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## *Saturday Night at the Preakness Stakes*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
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I know it seems strange to folks who see me in Atlanta all the time, but I really did grow up on a farm. When the weather turns fresh and green this time of year, and even when it turns muggy and hot, I still yearn for the outdoors again. I will always thank God for that natural beauty which lies beyond even our most intricate human achievements.

But the outdoor life, and the farm life, is not all beautiful. Growing up among cattle and horses, and all sorts of birds, snakes, raccoons, foxes, and wild dogs, I was aware not only of life, but also of death. I once watched a snapping turtle drag a huge goose to its death underwater. I saw stillborn calves and cows who had fallen into ravines and died.

I remember a particular horse once, who had somehow managed to cut his neck by rubbing the tin roof of a cow trough the wrong way. I was a young boy, but they let me watch them hose the horse down inside the barn. I had never seen so much blood in my life. Then they told me they would have put the horse out of its misery. I understood.

I was never that fond of horses, but I learned a fair amount about them. When visitors to the farm got "bucked off" their horse (they really just fell off), then I would be the one to ride the horse back to the barn. I knew horses were incredibly powerful, but they could also be strangely skittish. I still admire folks who truly love to ride, and who truly love their horses.

I was reminded of all this last Saturday night, before Boog (my wife) and I had to go out yet again. I stopped and said that we had to watch the Preakness Stakes horse race. "After all," I told her, "it's in Maryland where you're from." Like half the country, I had noticed the frisky strength of Barbaro, by far the favorite horse in the race; and I had watched him romp to an easy victory in the Kentucky Derby.

I saw Barbaro barge out of his starting gate too early, and I admired the riders who cut him off and led him back around to the start again. Then, I watched the race start, and I began to look eagerly for Barbaro. Within seconds, Barbaro was being pulled back. Something wrong had happened (he had broken an ankle in three places), and he was out of the race.

It is hard to stop a massive horse who has been trained to run. They will run right through the injury and end up dead. But somehow, that jockey, Edgar Prado, pulled Barbaro back. I looked at Boog and said, "That jockey just saved the horse's life."

Like I said, I am not really a horse person. But I do appreciate beauty and skill. On Saturday evening, that beauty and skill had me in tears. I want Barbaro to make it, and he might not. I want the jockeys to get awards, too. I want the world to pay attention to ordinary heroes, everyone there at the Preakness who rose to meet a tragic occasion (including the eventual winner's team, riding Bernardini, a horse owned by a sheik from Dubai!)

None of us knows exactly when we will have to rise to meet a tragic occasion. But we will. Life itself is not always beautiful. It's not always fun. And, sooner or later, life involves death. All those folks at the Preakness last week had spent time in training, practicing, disciplining themselves and their horses to do the right thing. When the unexpected occurred, they were prepared. On Monday, when the United States observes Memorial Day, we will remember other folks who knew how

to train, who were prepared, who knew that life is not always beautiful; we will remember that life involves death.

There is a Christian discipline, and a Christian training. It is about praying steadily in little ways, so that when we really need to pray, we know how to do it. It is about learning how to forgive in little ways, so that when we have to forgive something big, we can. It is about giving in ordinary ways, so that when something extraordinary needs us, we can respond. It is about losing something so that we can gain something else. Christian training is about becoming as familiar with death as we are with life. When we know that, we know resurrection itself.

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