

July 27, 2016

Dear friends in Christ,

I was visiting Tatiana Ewenko last week before I left for vacation. Tatiana is about 90 years old, is at an assisted living facility, and one of my favorite people to visit. She speaks with a thick Russian accent, reflecting a life that was filled with experiences few of us could relate to. As a young girl in Russia, she became a prisoner of the German armies, held in a concentration camp during much of the second World War. She survived, and met an American serviceman, and the two would get married and come to America and his home in Wausau.

In my visit last week, Tatiana showed me a treasure from her life before America. It had been a gift from the priest in the Orthodox Church. A piece, or rather a chunk, of bread from Communion. In the bread was a small candle that over the years has melted and become one with the bread. They were wrapped in a rag, and kept in a cloth bag drawn tight with a tie string.

The priest gave this bread and a candle to everyone who was making the trip to America after the war. Tatiana did not give a detailed explanation why, but there it was, some 70 years later, in my hand. I imagined the priest sending his children off on a journey not unlike the people of Israel going off into the wilderness. This was his promise to Tatiana and others that God would be with them, to feed them and light their way.

90 years old, and 70 years after leaving her homeland, Tatiana and her family treasure that cloth bag and its contents. It will always be a reminder not only of the events that together make up her life, but also place her life and the life of her family within the circle of God's love.

I wonder if that Orthodox priest who gave Tatiana the bread and candle had an inkling of the gift he was bestowing upon her and her future family. I wonder if he understood the power of his actions, done in God's name and love. I wonder if Tatiana is aware of the power of the moment for me when she shared the bread and candle with me.

Typically, I would close with some kind of "moral" that would suggest how the story might relate to us. But I don't want to. I simply want to enjoy and relish the story as it is, and ask you to do the same.

In Christ,
Fr David