

## **Our Father, Which Art at Red Lobster...**

**by Rev. Joe Dirt - Thursday, December 01, 2022**

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This posting is more this old curmudgeon thinking out loud than anything else... so take it in that spirit.

I am not a fan of religion. In my calculus the amount of harm that religion has done far outweighs any good that can be attributed to it. Given that the basis of any religion is essentially unprovable (hence we talk about faith), the amount of prosecution, violence, even killing and wars, suppression of other beliefs and non-believers, etc. done in the name religion, in the name of God, is incredible. The history I am most familiar is of the history of the Catholic Church, not because I am Catholic, but it because it longest and best documented. This history continually makes me cringe the more I learn about it. Protestants, Muslims, Hindus and probably many others religions do not get a pass on this horrible chronicle either.

In spite of having said the above, I totally understand the impulse to be religious. Hell, at times I wish I could be so as I suppose it would make life easier to have faith to lean on. Much as I have tried in the past, it is just not a place I can go. I am more than okay with that at this point in my life.

Both sides of my extended family are very religious as are some of my closest friends. They are mostly Southern Baptist or other fundamentalist religions. I generally try to respect their belief system even though I do not always feel like respect for my absence of belief is reciprocated. At least a few members of this group feel it is their duty to evangelize. One member has been exceedingly aggressive with their efforts to "save my soul" even though I have repeatedly and emphatically requested that they stop. At this point I feel the gloves are off with this individual, and I just get rude...much to my own chagrin.

For me the bottom line with religion is that it is a private matter, much like sex, that there is a time and place for it. In my way of thinking this is the church and the home. Much like public displays of affection – overly amorous attention to one's partner – should be avoided; I feel the same way about overt displays of religion like praying at various group gatherings, events, meetings, etc. I find it especially so as the prayers here in the United States are generally Christian prayers. With a Jewish wife the ending phrase, "*in Christ's name*" has come to have a fingernail on the chalkboard feel to it for me.

One type of public prayer that I find particularly onerous is praying in restaurants. I feel about embarrassed by this type of public praying as would if I was sitting at a table with a couple in a restaurant and they were frantically making out. Generally what I try to do is to suppress the emotional turmoil this creates for me, and I just endeavor to survive the situation. Obviously, however, this is something very important for my various table mates.

I was recently visiting some friends for a few days. Normally I would have stayed at their home, but the wife is having some serious health issues that prevented that. I dearly love both these folks as if they were close relatives. While the woman is normally religious, her health concerns have accentuated that part of her. The husband and I spent our days cussing at small, dimpled balls. In the evenings the couple and I went out to eat, and of course she prayed out loud before each meal. I dealt with it as I have

normally dealt with it. I just try to survive what for me is a very embarrassing moment. The last time, though, she asked me to lead the prayer! This was a little surprising as we have talked about my secularism in the past, however that conversation was a while back. Part of me panicked as I did not want to hurt this dear friend's feelings, but I politely declined. She then did her due diligence with the prayer. We talked about what had transpired a little bit afterwards, but it was uncomfortable for a few minutes.

There is a season for everything. I have no problem if you want to bow your head and say a silent prayer. More than that I find inappropriate, and it has me looking for the door. Perhaps these folks feel it is a religious duty, but to me it smacks of evangelizing, of pushing religion out of the private zone. For some reason when one of these restaurant prayers happens, I am reminded of the Pharisees of Jesus's time as described in the New Testament.

As far as riddles wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma go in this life, this is not a big one, but it keeps popping up. . What's a boy to do?

And so it goes.

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