

in a

WordTM

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

Volume 40 No. 10 December 2021

CHRISTMAS IS THE GIFT
THAT KEEPS GIVING

Photo by Rev. James Pawlicki, SVD

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.

Father LeDoux passed away in 2019. He wrote this article for IN A WORD in 2003. His message is timeless.

Former USCCB official and leading voice for Black Catholics dies at 75

By Mary K. Tilghman Catholic News Service

BALTIMORE (CNS) -- A funeral Mass was offered Nov. 23 at St. Peter Claver Church in West Baltimore for Beverly A. Carroll, a social justice advocate who spent her life raising her voice for African American Catholics in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the United States and the world.

Carroll, the founding director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Black Catholics, died Nov. 13. She was 75.

Bishop John H. Ricard, a former auxiliary bishop of Baltimore and current superior general of the Baltimore-based Josephites, celebrated the Mass for his friend. Carroll worked for many years with Bishop Ricard, who also is the retired bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

"She was a great advocate for the community, for the church, for African Americans in the church," said Josephite Father Ray P. Bomberger, pastor of St. Peter Claver Parish, to which Carroll belonged her whole life. "She was interested in the church, the people of the church, what was going on, (and) how we could do it better," he said.

Father Bomberger praised Carroll's devotion to her church, both in her home community and around the country, as well as her interest in education and social justice. Carroll was a lifelong parishioner of St. Peter Claver, where she served as a corporator and parish council member.

Carroll, he noted, was instrumental in the rebirth of the National Black Catholic Congress. Under the leadership of Bishop Ricard, the congress, which met five times in the late 19th century, was reactivated. It first met in 1987 and has continued to gather every five years.

One of the results of that first meeting, according to NBCC documents, was the formation of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, of which Carroll served as founding director.

In addition, she served as a staff member to the Subcommittee for African American Affairs at the USCCB. Carroll also led a delegation of African American Catholic women to an international meeting of women in Johannesburg as well as participating in a conference held in Nigeria to implement the U.S. bishops' document on solidarity with Africa.

Speaking at a 2005 event in Washington, Carroll joined other social justice advocates in noting that

African American and Hispanic Catholics need a more institutionalized voice in the church's social ministry.

"We have to find ways to get all voices around the table," Carroll said, according to a report by Catholic News Service. "We can't afford to have some persons outside and some persons in."

Carroll, the daughter of James and Lillian Carroll, served for many years as chief staff officer in the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Office of Urban Vicar. She was chairwoman of the Father Charles A. Hall Cluster School Board and also served on the boards of Sandtown-Winchester Academy and the Bon Secours Medical Health system.

For her efforts, in 2012, the year she retired, she received the Martin Luther King Award from the Archdiocese of Baltimore as well as an honorary doctorate of humane letters from her alma mater, Siena College in Loudonville, New York. That year, she also received the Servant of Christ Award-Lifetime Achievement Honors from the National Black Catholic Congress XI.

A 1964 graduate of Baltimore's Frederick Douglass High School, Carroll held bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Maryland.

During her funeral, Therese Wilson Favors, a longtime Catholic educator and former director of the Baltimore archdiocesan Office of Black Catholic Ministries, shared this description of Carroll from the Mass program: "Rooted in family life and bundled up in love Beverly was the Carroll family matriarch showering her family with love and wisdom."

"She urged her family to value spiritual formation and academic achievement as healthy successful paths to the future," Wilson Favors read. "Beverly encouraged her family to serve and help others in this journey of life. She integrated her life journey into their life journey."

Tilghman writes for the Catholic Review, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.



Beverly Carroll, founding executive director of the Secretariat for African-American Catholics at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, is pictured in a 2005 photo. (CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec)

in a word or two

On Christmas day, 1864, the 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.'

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