

Tommy

defends his faith in the cafeteria

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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Let's make one thing clear from the start. It's not that Tommy had faith in the *cafeteria*; it's not that he believed *in* the cafeteria, that it was some sort of magical place. Quite the contrary, for Tommy, it was often a torture being in the cafeteria. The system at school expected the students to take seats in the order in which they arrived, and this often meant that Tommy ended up sitting with people who were not his friends.

This is exactly what happened Monday as Tommy, assigned to a corner seat, found himself surrounded by Kurt, Andy, and Phil. They were classmates but not friends, not bad guys, really, but not guys Tommy would choose to pass time with.

Quickly the conversation turned to something on television yesterday morning. Tommy had not seen it. He never saw that program.

"How not, man?" asked Andy.

Tommy had to think before answering. He never saw that program because it was on at exactly the same time that he was always in church. Tommy knew that if he said this there would be some sort of reaction. He thought about sparing himself the grief; but then he decided that this would not be faithful or brave.

"It's on at the same time my family goes to church," he said.

"You go to church?" asked Kurt; it was not really a question.

"Yeah," said Tommy, trying not to start something.

"Why?"

"Why not?" replied Tommy, still trying to keep things light.

"Why waste your time?" Kurt was not going to let this go.

“Well, first of all, I *have* to go,” said Tommy, and then he added, “but I don’t think it’s a waste of time.”

“Hey man, how is going to church *not* a waste?” Another non-question from Kurt. “You sit there and listen to somebody BS, and you listen to lame music.”

“I don’t know what you’ve heard in church,” said Tommy, who now realized there was no way out of this conversation, “but in my church we hear about serious things...”

“Like what?”

Tommy had to think... “Stuff about life and death; what’s life; what’s death?”

“Hey man, who wants to hear about that sort of ____?”

“I like to hear about it,” said Tommy, “because what we think about it makes me feel...,” again Tommy had to think..., “that everything’s gonna be OK.”

“Just drink beer,” said Phil.

Tommy just shrugged.

Andy picked up on this. “You think you’re better than everybody? Another non-question.

“NO,” replied Tommy, quickly. “We’re just people doing what we believe in.”

“I don’t believe in God,” said Andy. “Like..., where is God?”

“Here we go,” thought Tommy, who knew enough to ask, “is that a serious question? I mean..., do you want me to try to answer it?”

“Sure..., try.”

“Basically,” said Tommy, “if God is the thing behind everything else..., if He made everything else and keeps things going, we don’t expect to see Him like some specific *thing* in the world.”

No one had a quick response to that.

Tommy continued: “The idea of God is that..., anyway, as people grow up, they understand the world better and better. And then they get to a point where they see that the world comes from something greater..., and that’s God.”

“I don’t see anything,” said Andy, “you’re saying I’m not a grown up?”

“I’m not judging anybody,” said Tommy, “I’m talking about what I see, that’s all.”

“So you’re more grown up than me?”

“I didn’t say that?” said Tommy, but he was thinking it. Instead, he said, “as far as I understand it, sometimes people *could* see God but *don’t* because they are looking in the wrong place. They think they should be able to spot God *in* the world, instead of understanding that the whole world is kind of God’s...,” Tommy was searching for a word..., “face. I mean..., you see a face; you don’t see a brain, but you still know there is person behind the face.” Tommy was momentarily proud of himself. He had never thought of an example like that before.

“So, why do you have to go to church?” Kurt was back in it.

“I guess it depends on what you mean when you say ‘have to.’ If you mean that somebody is forcing us, no; we don’t ‘have to.’ It’s that we think we *should* do.”

“Why?”

“Basically, I guess,” said Tommy, “we believe that we are here for a reason. I mean God didn’t just make us to make us. He made us for a reason. And what’s the reason?” Tommy wasn’t waiting for anyone to ask. “It’s to live with Him in heaven.” Again, Tommy wasn’t waiting for the next logical

question. “We are *here* so we can decide who we want to be..., so we can be somebody that *we* choose to be, that we made ourselves into.”

“And how do you do that?” This was sarcastic.

“Again,” said Tommy, “it’s all about growing up—in a certain direction—to be more and more like God—because the more like God we are when we get to heaven, the better it will be.”

“So, why do you have to go to church?”

Tommy needed a few seconds to think of what to say. “Where you do you think I learned about all this?”

“You could get it from a book.”

“Who writes the book?” replied Tommy. “And who helps me to understand it? And, besides, one of the biggest things we believe about God, and life with God, is that we are going to be together there; so we should get together here, and learn together, and pray together, and help each other out. It’s one the main ways we get ready to go to heaven.”

“And if I don’t I go to hell? Andy again.

“I didn’t say that,” said Tommy, “*who* says that? But we do say that you can go to heaven in better shape, or worse.”

“You can go to hell.” Andy did not premeditate this, and it was, in fact, as jarring as it reads.

“Cool down,” said Tommy. “Come on, we’re just talking about our ideas.”

“Yeah,” said Andy, “and your ideas are full of it. God this, God that, God is good. Look at the world..., God is good?” Not a question.

Tommy was in too deep to back out now. “I know it’s a messed up world,” he said, “but we sort of expect this if we are here for growing. I mean..., if we’re here to get to be good, it means we had to start out being bad.”

“Just words, buddy, just words.”

“OK, but words that explain what we see, and know that there’s a reason for what happens, and that our lives *mean* something, and that we’re going somewhere.

“You can go to hell.”

Just then the bell rang and Tommy decided to let things be. For a little while he was angry about how he was talked to, and bothered that he was surrounded by people who...; there was just no nice way to say it. But by nighttime he was a little proud of himself for sticking up for his faith; and he even understood that this had made his faith grow, a little.

Later that same night, Phil, bored with TV, went outside and lit a joint.

Andy had to face the awful, nightly abuse he got from his father who was again drunk.

And Kurt didn’t know it, but his mother had just gotten a really serious call from her doctor.

Dear reader,

If perhaps you might like learn more about Tommy, just go to www.thefaithkit.org/panormana and click on *Seasons Suite*.

Be A D.O.R.K.

D is for “dream,” as in “have one,” something you want to be or do that is doable and worth your life. Have a plan to get there. Do the work that has to be done. See setbacks in the spirit of the sentence: “The more you put into it, the more you appreciate it.”

O is for “other interests,” as in activities you find fun or at least interesting. Try to get good at something that not everyone can do. Remember: “The more you are interested in, the more you are interesting.”

R is for “right,” as in “right relationships.” This means that you are a friend to your friends, and you are honest and patient in relationships with the opposite sex. Remember, love is great but only when it’s real, and it’s real only when it lasts and it wants to last for life.

K is for “kingdom,” as in kingdom of God, the only thing that really counts because it’s the only thing that lasts. Seek first the kingdom and everything else will fall into place. Have a relationship with God. Pray every day. Practice your faith every week. Make decisions on the basis of your faith and watch as it grows and with it your peace, sense of purpose, and even joy.