

Your Favorites ...

1. What do reindeer say before they tell a joke? "This will sleigh you."
2. What is Santa's primary language? North Polish.
3. James Fenimore Cooper wrote about the life of Santa Claus. It is titled *The Deer Sleigher*.
4. What does Santa like best about gardening? He loves to Ho, Ho, Hoe!
5. Does Santa have any money? No. That is why they call him Saint Nickless.
6. Why does Santa like to go down chimneys? Because it soots him!
7. But isn't he afraid he'll get stuck? Yes, he gets Santa Claus-trophobic.
8. Won't all that soot make him sick? No. He's had his flue shot.
9. But what if there's a fire in the fireplace? Santa then becomes Krisp Kringle!
10. What do you get when you cross a sheep with a cicada? Baa Humbug!
11. A webmaster's favorite hymn? Oh, .com all ye faithful!
12. What playwright was intimidated by Christmas? Noel Coward
13. Christmas is the time of year when mother has to separate the men from the toys.
14. What do you get if you cross a Yule Log with a duck? A Fire Quacker.
15. How do Mexican sheep say Merry Christmas? "Fleece Navidad."
16. Who is Round John Virgin? One of the twelve opossums.
17. Just before Christmas, an honest politician, a generous lawyer and Santa Claus were riding in the elevator of a very posh hotel. Just before the doors opened they all noticed a \$20 bill lying on the floor. Which one picked it up? Santa of course, because the other two don't exist!
18. What happened when Santa's cat swallowed a ball of yarn? She had mittens.
19. Where is the best place to put your Christmas tree? After your Christmas one and your Christmas two.
20. Did you hear that one of Santa's reindeer now works for Proctor and Gamble? It's true! Comet cleans sinks!
21. I know, I know. I know that people say, "It's the thought that counts, not the gift ... but couldn't people think a little bigger?"
22. Sometimes I get the feeling that if Christmas, Father's Day and birthdays did not exist, then aftershave too, would not exist!
23. Billy: How come you never hear anything about the tenth reindeer, Olive? Tilly: Olive? Billy: Yeah, you know ... Olive, the other reindeer, used to laugh and call him names ...
24. There once was a Tsar in Russia whose name was Rudolph the Great. He was standing in his house one day with his wife. He looked out the window and saw something happening. He says to his wife, "Look honey. It's raining." She, being the obstinate type, responded, "I don't think so, dear. I think it's snowing." But Rudolph knew better. So he says to his wife, "Let's step outside and we'll find out." Lo and behold, they step outside and discover it was in fact rain. And Rudolph turns to his wife and replies, "I knew it was raining. Rudolph the Red knows rain, dear!"
25. A man walks into a cafe desiring breakfast. The waitress seats him and he asks what the specials are. She tells him the Christmas special is Eggs Benedict. He orders the special. A little later, the waitress comes out with the Eggs Benedict, served on hubcaps. Surprised, he asks why the hubcaps instead of regular plates. Her response? "There's no plates like chrome for the Hollandaise."
26. Some children call him Santa Caus since there is Noel.

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CROSS LINKS

CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS, UNITED STATES PROVINCE OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS
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November 2015

Dear hearts and gentle souls,

I'm not sure when this will get to you, but I'll take a chance that it will be after Thanksgiving and sometime during Advent. So I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving, and I hope you can gift yourself with a little bit of a respite during the Advent Season for some silence and reflection. All too often we zoom into Christmas with hardly a break, and we're too exhausted to fully enjoy all the gifts of that day, especially love of our family and God's love for us.

I've been focused a lot on family this past year, and the reflection on the two inside pages shares some of the fruits of that focus. Let me make a couple of pleas based on my experience: One, before it's too late, interview your oldest family members. Get their memories on paper. If you search the Internet using "interviewing older family members", you'll

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Family is so important at Christmas, and you are part of the Holy Cross family, as are your loved ones. We will be praying for you during the Christmas Season, which ends January 10, 2016.

If there are specific individuals (living or dead) you would like us to remember, or specific intentions, jot them down on the enclosed prayer slip and send it back to us.

No offering is required, but any offering given will be designated for the *Tribute to Father Ted Fund* I referenced on this page.

get lots of ideas for questions to ask. Trust me, it will be a blast! When I interviewed Mom, my jaw dropped more than once! It was a combination of OMG and TMI!

