was proud as ever to be his son.

At the Nativity- at the coming of the Son of God into the world in the person of Jesus- God told the world "*This is my Son*". Not in an Italian social club but instead in a humble

manger with animals all around him, and with all the noises and all the smells that go along with that. *God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God*- given to a world who did not always care that the Creator of the universe has come among us; to a world who too often denied their oneness with the Father. But this world could never prevent God from coming among His beloved people, His beloved creation.

Why did He come among us? It would have been so much easier to love us from afar and still take care of us. But that wasn't enough- He loved us and the one who loves longs to be with their beloved, no matter the cost and no matter the trouble. Because when you love someone you'll do anything to help them to rise above whatever they're going through and make them know they are loved.

So when God became incarnate- when he became Emmanuel- God with us- he made a huge sacrifice- as St. Paul says, emptying himself and giving up the glory that was his from before time began- enduring the pain and the labor and the uncertainty and the stress that is the lot of the human race and embracing all the good and joyful parts of being a human as well- the king becoming a servant and through that humility and that love making every servant a king or a queen.

And that love that God had for us so beautifully expressed in Jesus Christ continues to be given to each one of us and it's too good to keep for ourselves. So we pass it on to those we share our lives with and we help them to know that they are loved without limit and without condition and that nothing will stand in the way of that love being shown- shown in an infinite variety of ways but each way being a way to help the person we love to rise above the darkness and to enjoy the light that is God among us.

I shared with you a few years ago the story of that Christmas night when the police came to the friary because I had forgotten to call my mother that Christmas and she was so worried that she called the police to see if I was alright. My dad passed away almost two years ago, so I can't give him a call, but I can still remember him, and I do every day and I still thank God very day for him and I can still love him. He is forever with me as God is forever with us in His Son Jesus Christ.

Happy Christmas!