

Look, up in the sky, it's an eclipse

One of my favorite visits in the Archdiocese of Baltimore is with the journalism classes at the Institute of Notre Dame taught by Mike Reeb, a friend from our decades together in the sports department at The Sun. Discussing the power of observation in an increasingly distracted world, my shtick goes like this:

What's the first direction your mother gives you?

Look!

I then recount to them years on the road, working at basketball arenas, football stadiums and golf courses, when my spare time was spent at the latter. I passed on opportunities to really see America, but my wife, Mary, and I are slowly but surely making amends for my misspent 30s and 40s.

The only piece of sports memorabilia in my office at the Catholic Center is a photo plaque from my 1998 CYO soccer team at St. Anthony of Padua in Gardenville that included my son, Don. (We went 5-4-1, had no one being recruited to play in the A Conference and had way too much fun.) Instead, there are an abundance of photos of Mary and I, at Bryce Canyon, Mount Rainier, Yosemite Valley, etc.

The visit to Mount Rainier (left) involved a very neat role reversal. Whereas I used to be the taskmaster, driving my wife and kids hard to see one more site, it was our daughter, Kate, who pushed her parents and her husband, Micah, to one more perspective of the 14,410-foot peak in Washington state. It was magnificent, and well worth the drive. It was taken last Aug. 27, and was the first bookend in a year-long stretch that has included moments with God's creation that will sustain us forever.

The following week, on a Holland America cruise out of Seattle to near the 60th parallel in Alaska, we were thrilled to see hundreds of whales; Hubbard Glacier, the world's largest freshwater glacier; and that same evening, the Northern Lights. After a long, taxing stretch of work, my wife and I left a Catholic Press Association conference in Quebec City in June and drove the Gaspé Peninsula, with stops at

Land's End in Forillon National Park and Percé Rock. July took us to a summer cabin maintained by my brother, Kevin, and his wife, Linda, on Lake Ontario, and my first look at Niagara Falls. (The Canadians get a lot of things right, but the neon and commercialization on their side of the Falls turned my stomach).

Our next journey underscores our interest in creation.

The September issue of the Catholic Review goes to press next Tuesday, Aug. 22. You can count the number of times I've missed press day for the Review on one hand, but last March I submitted a vacation request that begins Aug. 21, when you will find Mary and I in South Carolina, hopefully in McClellanville on U.S. Route 17, on the way from Charleston to Myrtle Beach, smack dab in the middle of the path of the first total solar eclipse to cross the United States since 1918.

It's been almost a half-year since Mary purchased eclipse glasses and scored early-bird deals on airfares, lodging and a rental car, but there are some aspects of this show that are out of our hands.

Even when it's calm, Mary is an avid weather-watcher, and the long-range forecast where we're heading is for cloud cover and thunderstorms. I, meanwhile, most enjoy nature when humanity and all the noise its produces are scarce. Eight-plus years later, I'm still grouching about sunrise at the Grand Canyon, where a gaggle of teenage girls could not stop jabbering. I must keep telling myself, next Monday is going to be as crowded as Times Square on New Year's Eve, and it is not going to be quiet.

Free us from all anxiety. Whatever happens, darkness at the break of 2:48 p.m. Aug. 21 is going to be another grand moment with creation.

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