

# An escaped snake and a Holy Week Lesson



*“Now the snake was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made.” – Genesis 3:1*

In his general audience speech on Spy Wednesday in 2009, Pope Benedict told the crowd gathered in St. Peter’s Square that Holy Week “gives us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the central events of the Redemption, to relive the Paschal Mystery, the great mystery of faith.”

Immersing ourselves in the sacred liturgies and events of Holy Week is exactly what my family had planned. Also, we had spent months tending to all of the (mostly small) projects around the house that we’d been putting off for years – hanging pictures, replacing the missing tile in the bathroom, wiping down walls and the like. See, our oldest daughter, Olivia, was coming home for Easter, and she was bringing her new boyfriend with her – for the first time, and there was still much to be done.

Even for a family that is used to being busy, there was a lot going on. But to quote the psalmist, “The Lord knows the plans of man; they are like a fleeting breath” (94:11).

Things began falling apart the previous week. Our middle son came down with a case of strep throat before Palm Sunday, and during Holy Week, it had spread to our two other sons – and worse, my wife. A long, difficult Lent was not going away quietly.

While we canceled Easter events with our extended families, the antibiotics did their job healing the sick well enough that it looked like Olivia (and her boyfriend, Alex) had the green light to come and visit. Or so we thought.

In order to give you the full scope of the chaos that ensued, I need to rewind a few months. Sometime around August of last year, my beautiful wife, whom I love, was having a discussion with my reptile-loving 16-year-old son, Grant, about his poor grades from the previous school year. In this little chat, she promised him that he could get a snake if, by some miracle, he was to make all A's and B's during the first semester. (Full disclosure: His intelligence was never in question, but his work ethic was suspect.) Well, to everyone's surprise, he buckled down and pulled it off. Great news, right?

Wrong. Because now we possess under our roof – where our babies sleep – a 3-foot-long boa constrictor that will, in time, potentially grow to be 9 feet. Grant named him Reggie after the pet snake in “Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark.” I don't love snakes, and my wife downright loathes them, but here we are, paying the price for trying to be good, loving parents. Our 5-year-old likes to hold him, and our youngest says, in her adorable 3-year-old voice, that he's “soooo cute.” We're having her eyes checked soon.

Anyway, back to Holy Week. Exhausted from cleaning and fixing and tending to sick people, I went to bed early on Good Friday while the rest of the family livestreamed Tenebrae. I woke up around midnight to some commotion and panic. Reggie escaped – for real this time, not like on April Fool's Day – and he was nowhere to be found.

We were just hours away from Olivia and Alex pulling in the driveway. From midnight until 4 a.m. on Holy Saturday, we tore apart our meticulously clean house. We removed every single item from every single closet, and we pulled out couches and televisions and beds and bookcases and refrigerators and

washers and dryers. He was gone, and we were more than a little on edge. Every expert on every website we read and video we watched said the same thing: He'll come out ... eventually, but it might be a few months.

We went to bed with the house – and our nerves – in tatters, and woke up early to put things back in order. Olivia did come home, apprehensively, and we had an incredible weekend despite our fears that Reggie would pop out of a cupboard or from underneath a couch cushion.

But despite the anxiety, the lesson wasn't lost on me. From time to time, don't we all need to peek into the dark, cobwebbed corners of our lives and corral the evil that might be lurking? As a metaphor, it sounds great. In reality, maybe not so much.

Reggie was found a few days later, curled up in one of the milk crates that his enclosure sits on. To paraphrase Pope St. John Paul II: We are an Easter people, and on that day, alleluia was most definitely our song.

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