



By John Holmes, REHP

I'll make you an offer you can't refuse. I'm a big fan of *The Godfather* saga. Visualize Marlon Brando, "Don Corleone", in his office conducting "Family Business" with a series of *amici*, friends and associates, requesting favors. The Godfather welcomes them into his magnificently decorated home, offers Chianti, and like "the gentleman" he was, asks of what service he could be. The acquaintance would tell their sad story and after careful thought, the Don would ask his question, "Do you want justice?" Sometimes the *amici* would say "yes". Sometimes the friend would say something outrageous to which the Godfather would tell them their request was not justice; it was revenge. The Don would then say he would have someone look into the matter and the person would be satisfied with the result. In return, the Don would inquire, "Someday, and that day may never come, I'll call upon you to do justice as a gift on my daughter's wedding day." The wronged person would respond, "Grazie, Godfather."

Much like visitors who asked the Don for favors, I often prayed for guidance. I know my prayers are heard because a few years ago on one terrible night, I got an answer. I was incredibly sick and my future looked bleak. As death approached, I knew I had to do something drastic or I would perish. I needed a plan and fast. I started to see myself in one of those deathbed- salvation scenes. The scene seemed so "Little House on the Prairie". **I was not going to go out in a tear jerker moment.** As helplessness overtook me, common sense and anger kicked in. My first response was to strike out. My thoughts were of self-pity until I realized that my situation could only be solved by outside intervention. I needed strength tempered with family honor.

All of a sudden, I saw Don Corleone. He tried to tell me something. It seemed so surreal. As morphine partied in my brain, reality became a rare commodity. In my dream, the answers to life's questions appeared. There was no need for me to die. Corleone's lips moved, but I could not hear. I remember begging, "Please speak louder! I can't hear you Godfather!"

His lips moved again “S**** Bl****”. I still did not understand. Don Corleone turned and started to walk away. Everything was moving so slow, I could barely breathe when the Godfather turned to me one more time and said “Use your small blessings” and everything went dark.

Several hours later, I awoke. The morphine hallucinations had subsided. There was an eerie feeling inside of me. Haunted memories troubled me. What did Don Corleone mean? Use your small blessings. My thoughts were fixed on Don’s message when I saw my family priest walk past my door. I called to him, “Father, do you have a few minutes?” Father Fredo entered my hospital room, full of enthusiasm and understanding. I told him my dream and its unexplained message.

The priest listened attentively and after I completed my story he inquired, “What do you think the dream means?”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN! “I thought you were the expert on blessings. Didn’t you learn anything in Seminary School?”

Father Fredo smiled and proceeded to say, “I was only testing you to see if there was any fire in your soul.” He continued, “You obviously have a strong sense of family, and it is this sense of *famila* that will not let you die. You have too much to live for and you are too ornery to give up.” Father Fredo then surprised me. He told me, “I’m Italian and my father’s name was Corleone. Small blessings are the special parts of life that mean so much. They bring great joy. They are selfless acts of kindness – the times you help someone just because they need help, the jobs you do for the elderly and those who are less fortunate. It is the giving of one’s self just for the giving and expecting nothing in return. John, I know you have given much during your life. Your name has been mentioned at services throughout the years. These small blessings give us a reason to live.”

Father Fredo went on to say, “You are not going to die. I knew I was going to talk to you today even though I did not know you were here.” Father Fredo then started to tell me about a dream he had last night. He said he had come from a very close family and that he was taught the value of helping others. His mother had told him that these small blessings will add up substantially over a person’s lifetime and that there would be a time in his life that he would use these blessing to call on strength to get him through a crisis.

“My father came to me last night and told me about you. My Dad said that you were a good family man and that you needed to be reminded about the good you have done in your life. It was time for you to call on your special blessings to help give you the strength to live.”

I lay in my hospital bed for the next few hours contemplating what Father Fredo had told me. I looked back on my actual family, thought of all the strength and support I had been given over the years, and how much I needed their support now. I thought

about my career at the Health Department, and realized how much my co-workers were like family to me, and I discovered just how special our careers as public servants are.

So let me make you an offer you can't refuse.

Help others through random acts of kindness, treat people as if they are your family, and when it is your turn to face a crisis, you will be able to call on your special blessing to give you the strength to pull through.

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