

# One man's way to peace

He was credited with having saved a billion lives in his lifetime.

I had never heard of him.

As I've often said, if you want the bad news, read the front pages of the newspaper. If you want the good news of people who really did "make the world go round," read the obituaries!

There you find stories of pipe fitters and plumbers, scientists and social workers, medical professionals and teachers, homemakers and hobby enthusiasts. They lived mostly simple lives, "doing the next right thing," and left the world a better place.

The man credited with saving a billion lives was Norman Borlaug. He had grown up as a farm boy in Iowa with an insatiable curiosity about plants. He wondered why certain plants grew here and there and others did not. Despite the fact that it was during the Depression, his grandfather insisted he go to college.

He majored in plant pathology, not exactly a "sexy" major. Armed with his doctorate, he connected with the Rockefeller Foundation, studying world hunger. His first trip took him to Mexico in 1944. His first reaction was one of near despair. As the Sept. 14 New York Times obituary read: "Mexican soils were depleted, ravaged by disease, yields were low, and the farmers could not feed themselves, much less improve their lot by selling surplus."

Dr. Borlaug wrote to his wife: "These places I've seen have clubbed my mind - they are so poor and depressing. I don't know what to do to help these people, but we've got to do something."

His training as a scientist gave him insight, but his instincts as a farm boy gave him the drive. He would manipulate tiny wheat blossoms to create strains of wheat resistant to "rust" and various type of blight. Working under what many would have considered impossible conditions, Norman Borlaug succeeded.

World-wide famines were widely predicted in the 1960s for South America and Asia.

Because of his work, those famines were averted. History was changed for countless people.

As I read of his life, I thought of the countless people who labor in obscurity each day, whose quiet labor changes lives. I think of some pathologist looking at some piece of my skin to determine the presence or absence of cancer. His or her decision will impact my life.

I think of some lab technician looking at my blood sample to determine whether my blood-thinner is making my blood too thick or too thin. A wrong calculation could end my life.

I think of countless people entering data into computers to determine patient care or someone's social security payment or someone being billed properly for services performed.

None of these people receives the adulation we give to sports heroes or entertainers. But all of their work is vital. Every job well done changes the world for the better.

One final thought. When Normal Borlaug received the Nobel Prize in 1970 the committee said: "We have made this choice in the hope that providing bread will also give the world peace." Sadly, that has not happened.

So I was reminded of the long bread of life discourse in John's Gospel in which Jesus says: "The Bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world!" Without bread, human life cannot exist. Without the bread of life, human life has no lasting meaning. In his battle against secularism, Pope Benedict XVI has rightly concluded that without faith in God there is no lasting hope and no lasting joy.