



Second Sunday of Easter | Sunday of Divine Mercy
April 3, 2016



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Pastor's Column

The Ragman

A number of people have asked for my Easter homily. Here it is!

Early one Friday morning, even before dawn, I noticed a young man, handsome and strong, walking through the alleys of our city. As he walked, he pulled a cart filled with bright new clothes; in a clear tenor voice, he called out: RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! I'll take your tired rags. RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS!



Now, this is certainly a wonder I thought to myself for the man stood six feet four inches tall, and his arms were like tree limbs, hard and muscular, and his eyes flashed intelligence. Surely he could have found a better job than being a ragman in the inner city. I followed him, driven by curiosity and I was not disappointed.

Soon the Ragman came upon a woman sitting on her back porch sobbing into a handkerchief, sighing and shedding a thousand tears. Her shoulders shook; her heart was breaking. RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS!

"Give me your rag," said the Ragman with a gentle voice, "and I will give you another." He slipped the handkerchief from her eyes and laid across her palm a linen cloth so clean and new that it shone. She blinked a silent thanks, and, as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman did a strange thing. He put her stained handkerchief to his own face and began to weep and sob as grievously as the woman had done. Yet she was left without a tear.



Drawn in like a child who cannot turn away from mystery, I continued to follow the sobbing Ragman. RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS!

Soon he came upon a girl whose head was wrapped in a bloody bandage. A single line of blood ran down her cheek. With gentle compassion, the Ragman offered the girl a beautiful yellow hat from his cart. "Give me your rags," he said. "And I will give you mine." The child was still while the Ragman loosened her bandage and tied it around his own head. When he put the hat on hers, I gasped aloud at what I saw, for with the bandage went the wound and on his forehead a line of blood began to form – it was his own!

RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! ... cried the sobbing, bleeding, strong, intelligent Ragman as he picked up his pace.

"Are you going to work?" He asked a man leaning against a telephone pole. The man shook his head; the Ragman pressed him, "Do you have a job?"

"Are you crazy?" sneered the man, and with that he opened his jacket to reveal that he had no arm. "So," said the Ragman, "give me your jacket and I will give you mine." The one-armed man took off his jacket. So did the Ragman, and I trembled at what I saw, for the Ragman's arm stayed in the sleeve and when the other put it on, he had two good arms, but the Ragman only one. "Go to work," he said, with quiet authority in his voice.

"RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS! After that,

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the Ragman found a drunk, lying unconscious beneath an army blanket; he was old, wizened and sick. The Ragman took the blanket and wrapped it around himself, but for the drunk he left new clothes.

At this point, I had to run to keep up with the Ragman. Though weeping uncontrollably and bleeding, pulling his cart with one arm and stumbling for drunkenness, he went on with terrible speed. It pained me to see the change in this man, yet I kept following.

Finally, he came to a landfill. He climbed up a hill of garbage and with tormented labor, he cleared a little space. Then he sighed and lay down. He pillowed his head on the jacket and the handkerchief. He covered his bones with the army blanket...and then, he died.

How I cried to witness that death. I slumped in a junked car and wailed as one who has no hope because I had come to love the Ragman. I wore myself out with sadness and fell asleep. I slept through Friday night and Saturday too. But then on Sunday, I was jolted awake by a violent light.

Light – pure, hard, demanding light slammed against my sleeping face and I blinked and looked and then I saw him. There was the Ragman folding the blanket most carefully, a scar on his forehead but alive!

And besides that, he glowed with health and wholeness. There was no sign of sorrow or of age and the rags he had gathered shined with cleanliness.

I lowered my head, and trembled for all I had seen. I got myself out of the junk car and walked to the



Ragman. I told him my name with shame, for I was a sorry figure next to him. Then I stripped myself of everything and said to him with yearning in my tone, “Clothe me. Make me new again!” He dressed me. My Lord, dressed me! He put new rags on me and I am a wonder beside him. The Ragman! The Ragman! The Christ!



**RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS!
RAGS, RAGS, NEW RAGS FOR OLD RAGS!**

We the Faith Community of St. Thomas More gather together on this Feast of the Resurrection in the presence of the Ragman, the Christ.

Through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, we have committed ourselves to standing with the Ragman. We have met him...We have heard his song...We have experienced what he does for others and what he does for us.

This morning, in a few minutes, after this homily, we will have the opportunity to renew our Baptismal Promises and to be sprinkled with the waters of the Baptismal Font. We, once again, strip ourselves of everything. We give the Ragman our old, dirty, stained, torn rags and allow him to dress us with the rags of new life, new hope, and new beginnings!

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—from a story by Walter Wangerin, Jr.

F. Mike