

Once in a small farming town in Oklahoma, there lived a poor fourth grade boy named Andy who would follow this route to school everyday: He had to cross the rugged plains and a dangerous highway where vehicles recklessly drove to and fro. Once past this highway, the boy would take a short cut by passing by the Church every morning just to say hi to Jesus, and faithfully say his morning prayers. He was being watched by the pastor who always found the boy's sincerity and innocence so uplifting in the morning.

"Hello Andy, How are you today", he would say greeting the child.

"I'm fine Pastor Thompson, How are you" ...he would say flashing his innocent grin.

Seeing the way that Andy went to school the pastor was so concerned one day he talked to him. "From school...", he advised "do not cross the highway alone, you can pass through the Church and then I will accompany you to the other side of the road that way I can see that you get home safe...."

"Thank you Pastor..."

"Why don't you go straight home ... why do you stay in this church right after school?"

Andy replied, "I just want to say "Hi" to my friend, Jesus," so the pastor would leave the boy to spend time praying by himself beside the altar, but one day out of curiosity he hid behind the altar to listen to what this boy had to say.

"You know my math exam was pretty bad today, but I did not cheat-although my seat mate was bullying me for notes ... you know, Dad's had a bad farming season so far this year so we don't have much food but I ate some bread and drank my water. Thank you for this! I saw a poor kitten who was hungry and I know how he feels so I gave some of my bread to him... funny but I am not that hungry... Look, this is my last pair of shoes... I may have to walk barefoot next week... you see this is about to be broken..."

but it is okay... at least I am still able to go to school... some say we will have a hard season this month, and some of my classmates have had to stop going to school to help with the farms ... please help them get to school again, please Jesus?... Oh, you know, Dad hit me again, it is painful, but I know this pain will pass away, at least I still have a Dad ... you want to see my bruises? I know you can heal them ... here... here and....oh ...blood. I guess you knew about this one, huh?

Please don't be mad at Dad, he is just tired and worries about putting food on our table and my schooling that is why he hits me... Oh, I think I am in love... there's this pretty girl in my class, her name is Anita... do you think she will like me? Anyway, at least I know you will always like me, I don't have to be anybody just to please you, you are my very best friend! Hey your birthday is just one week from now!!! Aren't you excited? I am! Wait till you see, I have a gift for you.... but it is a surprise! I hope you will like it! Oooops, I have to go..."

Then he stood up and calls out, "Pastor, I am finished talking to my friend... can you accompany me to the other side of the road now"?

This routine happened everyday. Andy never failed to visit the church Pastor Thompson shared this every Sunday to the people in his church because he had never before seen such pure faith and trust in God, and such a very positive outlook in such negative circumstances.

The day before Christmas, Pastor Thompson became very ill and was sent to the hospital. The Church was left to a substitute Pastor who had little patience for children or for any interruptions in his work. He would not smile and could always find fault in what other people were doing. On

Christmas Day he was in the Pastor's Study when Andy, coming from his Christmas party, playfully dashed into the church calling, "Hi Jesus!!!!!" "Who are you child and what are you doing in here", the pastor yelled out angrily. Poor Andy was so terrified. "Where's Pastor Thompson? He always helps me cross the street.... and not only that, I have to greet Jesus--it's His birthday, I have a gift right here...."

Just as he was about to get the gift out of his shirt, the pastor grabbed Andy by the shoulder and pushed him out the door of the church.

"I cannot be bothered right now I am preparing my sermon for the Christmas service tonight. Also, next time be more reverent when you come into the church", the man yelled as he closed the door behind Andy.

So the boy had no choice but to cross the dangerous side of the road in front of the church by himself. As he crossed a fast moving bus came in. There was a blind curve. The boy was protecting his gift inside his shirt, so he was not looking. There was so little time.

Andy died on the spot.

As people crowded around the body of the poor, lifeless, young boy... Suddenly, out of nowhere a tall man appeared in a pure white shirt and pants, a face so mild and gentle, but with eyes full of tears... He came and carried the boy in His arms, He was crying.

Curious bystanders nudged the man in white, and asked, "Excuse me sir, are you related to the child? Do you know him?"

The man in white, His face mourning and in agony, answered, "He was my best friend .. " was all he said. He took the badly wrapped gift from the shirt of the lifeless boy, and placed it near his heart. He stood up and carried

the boy away and they both disappeared from sight.

The crowd was curious...

On New Years Eve, when Pastor Thompson returned home from the hospital he learned of the shocking news. He went to visit Andy's parents, and to ask them about the man in white he had been told about. He consulted the parents of Andy. "How did you first learn of your sons death?"

"A man in white brought him here." Sobbed the mother.

"What did he say?"

The father answered, "He did not say anything. He was mourning. We do not know him and yet he was very lonely at our son's death, as if he knew our son very well. But there was something peaceful and unexplainable about him. He gave me my son, and then he smiled peacefully. He rubbed my son's hair away from his face and kissed him on his forehead, then he whispered something..."

"What did he say?"

"He said to my boy..." the father began, "Thank you for the gift... I will see you soon.. you will be with me..." and the father of the boy continued, "and you know for a while, it felt so wonderful... I cried, but I do not know why.... all I know is I cried tears of joy... I could not explain it, but when that man left, something peaceful came over me, I felt a deep sense of love inside... I could not explain the joy in my heart, I know my boy is in heaven now.. but... tell me, who was this man that my son talked to everyday in your church, you should know because you are always there... except at the time of his death..."

Pastor Thompson suddenly felt the tears welling in his eyes, with trembling knees, he murmured, "He was talking to Jesus...."