

Homily

Christmas - C

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
December 25, 2018

*Preached on the Royal Caribbean's Enchantment of the Seas Cruise Ship
at the Christmas Services...*

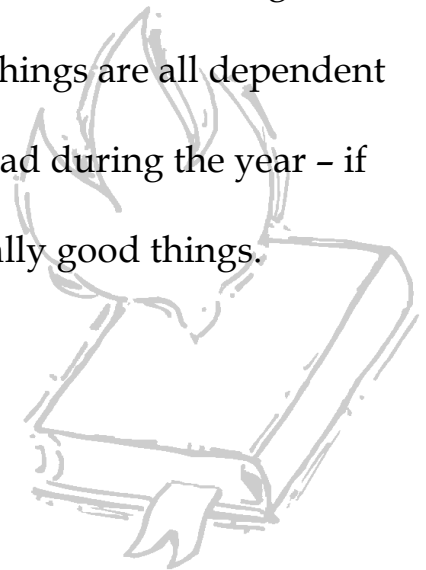
*I put a tack on teacher's chair -
Somebody snitched on me.
I tied a knot in Susie's hair -
Somebody snitched on me.*

*Oh, I'm gettin' nuttin' for Christmas;
Mommy and daddy are mad.
I'm getting' nuttin' for Christmas
'Cause I ain't been nuttin' but bad.*

*I spilled some ink on mommy's rug,
I made Tommy eat a bug,
Broke my grandpa's Shaving Mug -
Somebody snitched on me.*

*So ya better be good, whatever you do,
'Cause if you're not, I'm warning you -
You'll get nuttin' for Christmas!!!*

Ladies and gentlemen, let me present to you *the bad side of the Christmas message*. We are told by our parents that if we have been good boys and girls, then Santa Claus might fill our Christmas stockings with really good things. We are told that these good things are all dependent on the manner in which we have been good or bad during the year - if we are *really good* then we get rewarded with really good things.



And then there is *the bad side* which I have experienced. This year, as I boarded this ship from the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line, I encountered what I am going to call “Captain Claus, who *grilled* me over whether I have been a naughty or nice priest this last year, even though I told him that I said my daily prayers and attended Masses every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. Santa Captain then asked me how he wanted to reward me being good by filling my Christmas stocking with a 36-ounce porterhouse steak with sautéed onions, a new set of breviary ribbons, and all those things a good priest would want for Christmas.

It was at this point, after I ran down my wish list for Christmas, that the Santa Captain Claus responded to my requests in a way that became the inspiration for this year’s homily. Santa Captain gave me one of his famous “thumbs down” and said to me, “Fr. Peter, this Christmas you are going to get *exactly what you deserve...*” Just before I came to Mass, I found a hung Christmas stocking hanging outside my cabin. This is what Santa Captain Claus put into my Christmas stocking...

(Pull out your Christmas stocking)

- #1 One large potato
- #2 One large onion
- #3 A bunch of twigs
- #4 A box of rock candy
- #5 And a chunk of coal, purchased on Ebay by Santa himself for \$15.

Boo Hoo!

I learned a valuable lesson about my Christmas visit from Santa this year. I learned that the traditions of Christmas are not all good – the gift-giving part of Christmas has a *bad side* as well. Tradition tells us that if you have been a really *bad* person, that this jolly fellow will not be pleased with you and instead of filling your stocking with really good things, he might present you with really nasty stuff. In the Slovak countries, St. Nicholas fills the bad children’s stockings with onion or potato peels. In Belgium, Santa Claus gives bad kids a bunch of twigs in their stocking. The French Santa Claus takes the twigs one step further by having a partner accompany him, a partner named *Père Fouettard* or “Father Spanking,” who uses the sticks in a not so nice way.

In the United States, Santa might stick rock candy in your stocking if you have been bad. But the worst thing you can find in your stocking is the dreaded chunk of coal. And nowadays coal isn't easy to find - this particular piece of coal cost poor old Santa \$15 on eBay, which pretty much states that Santa is willing to fork over cold hard cash to tell you exactly how bad of a priest I have been this holiday season.

I started thinking about the symbolism that all these items represent throughout the world and the symbolism that other presents represent as well. Some kids might get the impression in this world that the better they act, the more presents they will get. If they wash the dishes an extra day during the week, maybe Santa will get them some special present which they have been desiring all throughout the year.

The message I wish to offer you this Christmas Season may be a little stark and, at first, a little disheartening. But if you think about the message, you might just find it to be a message of hope that will pay dividends in the long run. The Christmas message I offer you is this:
None of us deserve or can earn or merit the gifts that are under the tree.

None of us can pay God back for the gift that is found in that manger in church.

