

Bread and butter and memories

Every time I spread butter on bread, I stop and think of our friend, Father Tom. He was a Franciscan Capuchin priest—Father Thomas Pietrantonio—and somehow there was a reverence even to his small tasks.

I remember sitting with him in the kitchen of his friary as he spread butter on bread, slowly, quietly, without any sense of hurrying, without a worry about whatever would come next.

He was one of those people who always seemed to be filled with peace.

“I always use real butter,” he told me. “I know butter isn’t good for me, so I just use a little. I know they make all those pretend butters that are supposed to be healthier. But I don’t know about those. At least I know what butter is.”

That conversation about butter, and the way Father Tom sat smiling in his kitchen as he enjoyed the simplest of snacks, has stayed with me for almost 15 years. Today, when our younger son asks for buttered bread, I know I could let him butter it himself. But I like to do small things for him. As I spread the butter, I always think of that brief exchange with Father Tom.

He affected me in bigger ways too, having larger conversations about life, praying with and for us as we walked our infertility journey. And I remember his wisdom and guidance and his deep, deep faith.

Still, isn’t it wonderful how a simple conversation, an ordinary moment, can stay with us? I am thankful for all the extraordinary moments in life—the weddings, the births, the parties, the milestones along the way.

But I’m also grateful for the smaller memories that come back when I hear “Danny Boy” or smell a freshly peeled orange or see a beautiful starry night that takes me back to another time and place and person.

After a long, full life, Father Tom passed away before he met our children. So it’s especially wonderful to me that he comes to my mind so often during one of the

easiest, simplest things I do, buttering slices of bread on my kitchen counter.