

Toss or save? A Catholic take on spring cleaning

Whether spring cleaners decide to toss it or save it may be determined by whether they tune into *American Pickers* or *Hoarders*, two reality TV shows that issue opposite edicts on excess accumulation.

I started with the History Channel's *American Pickers*, a likable Iowan duo who cruise backroads in search of antiques buried in barns and basements. "What most people see as junk," the host explains, "we see as dollar signs."

When he scored a dusty old bike for \$1,000, he squealed, "My pickin' prayers have been answered."

I got sucked right in. When the pickers discovered a Remington typewriter, I blurted out, "I'd like one of those!" It's not as if I'm nostalgic; I've never used one. And what would I do with it? Set it beside my laptop? Display it in a turn-back-the-clock, just-for-show office?

Soon after I flipped to A&E's *Hoarders*, which films packrats whose lives and piles of stuff are on the brink of collapse. There's Shirley the cat collector who protests to the police, and Patty and Bill, who lost their kids to their unmanageable mess.

That sent me straight to my closet, armed with a 39-gallon garbage bag.

I knew it was time.

I removed my jewelry, pulled up my hair, and turned to the *What Women Want* soundtrack. It began with a trumpet blast and Sammy Davis Jr.'s warning, "When an irresistible force such as you meets an old immovable object like me you can bet just as sure as you live somethin's gotta give."

In my case many things gave: pleather belts, corduroy blazers, tweed skirts. Horizontal stripes, diagonal stripes, and vertical stripes. Tops that were juvenile and tops that were matronly. Pants that were too small and pants that were too big.

I was tickled by the empty hangers and sense of order that emerged.

That's not to say I didn't save a few sentimental items. The letter jacket I'll never again wear in public. The black shirt I wore the day I got engaged. And the sparkly silver sweater I planned to wear the day I got engaged.

I like to make a distinction that I hope is a fair one: I'm not a hoarder, but I am a documenter. So I do save the kind of stuff that tends to collect dust beneath staircases. Movie ticket stubs. Birthday cards. Name badges from conferences and conventions. The kind of stuff that could go in a scrapbook – if I decided to take up scrapbooking one day.

I figure the Holy Father would understand. When he moved into the papal apartment, his collection of 20,000 books followed him. “For me it's like being surrounded by friends, now that there are books on the shelf,” he said.

Toss or save?

It's a crossroads many of us stand at this spring, as we prepare the house and soul for warmer weather and lighter accouterments.

To toss, in many ways, is to be relieved, to feel light and unfettered. But to save can mean being grounded, glued to tokens of a rich, well-lived life.

The Easter miracle illustrates both.

We are freed from the earthly shackles of sin, just as Jesus was unbound by the tomb. Yet we are fastened to that moment, so deeply rooted that we pick and press all the flowers that have blossomed from those seeds.

In Easter we celebrate history and novelty, responsibility and possibility.

Our closets may be full, but so are our hearts.

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