

Homily

Christmas - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 25, 2019

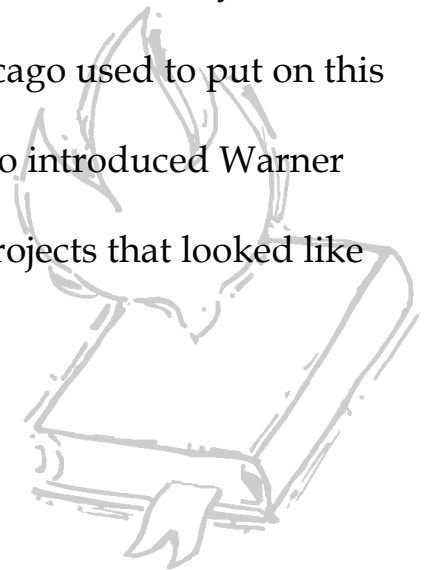
*There must have been some magic in
That old silk hat they found.
For when they placed it on his head
He began to dance around.*

*Frosty the Snowman was a jolly happy soul
With a corn-cobbed pipe and a button nose
And two eyes made out of coal.*

*Frosty the Snowman was a fairy tale they say
He was made of snow but the children know
How he came to life one day.*

*"Dear Bishop Conlon: Bring out the men in the white coats... Fr. Pete has
lost it again..."*

How many of you remember "The Ray Raynor Show" from your
childhood? For decades, WGN television in Chicago used to put on this
live program with a guy wearing a jumpsuit who introduced Warner
Brothers' Cartoons and created arts and crafts projects that looked like



disasters. The guy would take us on tours through the Lincoln Park Zoo and have conversations with a stuffed dog named Cuddley-Duddley.

As I lived out on the farm in Sandwich, IL and raised the chickens, geese, quail and sheep, we really had no television station except the one that showed the Ray Raynor show, Garfield Goose, Bozo's Circus and Cubs' Baseball. We walked a mile and a half each way, each day to and from school (who needed school busses?) and all we had for entertainment was the time we kids spent with each other, the animals on the farm and the one television station with good reception. (Sadly, every time my family served duck at the table, my siblings would try to make me cry by saying that my mother killed "Chelveston," a Ray Raynor reference that only those who lived in the 1970s would understand.)

Every Christmastime, Ray Raynor would broadcast on television three cheesy songs produced in 1952 which were recently digitized by the Museum of Broadcast Communication in Chicago. One of the songs was the aforementioned "*Frosty the Snowman*"; another was called "*Suzy*

Snowflake." The one I liked the most was the song about Santa's three little elves; tell me if you remember this one...

*Now Hardrock's the driver up there by his sleigh
Coco reads maps and he shows him the way
Though old Santa really has no need for Joe,
But takes him 'cause he loves him so.*

*Oh-lee-o-lay-dee, o-lay-dee-I-ay
Donner and Blitzen, away, away
Oh-lee-o-lay-dee, o-lay-dee-I-oh
I'm Hardrock! I'm Coco! I'm Joe!*

*And Santa is busy with his happy pack;
He trusts his drivers and never looks back.
Oh-lee-o-lay-dee, o-lay-dee-I-oh
I'm Hardrock! I'm Coco! I'm Joe!*

A few years ago, I wanted to try my hand writing Christmas music again to relive that spirit of innocence. I write music on the side as kind of a personal hobby because I wanted to return to a spirit of innocence that the shows from my youth used to convey. I believe that programs like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* or *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* have endured because they convey a kindness not seen in the sarcasm and irony that fill the programs of today's age

For me, this type of activity reminds me of the innocence of Christmas that I must retain each year to understand truly what this season is supposed to mean. Amid the commercialism and the rushed need to clean the house for guests and such, the whole point of the season that I need to remember is that a light has penetrated the darkness to bring hope to a world in need of the Savior. Without the light, the presents and decorations mean absolutely nothing. With the light, we are guided towards eternal love. This is the only gift that matters to the faithful Christian, the most important gift of this Christmas Season.

I was thinking to myself about lying in bed at night in a dark room. For some people, the room might seem a little scary, being dark and all. It did for the child whose father was the Protestant Reformist named Martin Luther, who lived about some 500 years ago. This man Martin wanted to show his son how, in the darkness of night, that there was nothing to fear, for this light of God shines in our hearts as much as it does in the sky.

