

A walk down Gino's memory lane

The second coming was great, wasn't it? No, I don't mean the second coming of Christ. That hasn't happened, yet, at least to my knowledge. Although it would be just like me. The world ended and I was too busy to notice!

No, I'm referring to the second coming of Gino's. Judging by the crowds that have lined up for food, this may be a preview of the real thing.

For most of us, the second coming points to the future. The second coming of Gino's takes me to my past. You see, as a teenager in the high school seminary at St. Charles, I spent two summers working at Gino's in Middle River.

When I worked there, hamburgers were 15 cents. French fries had just been raised to 12 cents. I earned a dollar an hour. Working for almost nothing then well prepared me for 33 years doing my radio show, where I earned absolutely nothing. By those standards, Gino's looked pretty good.

Those were very different times. For example, we were not allowed to add things up on the cash register. We had to add purchases up in our heads, and only enter the total in the cash register. No doubt it was to save paper. As my dear departed friend, Father Stan Janaites, would say, "They were cheap!"

So if you ordered four fries, two milk shakes, two cokes, two hamburgers, and two chicken dinners (we sold Colonel Sanders chicken in those days) I had to figure all that up in my mind. If it was a huge order, for example food for the Seventh Infantry Division, I could use paper and pencil.

We also used to have to count the number of hamburger wrappers and french fry bags. The total better add up to the total that were sold. It was an obsessive compulsive's dream.

I also got to meet nice people too. I'll never forget the man who ordered 16 hamburgers. The large bags only held 12 burgers, so I put 12 in a large bag and four in a small bag next to the large one. He grabbed the large bag and went away. Shortly he returned, and with all the good graces of a cro-magnon cave dweller, he

yelled at me: "Hey, you four-eyed s.o.b. Where's my other four hamburgers?" Summoning all the actual grace that I could muster at the moment, I replied: "Right there, sir" pointing to the bad he left behind. Uttering some other expletives he stormed off.

My fellow workers eyed me carefully to see if a "good Catholic seminarian" would mutter any expletives myself. Unfortunately, I was too naïve to know any.

Yes, my fellow workers were all male. In those days girls were not allowed to work in such places. The sexual revolution changed all that.

Odd as it may seem now, it was a perfect working place for a young man studying for the priesthood. High school and college seminarians were actually thrown out of the seminary for just being seen with a girl, much less dating a girl. I was safe.

Yes, I was 'hazed' by co-workers. My favorite happy memory is the time I was asked by one of them to go down into the cellar and bring up a 100-pound bag of potatoes. To put this request into perspective, let's just say that I didn't have a "Charles Atlas" build. As a scrawny teenager, I looked more like a recent escapee from the salt mines in the Russian Gulag.

Also they didn't tell me, that I was supposed to put a plank on the stairs and drag the bag up. They all gathered to laugh at me, when suddenly I actually walked up the stairs carrying the 100-pound sack. They couldn't believe it. Neither could I? Need further proof of the existence of God?

I have one final story. The manager announced one day that Gino Marchetti himself was coming to visit the store. Gino the Giant? Gino was a god to me. He was in the same category with Johnny Unitas and "Big Daddy" Lipscomb, and Lenny Moore. "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof."

When he arrived, he wore a suit. I thought he would wear his Baltimore Colts Uniform.

And then he did it. He reached into the hamburger bin, unwrapped one of the hamburgers, and took a bite out of it. No doubt he was testing the product. But to my scrupulous young seminarian eyes, all I could see was: "Gino's going to hell. He

ate meat on Friday!”

So, now you know the rest of the story. My sole purpose for spending 12 years in the seminary was so I could become a priest, and hear Gino’s confession.

Gino, I’m available at the Cathedral rectory. Also, I give a lot of men’s retreats at St. Joseph’s in the Hills in Malvern, Pa., not far from where you live. Come make a retreat. Grace is always free.