

in a

Word™

Volume 38 No. 10 December 2019

A Publication of The Society of the Divine Word, Southern Province



*And the Word
Was Made Flesh*

CHRISTMAS, THE GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING

by
Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD

Sometimes surreptitious and sneaky, at times in-your-face and boisterous, love is here, there and everywhere. It is known to hit you with great force and sweep you off your feet. But it is also known to approach you silently and capture you while you suspect nothing.

So does Christmas, the birthday of God's Son as man, since God is love, and all who love abide in God and God in them, as 1 John 4:16 advises us. I dare say that most people are not even aware that they are being ensnared by the love that is Christmas, for Christmas love does not broadside most people as love is sometimes seen to do. It is almost a sneaky love.

This is obviously the case, because we celebrate birthdays by giving presents to the birthday girl or boy. Our culture and custom of celebrating Christmas is upside down, for the birthday Boy does not get the presents. We do. And, save for the exception of people born on Christmas Day, we should not be receiving but only giving presents to the birthday Boy.

But what is so sneaky about the love found in this culture and custom of giving gifts at Christmas time? Most people conveniently overlook the fact that they should be giving to the birthday Boy himself, not to their dear family and friends. So, they also tend to overlook the fact that they are spreading the real Christmas message of love by giving gifts to others.

So who has the last laugh? Venal shopping insanity aside, we can say unconditionally that the Christmas birthday Boy is having the last laugh and has been laughing since his epic years on earth. "The Man Of Sorrows," "God's Suffering Servant," poignantly depicted by Isaiah 53, is also the Center of our joy, the Image of the eternal Father, the Prince of Peace.

So incredibly compelling is the Christmas birthday Boy's message that one day it would be recorded through John 15:9,12, "As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love... This is my commandment: love one another as I love you."

The last laugh is not had by "Ho, ho, ho!" merry shoppers who cannot get enough of the madness that is Black Friday, anticipated Black Friday, and finally the Black Friday trailer, Cyber Monday, that invites you to jump online and save big bucks on everything!

Not far behind the bona fide fanatics that camp out day and night for several days to get a jump on all other shoppers, the barely-sane, herd-driven shoppers stampede before the fairly-sane regular shoppers who fancy themselves driven by the spirit of Christmas. In spite of themselves, despite their consumer-driven pursuit, all of them salute the birthday Boy.

Christmas gifts range from the crudest homemade to the most lavish, expensive rocks imaginable, platinum or gold trinkets, eye-popping motor vehicles wrapped in a huge red ribbon with a bow, unreal watches, computers with all the bells and whistles, mega-screen TVs with an entertainment center, smart phones of every description with more computer power than our early spacecraft, electronic gadgets, fancy clothes and paraphernalia galore.

Looking at it another way, without the obscure, little birthday Boy, once hidden away in the relative comfort of the straw in a cattle cave, none of this merchant madness would be going on, the world would not even know the excitement it would be missing at Christmas time, and the global atmosphere would be dull and pedestrian but for New Year fireworks.

While tens of millions are willing to acknowledge and celebrate the Reason for the season, untold millions more are willy-nilly, grudging fellow travelers who swell the outsize numbers of participants in scores of parades around the country and the world, scenes with billions of multicolor lights embraced by most, countless movies and musical extravaganzas.

Unwittingly, often against their intent and will, those grudging fellow travelers nonetheless keep alive, promote and propagate the birthday Boy's story with his message that still eludes the grasp of a baffling number of individuals as well as that of the United Nations who give perennial mere lip service to the feckless pursuit of peace around the world.

Now what about you personally? Do you keep in touch frequently with your relatives and other dear ones? Do you engage in family activities that enable you to bond more deeply and more firmly as you continue your pilgrimage here on earth? Do you reject the venal, commercial Christmas to find the birthday Boy's peace in yourself and your own family?

Perhaps Nat King Cole said it best of all when he sang, "I want your arms around me for Christmas. I need no presents under the tree. You're all I want, my darling; and that will be the world to me." A warm person is all that most folks really want. Just ask anyone lonely, separated, abandoned, forlorn, without family or companion, or in a loveless relationship.

When the high-priced commercial gifts lavishly offered on Christmas Day have lost their luster and glamour, relegated to the ho-hum heap of baubles and trinkets that are no longer lovingly appreciated, the birthday Boy's message of anxiety-proof peace that the world cannot give lives on the loving hearts of all who embrace him and his enduring love.