Second, if you have old family pictures, label them on the back as to who the individual(s) are, where the photo was taken, when, etc. We have many old photos, but Mom just doesn't remember who they are, and so they're basically useless.

OK, now ... staying on the family theme. One thing every family values is education for the younger members. Holy Cross is no different in that regard. We have well over 100 men in formation around the world. As you know from your own experience, education is an expensive proposition. It's not just tuition, but also things like textbooks and fees. The postulants, novices, and seminarians live in our houses of formation, but even there we have to provide food, maintenance, transportation, etc. Like you, we are faced with rising costs in every aspect.

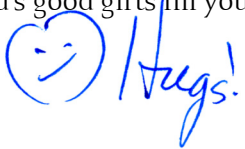
The education umbrella also shelters our priests who are presently studying for advanced degrees, with a view towards eventually teaching in our colleges and universities.

Given all the above, the United States Province is starting a very special appeal for what we are calling the **Tribute to Father Ted - A Fund for the Future of Holy Cross**, in honor of **Father Ted Hesburgh, C.S.C.** Father Ted needs no

introduction; you know as well as I do how much he valued education. All donations to the fund will be used for the education and formation needs in the U.S. Province. *But there's more ... Jay and Mary Flaherty are going to match, dollar-for-dollar, every gift received up to \$500,000!* Wow! Your generosity, combined with others, could create a \$1 million endowment fund to support men who may be touching your life in coming years, and who may also impact the lives of our children, grandchildren, and great-grands.

And so that brings me full circle. May you have the heart of a child this Christmas Season. May God's good gifts fill you with amazement, awe, excitement, and gratitude. Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year.

With love and appreciation for the gift you are to Holy Cross....

F. Herb 

O GOD OUR HELP IN AGES PAST ...

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. Deuteronomy 7:9

It was exactly what I hoped would happen.

My niece Jennifer e-mailed me saying that her son Zion had a homework assignment. The class was supposed to research and find out information about the earliest ancestor in their family who had come to the U.S. The teacher later canceled the assignment because it proved too difficult for many of her students. But to Zion, I was able to give the following information:

“Conrath Jost arrived at Philadelphia 15 September 1749 as a passenger aboard the *Phoenix*, John Mason, Master. The ship was from Rotterdam, via Cowes (an English seaport on the Isle of Wight). He settled in Lancaster County, PA. Conrath was born September 28, 1700. He and his wife Phillipina had 11 children. As soon as he arrived in Philadelphia, he and all other males over 16 years of age were marched to the Courthouse where they swore an oath of allegiance to King George II of England. They went right back to the ship where one of two things happened: 1) they were purchased as indentured servants; or 2) they left the ship free and clear to start their own life. It is not clear which happened to Conrath.”

When Dad died in May 2014, I started to prepare his obituary. Wanting to get some facts accurate, I asked around the family as to who had the brown wrapping paper on which I had done a version of our family tree back in the '70's. It only went back four generations, and was the product of spending time in the public library going through microfilm. Once I found it and got the necessary facts for the obit, I thought to myself: “It would be good to get this online.” Having seen the TV commercials for *ancestry.com* and their green leaves, that was the starting point.

Well, to make a long story short, there was one green leaf after another. It has been an astonishing and humbling experience. The family now extends back 114 generations. There are commoners (mostly Dad's side), plus churchmen, aristocracy and royalty (Mom's side). You would immediately recognize some of the names

from your knowledge of history and the Bible. Nineteen nations are represented, including all of Europe, plus Turkey, Persia (modern Iran), Egypt and Palestine. The great majority are from the area we now know as modern-day Germany. The youngest member of the family is my grand-nephew Jack Heroux, born December 2014. The oldest so far is a man named Bel-Bani, who was King of Assyria around 1700 BCE. The “barbarians” who caused so much trouble are amply represented: Huns, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Suevi, Franks, and Vandals. There are a surprising number of multiple marriages.

We have every degree of royalty, as well as farmers, shoemakers, millers, laborers, brickmakers, clerks, dry-wallahs, feudal serfs, bakers and soldiers, concubines and harem girls. Speaking of soldiers, members of the Yost/Hiemenz family have fought in every major U.S. conflict, from the Revolutionary War to Vietnam. Most died of natural old age, but there are many infant deaths, as well as men and women who were killed in battle, murdered, or assassinated. Large families of 8 or more children were common.

