

## **“Where Was God today? ... He was in Syms”**

By Lorelei Pepe

Yes, God was there today, in the clothing store for men and women, called Syms. This particular Syms in Miami, was going out of business and I had been “eyeing” a pair of silver grey sparkly, dress shoes for weeks. The Christmas season was fast approaching and I thought these would be great for the holiday season. I took the plunge as they were on sale and marked down! I was a real shoe fan and they had to be part of my collection! I felt like a “kid” again and decided to be a little selfish as they fit so beautifully!

I approached the very long waiting line to pay and decided they were worth the wait. As I walked to the line, another lady, who was a short, middle-aged woman with black hair also approached with clothes in hand and I motioned for her to go ahead and she said “gracias”, and gave me a warm smile. Not long after, a tall, young, nice looking fellow in his late 20’s or early 30’s or so, appeared behind me talking on his headset phone apparently to his girlfriend or wife? He was describing the 2 dresses he had in hand, along with a blue dress shirt and dark jacket for himself. He was asking her if she wanted the solid, black sleeveless dress or the dark blue printed one and had difficulty explaining the color, so I could not help myself and turned around and said “tell her it is navy blue”! He was relieved as he told her and nodded to me and put the black one back on a rack.

During his conversation which was quite loud, I overheard this young man mention “funeral” and when I looked up at his face, I could see how much pain and turmoil he was in. He told her he was running late and would be at least 15 minutes on line, then rush home and change for the funeral. Then he hung up and I could not help myself. I said “excuse me” but I heard you have to go to a funeral and in a hurry, so please go in front of me. He just nodded and then said his mom died 2 days ago. He was holding back tears when he said it was sudden, although she had suffered for 2 months and died from “Mad Cow” disease which just consumed and destroyed her. I was shocked and speechless. I finally said “I am so very sorry”. I felt like hugging him as the tears were rolling down his face now and I felt like crying too! I just reached over and touched his arm, in a sympathetic manner.

In the meantime, the dark-haired lady who was Spanish but understood English had overheard the conversation too. She then walked up to the front of the very long line and explained the situation in English and Spanish to all the people on the line. Everyone was nodding their heads and when she came back, motioned for him to go to the head of the line. He was grateful and thanked us, and as soon as he approached the register, he was wiping the tears off his face and then put on his sunglasses so no one could see his pain and grief, but we all knew and understood. He quickly left and then I said to the Spanish lady, “you never know, do you?”. We need to cherish every moment we are given. She said she was thinking the same thing. So, we continued talking and she told me she was a caregiver (like myself) originally from Ecuador but had lived in New York. She noticed my New York accent and asked me where I was from and told her “Brooklyn”. She then smiled and said “me too” and that she lived in the Bensonhurst – Bay Ridge area during part of her life and it turned out she knew of my childhood church, The New Utrecht Dutch Reformed Church, on 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 84<sup>th</sup> street. We both had wide smiles as we felt connected somehow for a moment. I could see the cross around her neck and knew she was a believer like myself, so we knew this was no coincidence. God connects us all through our faith in Him.

We walked up to the cash register together as the clerk shouted “next” and she paid for her purchases in cash but was short a nickel and had no more money on her! So, I quickly dug in my wallet and came up with it and gave it to the clerk. She thanked me and then just grabbed my neck and hugged me, standing on tip toes to reach me as I am tall. I told her “no big deal”, and as she left wished her a very Merry Christmas and she said the same and Feliz Navidad in Spanish, her native tongue and gave me a wave good-bye with a big smile!

So where was God? He definitely was in Syms today and touched all of us. Like the Holy Spirit that blows in the wind, He blew through all our hearts and souls. Everyone responded openly, randomly and kind- heartedly. For one brief moment we forgot about our own selfish needs, and helped a man suffering in pain. Just like Jesus Christ who suffered and gave His life for all of us, so that our sins would be forgiven and saved. We are all broken. The hand of God is amazing and all mighty. So, if you ever wonder where God is just open your eyes and mind and look up! You may find Him in unexpected places!

And that was the true spirit of Christmas that year!