This article was written by Father LeDoux in 2013.

He passed away in January of 2019. However, his words still live on

Saint Paul the Apostle in Baton Rouge Celebrates Thanksgiving with Community Dinner

At 11 o'clock this morning when the doors of Saint Paul Community Center were opened, we were greeted by nearly 100 people standing in line waiting to enjoy our Thanksgiving Day Community dinner.

For the past 5 years St. Paul has provided Thanksgiving dinner to everyone who comes through our doors, members Of the Eden Park Community, parishioners and everyone else who finds their way to us.

Over the course of the next 2 hours more than 300 people were served a fantastic homemade Thanksgiving dinner. Dinner consisted of turkeys that were fried, baked and smoked. There were hams baked and honey baked. There were yams and sweet potatoes; there was dinner salad and potato salad, dinner rolls, macaroni and cheese and spaghetti. There was corn bread dressing and dirty rice. There were green beans and peas. There was sweet potato pie, Apple pie, pound cake, bread pudding and cookies for dessert. No one left hungry. And by the grace of God many were able to take a plate with them when they left.

Dinner was provided by members of Saint Paul the Apostle who prepared their food at home and brought it to the center for distribution. Many parishioners also joined in fellowship with our guest for dinner. giving a true witness that we are all brother and sister to each other none greater or lesser than one another.

One elderly woman took my hand and looked directly into my eyes. She had a smile that would brighten any Room she walked into. She said, "Father I have been coming here for the last 5 years, ever since you began serving Thanksgiving dinners. I had looked so forward to this because I live alone and have no family seldom do I have company but on a day like this, I feel a part of something much greater. There is so much joy and love when you come here. If God wills, I'll be back next year."

Those who enjoy the day with us are elderly folks, some elderly husbands and wives who would otherwise not cook a Thanksgiving dinner, there are people men and women and children who live on the street. There are people who cannot afford to fix

a Thanksgiving dinner. So many young people, but regardless of the reason. they know everyone is welcomed.

At 1 o'clock when the last guest was served, the food ran out. It never seems to fail. It reminds me that when we do things as a people of faith for the good of our brothers and sisters, God always provides all that we need.

At the end of this day, I felt even more blessed that I did when I started the day at 4 o'clock in the morning, getting up to bake 2 turkey's myself. I wish all of you a blessed Thanksgiving, and I pray that we all realize that every day is a day of Thanksgiving and every day we really can do something for someone else in need. I really believe the genuineness of people's gratitude our community of Eden Park and our community of faith at St. Paul are better, stronger and more grateful tonight because of blessings shared ... given and received!



About the author:

Father Rick Andrus, SVD is pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. St. Paul is a dynamic parish that is actively involved in social issues in the city of Baton Rouge.

in a word or two

On Christmas day, 1864, the beloved poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow received word that his son, a soldier in the Civil War, had been wounded.

Just two years before, Henry had lost his wife in a fire. As this devout Christian man sat alone with his grief, on the most joyful of Holy Days, he penned words of hope to challenge his own despair.

He called his composition Christmas Bells. Little did he know that those words would someday be set to music and become a blessing to millions of people around the world.

I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Till ringing, singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head
'There is no peace on earth,' I said,
'For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.'

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.'

'Christendom no longer exists,' pope says,
explaining need to revamp Curia

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The ongoing reform of the Roman Curia is a necessary part of the Catholic Church's fidelity to its mission to proclaim the Gospel, recognizing that very few countries today can be described as "Christian" and that new ways of evangelizing are necessary,

Pope Francis said. But attempts to meet the new challenges are threatened by "the temptation of assume an attitude of rigidity," the pope said Dec. 21 during his traditional pre-Christmas meeting with cardinals and top officials of Vatican offices. "Rigidity, which is born of the fear of change, ends up erecting fences and obstacles on the terrain of the common good, turning it into a minefield of incomprehension and of hatred," the pope said. "And today this temptation of rigidity has become very evident." Pope Francis quoted from St. John Henry Newman, whom he canonized in October: "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." Conversion and transformation are part of an individual's response to God's call, but also must take place within the Curia, which is called to be at the service of the church in its efforts to share the Gospel, he said.

Merry Christmas from IN A WORD and Divine Word Missionaries

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Arkansas.

IN A WORD is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center. Rev. James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, office manager; consultant.

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Electronic messages to our inawordsvd@gmail.com. IN A WORD is not published during July and August.

Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>