

# The Ring Story

by Mike Ashland



A student in my middle school religion class asked me how the host becomes Jesus during mass. All the kids in the class seemed skeptical. They thought they “got me” on this one.

I asked students how long their parents had been married. Hands went up and answers began to pop in the room. “15 years.” “20 years.” “My parents just celebrated their Silver Anniversary. 25 years!” I think the longest married in the room was 29 years.

“What about your grandparents? Any have marriages 50 years or longer?” Many hands flew up again. “52 years.” “60 years, then my grandma died.” “My grandparents are celebrating their 72nd anniversary!” There was silence after that.

“Wow,” I said, “that is a long, long time!”

“Do any of you know the story of your grandparents meeting and courting? Back then they didn’t call it dating.” One or two had bits and pieces and shared them with the class. Most didn’t know any of their grandparent’s stories.

“I’d like you to go back in time with me. Go back to when your grandparents were dating, young and excited. Imagine them going past a jewelry store and your grandmother looking through the window and seeing a diamond engagement ring. What is she thinking? What is that ring to her?”

“It’s a wedding.” “She’s thinking, ‘Will he ask me?’ and wonders if she’ll say yes.” “It’s what she wants. The ring is her getting married.”

“And what is grandpa thinking when he looks in that window?”

Hands fly up. “Wow. That’s really expensive!” “Can I afford it?” There is laughter.

So it’s months or years later. Your grandpa gets down on one knee and asks your grandma to marry him and opens the little velvet black box to show her the diamond ring. “Yes,” she says with tears in her eyes and he places the ring on her finger.

In that little moment, she looks down at that ring. As she looks at it, what is she thinking? What is that ring, now?

“It’s a promise. She’s going to get married.”

Now we’re at the wedding. Lots of people and flowers. Music. A priest or minister who asks your grandpa to repeat these words as he places the wedding band on her finger....”With this ring, I thee wed.” And your grandma looks down through her veil at the diamond ring on her finger. What is she thinking? What is that ring?

“I’m married! She’s thinking.” “Oh my God! I did it! I’m married!”

Later that night, she is in the bathroom changing into her fancy nightgown while her husband sits on the edge of the bed watching TV. She looks at herself in the mirror and holds up her hand with the ring sparkling on it. As she looks at her reflection, what is she thinking? What is that ring?

“Will I have kids?” “Will we be okay?” “She’s thinking about the future, about a family.” “The ring is her future. It’s her with him and everything that will happen.”

So now we move forward. Your grandma and grandpa have been married for 10 years. There are little munchkins running around. Your dad or mom are just little toddlers playing with their brothers or sisters, teasing each other and making a mess and lots of noise. Friends and family are there to celebrate. In a quiet moment, your grandmother looks down at that ring. What is she thinking? What is that ring, now?

“It’s her family. Her kids.” “It’s good times and bad times.”

Let’s make just a few more stops on this story. The next one is the Silver Anniversary. Some of you have been at your own parent’s 25 year celebration. There are teenagers around. Lots of cousins and family. Your grandpa has some gray hair, and not maybe as much as he used to! Your grandma looks around at this family and all her friends, and at her husband of 25 years. And then her eyes find that ring on her hand. What is she thinking? What is that ring, now?

“It’s her family...and her marriage.” “She’s thinking, ‘How did I get here?’” “The ring is history. It’s all the stories and birthdays and getting sick and worrying and having fun.” “It’s me and my brother and my dad.”

Just a couple more stops, I tell them.

Let’s jump a long ways forward, now. It’s your grandma and grandpa’s Golden Anniversary. 50 years! It’s a big, huge party with dear old friends and family. Babies and toddlers are crying and playing. Grandchildren!

For a moment your grandmother sits alone, with laughter and talking and music all around her. She looks at her husband and then down at her hand. A hand that is wrinkled and a bit bent with age. She wonders how it got that way and how quickly this time of her life arrived. And then her eye takes in that wedding ring. What is that ring, now, to her as she gazes down at it?

It takes a moment for students to think. Then one hand goes up. “It’s everything. It’s her marriage, her kids, her family, her grandchildren. It’s her house and all her friends. It’s everything. I think she will cry right then. Maybe happy and sad at the same time.” Many of the students nod in agreement.

Just one more stop.

You are at the funeral of your grandmother. There are many people. Cousins and relatives. Old friends of your grandparents gathered in tiny circles getting re-acquainted and remembering your grandma. Even the grandkids are more quiet. There is a sadness in the room—an emptiness that is new and painful to you. You have a very hard time putting the world back together with it missing the piece that is your grandmother.

Someone comes to you quietly and stands before you. “I have something for you. She wanted you to have this.” The hand opens and laying there is your grandmother’s ring.

What is that ring, now?

“It’s my grandma. It’s her.”

There is a hush in the room. Some students are crying because they know the death of a grandparent. There are many eyes full of emotion.

How did that ring change? It is still just a ring. A band of metal with a diamond. It’s a little tarnished. It has some nicks and scratches. But it is just a ring, as it was in that jewelry store window so many years ago.

And yet, it is her somehow.

Eucharist becomes the Body of Christ not by magic or miracle. It becomes Jesus in our years and years of worship and prayer; in our singing and in our standing and our kneeling. It becomes Jesus in all the funerals and church picnics and pasta dinners and Christmas midnight masses and candles and smell of incense.

That host remains a dry and tasteless wafer. And yet after years, after decades of life in the church, the host becomes everything for us. It becomes Jesus through our life in the church. We are told that we are the Body of Christ. Our lives. Our history. Our sicknesses and failures, our successes and accomplishments. Our laughter and our tears.

All those things, all that history...that is us.  
That is the Body of Christ.

That is Jesus.