Throughout this process, I was thinking especially of the younger generation of our family. Because of the earlier research, some information was known. But it's fantastic to know that the generations coming up now have a good grasp of their heritage. That's why I was so excited about Zion's homework assignment.

Now you may be wondering, why this topic at this time? Well, it's all part of the Christmas story. In the Masses just prior to Christmas, you'll be hearing the Gospel genealogies of Jesus. In giving us the origins of Jesus, the gospels point to as many sinners, liars, and schemers in his genetic and historical lineage as they do to saints, honest people, and men and women of faith. The lineage that gave us Jesus' human blood, Scripture tells us, was produced equally by the great and the small, the talented and the talentless, commoners and royals.

So what's to be learned from all of this?

There are three major questions that are at the basis of every major world religion: 1) Where do I come from; 2) Why am I here; and 3) what is going to happen to me? Working on a family tree will definitely give the answers to the first two questions. As for the third ques-

tion, that is more a function of one's spirituality than research into one's ancestry.

You and I are the end product of many generations that came before us. Chances are good that all of our ancestors had to overcome considerable personal hardship in their lives. This knowledge that our ancestors had great inner strength can be a powerful tool to draw on as we consider our own hardships and travails. If it were not for them, you would not be reading these words today. If it were not for your own inner strength, future generations would definitely be affected. We are the same people our ancestors were, and our descendants are going to face a lot of the same situations we do. It's instructive to imagine how they would react, with all the different technologies past, present, and to come.

A family tree shows how deeply rooted we are. In today's highly mobile society, where so much emphasis is on the present and the immediate future, we too often tend to forget our past. Many families might not remember before great-grandma or great-grandpa, but being able to do so really provides a person with a sense of place in the broader history of the world. Now I can watch the History Channel, or Discovery TV or read something in books and magazines and think: “Wow, an ancestor of mine was alive while that was going on.” A family tree is more than just a collection of single family branches passing through time, here today and gone tomorrow. My life and yours is a journey of many lifetimes woven together from the past and the present, forming a tight-knit fabric for generations to come.

A family tree helps one to realize that God truly does write straight with crooked lines. A concubine is an ancestor! A Roman citizen marries a Visigoth woman! Nicholas in Germany meets Catherine from Belgium! Isabel's first husband dies and she marries Leo, and they have a child who continues the Hiemenz side. Conrath comes to America from Germany as a single man, and meets Phillipina Weaver in Lancaster County, PA. The process is repeated 114 times; there is an unbroken chain. If just one link is missing, I wouldn't be here today. When you stop to think of all the possibilities of any human life, all the different things that could have happened in any one ancestor's life let alone thousands of lives, it staggers the imagination.

A family tree helps one with tolerance of “the other.” Immigration is widespread, not just into the United States, but between countries and regions in Europe and Asia. From the human birthplace in Africa, we have truly spread out to all the world. Go back into your family tree, and you will most likely find many skin colors. You will also find that there is no one form of faith expression that persists across the centuries. In addition to every variety of Christianity, you will very likely find ancestors who have practiced Judaism and Islam, as well as those who worshiped gods or practiced nature worship.

There can be a number of surprising discoveries along the way. When I was in Rome many years ago, I picked up a fragment of ancient Roman brick near the Coliseum to bring home as a memento. Well, lo and behold: our 92nd great grandfather Tullius Domitius Calvisius was part owner of a tile and brick factory near Rome. His factory provided bricks for many of Rome's most famous monuments, including the Coliseum and the Pantheon. Wouldn't that be something if his shop was the one who made that particular brick fragment? Most recently, I finished making an altar for the chapel at the Provincial House. This was the fifth altar I have made. In thanking the Provincial for his thank-you note, I suddenly realized: “Ohmigosh! Three of my ancestors built altars!” What else has been passed on through genetics and blood?

I still remember November 2014 and our tradition of praying for our beloved dead. Before that month, I would remember those who died in my lifetime. All of a sudden, I had many more family members to pray for during that month, and a year later the number is in the thousands. Spiritually, the family tree has made a profound impact. The same God who cares for you and me cared for all those people from our past. It's the Body of Christ writ large, very large. We have a *huge* family in heaven!

In short, this has truly been a journey into the unknown. What will the next green leaf turn up? Will he or she be an unknown person among billions, or maybe have an entry in Wikipedia? Truly, God has been our help in ages past, and will be our hope for years to come.