

# 31 Days of the Little Way: “You Owe Me a Soda”

At Sunday Mass I was marveling at how far we have come with behavior in church. With children who are almost 7 and 9, I no longer worry that we won't make it through Mass. Sure, I worry that they aren't getting all they should out of Mass or participating as fully as they could, but Mass is not the stressful experience it once was.

All was going smoothly, and after the collection, Leo moved to sit beside John and Daniel came to sit next to me. I quietly reminded our first-grader that he could sing and pray along with the rest of us.

So he did. But at the end of each segment where he and I—and the other few hundred people present—had said or sung the same lines, he grinned and whispered in my ear, “You owe me a soda!”

Now, when I was growing up and two people said the same thing at the same time, we would say, “Jinx!” When this happens now, our children say, “You owe me a soda!” I haven't noticed that many people are getting sodas as a result, but there's always plenty of back and forth. It's not my favorite phrase, especially since sometimes it leads to disagreements.

As you can imagine, during Mass Daniel and I were saying the same thing fairly often, and he kept whispering, “You owe me a soda!” My first thought was to hush him, of course. But I realized he wasn't really distracting anyone else—and he was more into praying the responses aloud and singing than he normally is.

I decided maybe I should relax and let him be enthusiastic about copying me and everyone else in the church. I often think that my frustration with my children's behavior in Mass prevents me from having a positive experience—and doesn't take me any closer to God.

So I reminded Daniel to use his inside, quiet, church whisper voice, and I let him be. And he grinned at how well he was saying the same thing as everyone else.

By the time we got into the car after the final blessing, he had decided I owed him something like 15 sodas.

After Mass we went to pick out our pumpkins, including one to take to the cemetery for our nephew and cousin Georgie. Three years ago we thought we were just a few weeks away from meeting Georgie when he passed away in utero. He's a very special member of our family, and we love to visit the cemetery. And Daniel doesn't like to go empty-handed.

After spending the afternoon at home, the boys and I headed to the cemetery to

deliver our pumpkin and a little scarecrow on a stick. It was late in the day, almost dinnertime, and the sun was low in the sky. We seemed to have the cemetery to ourselves.



“While we’re here,” I said as we parked the car, “we need to check to make sure they polished the scratches that were on Georgie’s marker.”

I wasn’t thinking, but of course the boys loved that we had a real job to do. They jumped out of the car and ran to the marker. They looked over it carefully to make sure it was in good condition—and it was.



Cemeteries are sad places, but they are also full of life. There are trees and birds and at this time of year the vibrant autumn colors are starting to appear.



And there were our boys, falling over each other like puppies as they tried to find just the right spot for Georgie’s pumpkin and scarecrow, and discussing everything they were doing. At one point, they must have said the same phrase because I heard them laugh and say, “You owe me a soda!”

I wonder what Georgie thinks of this crew, I thought, as he watches them from heaven. I imagine he’s laughing too, completely in on the jokes and phrases that I’m still trying to figure out myself.



“Georgie must love watching you two play,” I said. “I’m sure he looks out for us sometimes.”

“He probably looks out for his mommy and daddy, too,” said Daniel. Just what I was thinking, I thought. You owe me a soda.

