

An Easter with the family

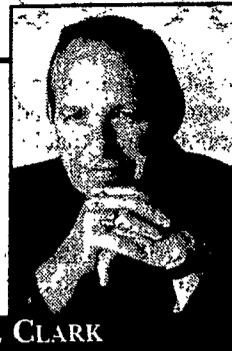
You know I love times with the family. That is true always, but the experience is more exciting at holiday times. Spirits are high. People make a special effort to get together.

This was the case on Easter Sunday when my niece, Mary Ellen, and her husband, John, hosted us for Easter dinner. It was the first time in many years we did not celebrate at the home of my sister and brother-in-law.

It was fun to be at John and Mary Ellen's home. Their son, Patrick, turned 2 on April 13 and was very much a part of everyone's happiness that day. Patrick is a peaceful, happy and friendly little guy. I am not always sure what goes on in his head. But as I watched him move with easy curiosity from person to person throughout the afternoon, I had a sense that he was sharing hosting duties with his mother and dad. Mock and scorn me all you want. I know he was doing that. Or was it the natty bow tie and beautiful smile that made it seem that way?

Patrick was not the youngest in the crowd. That was Liam James McMahan, Margaret and Doug's son. Liam will be 1 on May 30. While Patrick made his rounds, Liam held station. As children that age often do, he spent the afternoon absorbed in watching everything going on around him. Frequently, he commented on what he saw in a language all his own. I think of it as an infant version of Gregorian chant. I am always fascinated by what goes on inside the minds of little ones who are so intent on absorbing everything around them. I had the extra bonus of driving from Syracuse to Albany and back with Liam and his mother. Margaret is also my goddaughter, and that means a lot to me.

along the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

Kathleen and Mark also were there. Part of the day's delight was the opportunity to catch up with Kathleen's birthday, which was on Friday. There was a Patrick-Kathleen cake, many gifts and, as is always the case when Kathleen is around, a good deal of laughter. Mark said he is growing accustomed to the great curiosity so many people express about what life with Kathleen is really like! As best I can tell, he thinks it is terrific, something the rest of us have known since this exuberant bicentennial baby entered the world.

Grace and her date, Karl, were very much involved in the party. In addition to the gift of her wonderful company, Grace also hit the bull's-eye with the birthday gifts she so kindly purchased for me for Kathleen and Patrick. The woman has an uncanny eye for such things and always comes up with good buys.

Jane came to town on Monday with Julie, now 6, and Megan, who will be 4 on May 13, a birthday she shares with aunts Grace and Mary Ellen. Julie and Megan have always been beautiful. What changes is the shape of that beauty and the way it expresses itself as they mature more and their personalities emerge. I know it is a joy to note what hap-

pens in their lives between the opportunities I have to be with them.

Monday afternoon they invited me to watch "The Beauty and the Beast" with them. I was happy to accept and hunkered down with them in their grandfather's lounge chair. I was in the middle with my arms around them as they stretched out beside me. Of course, they know the script by heart, and were careful that none of its intricacies should get by their great-uncle. They were also kind enough to warn me when the scary parts were coming. I was grateful for that concern. But as the film unfolded I could tell by their body language that they were happy to have my support during those scary scenes. I will remember the pleasure of watching that film with them for a long time — almost as long as it takes the blood to flow back into my arms.

I picked up Margaret and Liam in North Syracuse at 3 on Easter Sunday afternoon and dropped them off at 9:15 a.m. on Tuesday. It seemed like a very short time. It was. But it was a beautiful time because it was so filled with life and brought so much joy and energy to those who were a part of it.

I thank all of them and offer special gratitude to my sister, Helen, and brother-in-law, Jim Early, for their gracious hospitality, and to my old friend, Tom Powers, who is such an important person in all our family events.

You so often ask about my family. I am grateful for that and, in recognition of such kindness, write about them today. I also remember and write about them because doing so helps me enter more deeply into the mystery of Easter.

Peace to all.



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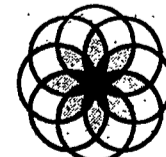
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