So one night, in a way to show his son how wonderful this light of God was, Martin went outside of his house, cut down an evergreen tree and brought it into his home. He then attached candles to his tree, so his son could see what stars would look like in the middle of an indoor forest. From that first example, Martin introduced what we today call Christmas lights, lights that represent the stars in the sky outside. (Of course, our parents of today's age would readily attach lit candles to evergreen trees indoors, not thinking twice about any insurance issues that might apply...)

This particular year, these Christmas lights serve as a poignant symbol of this light in the sky, especially in lieu of the funeral Mass of a man named Louis Egizio whose service I celebrated this Christmas Eve morning. Louis' family opted to celebrate this funeral service early for the sake of their mother, who wanted to remember her fifty years of marriage on this very special day.

The day was poignant for me because of a song that Louis often sang to his children during their formative days, a song that I have

designated as a new Christmas Carol for the Fr. Pete Jankowski
collection:

*You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
You make me happy when skies are gray.
You'll never know, dear, how much I love you.
Please don't take that sunshine away.*

For this particular family, the song reminds them of times gone by when their father used to sing this tune to his children during their formative days. For the state of Louisiana, it serves as their state song, written by Jimmie Davis just before he ran for governor of the state in 1942. For me, the song harkens me to a time in Church history where the pagan faith celebrated December 25th as the feast of the pagan sun god who appeared during the winter solstice (the darkest night of the year) to conquer the darkness and bring light back to the people. Today's age celebrates the solstice a few days earlier and Mother Church changed the theme of this day in the fourth century from a pagan god to the Son of the One God who came to bring light to a people seeking direction to heaven.

Some years ago, I reflected on how the prophet Isaiah perceived this light, as some kind of beacon which revealed itself within the darkness of the earth. I think to myself that this beacon of light rests in us today, a light presented to us at baptism, a light that constantly leads us to the presence of the divine as long as we gaze our eyes upon it and what it represents. Isaiah offers this vision in the 60th chapter of the book attributed to his name, a text we read once a year, every year, at the feast of the Epiphany, as wise men are led by this light to the child-king of salvation. Isaiah writes,

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds cover the peoples;
but upon you the LORD shines,
and over you appears his glory.
Nations shall walk by your light,
and kings by your shining radiance.
Raise your eyes and look about;
they all gather and come to you:
your sons come from afar,
and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.

Then you shall be radiant at what you see,
your heart shall throb and overflow,
for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you,

the wealth of nations shall be brought to you.

So as we begin this wonderful season of the star, I wanted to offer a song of praise for that star in the sky, based on this 60th chapter of the prophet Isaiah. I wrote this song a few years ago which speaks about the stars in the darkness, for the stars in our church. In essence, I tried to create a Christmas Lullaby that dreams of the stars in the night. As the lights are dimmed inside, I ask you to watch those lights on the trees and think about the angels that care over you at this moment, the lights of God that lead you to Jesus today. For when we all see this light of Christ, both at Christmas and at our baptisms, that light shining in our hearts throughout the years, then we realize we have cause to sing every day about the wonders of God's presence. This song of light is my present and prayer for you today:

*Lay down, dear children, rest for the night;
A glimmering star shines down with its light.
So do not fear as darkness abounds-
The light has now gathered around.*

*The voice of God now sings gentle song;
The choirs of angels joining along.*

*So listen closely, follow the sound-
The angels have gathered around*

*They come from heavens, near and far
To follow the light; to capture the star.
And when they feel that gentle glow,
That glimmering ember in their soul*

*Then to the lands the light will then pour,
The caravans come, the praises will soar.
The ray of light has glistened the earth
And we will receive a new birth.*

*With tenderness that light we uphold,
A richness of frankincense and of gold.
And when we share the light that we found
The nations come gathering around.*

*So rest my children under the star;
The child of light has come from afar.
He sings his song, his light has come down
And nations have gathered around.
The angels have gathered around.
And love has now gathered around.*

May this beacon of light, this child-like innocence lead us to the eternal presence of God. This is the one gift that really counts this Christmas Season. This is our prayer.