Think about this – your parents put a roof over your head, food on the table, clothes on your back, provide you an education and lovingly place a truckload of gifts under the tree for you every Christmas. Do any of us really think that washing the dishes or taking out the garbage each week really makes up for everything our parents do for us? Why do our parents even do all these things, knowing we kids cannot ever pay them back adequately?

Take our Lord for an example. Here is a Lord who came down to us from a perfect existence, assumed our frail human nature, bore upon himself all the weaknesses of humanity with the exception of sin, and suffered and died on a cross as the penalty for that sin. Do we really think that just going to Mass on Sundays or saying our prayers each day is going to repay our Lord adequately for everything he has done for us? Why does our Lord even make an effort to help us out in such a radical

way knowing we really don't deserve and certainly can't pay back what he has done for us?

The answer, of course, is found in one word, the most important word from the three theological virtues, and that word is *charity*. Charity - a love filled with the grace of God that is neither earned nor deserved but given to us anyway because that is the gift of the parent to the child, from the teacher to the student. What parent would abandon their child when they run into personal troubles in life, who have bad situations with the law or with whatever other sins exist in the world? Would that Christian parent not walk the path with their child out of an overflowing love and desire to see their child be well? This gift of charity, this God-inspired love, becomes the key to understanding the end of the First Eucharistic Prayer, the prayer the priest offers when Christ changes the bread and wine through that priest into Christ's Body and Blood. In this prayer, our dependence on God is put into perspective. This prayer specifically shows us that this gift of God is one

that is not earned by us but given freely by God. Specifically, the prayer ends with these words...

From the Old Version... Though we are sinners, we trust in (you, our God, for) mercy and love. Do not consider what we truly deserve but grant us your forgiveness through Christ our Lord. Through him you give us all these gifts. You fill them with life and goodness; you bless them and make them holy.

From the New Version, circa 2011... admit us, we beseech you, into their company, not weighing our merits, but granting us your pardon, through Christ our Lord, through whom you continue to make all these good things, O Lord; you sanctify them, fill them with life, bless them and bestow them upon us.

The fact is, we all are sinners and we are never going to repay that which our Lord, our parents, or the saints of the world have given us. This doesn't mean that we don't try to be good people or that we shouldn't make up for the sins that we have committed. But when any of us experience the type of love that has been given to us, we realize that this love is freely given and sets the example towards the way we should treat other people. It is because of this sense of Christian charity

that makes us understand why we come to Mass on Sunday, why we follow God's commandments and teachings, and why we devote our lives towards loving others for no other reason than for love itself.

And once we understand the import of such a gift, we then become inspired to be grace-filled loving people towards the others around us. We dedicate our lives loving our children and spouses, loving the friends and neighbors, loving the strangers, the poor, the lame and the helpless more than they can ever pay us back not because we are looking for some type of remuneration but because that life of charity reflects that same type of love that has been given to us by our Lord.

Through this life of loving like God, we start realizing that the child-like innocence of these young people around us reminds us of the God-child innocence that graced our world 2000 years ago. Knowing of our sinful nature and our inability to honor him with the kind of overflowing grace that he offers us, God assumes a human nature anyway and lives the life of a fragile human being anyway. He encounters all things that are human with the exception of sin - he is

raised by parents, he must endure all the human limitations of life. For our sakes, he chooses to die so that in this one human nature all of humanity may find comfort.

And from this example of faith, we encounter hundreds and thousands of examples of Christians within our history who model this Christ-like sacrifice through the gift of charity. On this particular celebration, the world has decided to attach itself on the one Christian named Nicholas, who some seventeen hundred years ago secretly offered this Christian Charity to those he served as bishop in Asia Minor, especially those who lived without some of the basic necessities of life.

We learn from all these individuals that the person of Christ did not seek love back in equal measures for that type of love is not possible, no matter what we do. But if we learn to love like he loves and to love him like he loves us, then maybe we realize that the grace-filled Christian in the Christmas Season never does not seek or desire payment for the services they offer in the world. Rather, similar to the kind of life

purported by St. Augustine some 1500 years ago, our lives are singularly devoted to giving of our hearts to others in God's name as God has done for us. Augustine writes, *"(Charity) is itself the fulfillment of all our works. There is the goal; that is why we run: we run toward it, and once we reach it, in it we shall find rest."* (see CCC #1829)

As we celebrate the feast of our Lord's nativity, I challenge you to build a relationship with God, to "come home" to Christ and live the life of love as modeled by a Lord who loves us even when sometimes we don't love God, with parents who love their kids even when the kids sometimes forget about their parents' love. May we realize that we have received something for Christmas that transcends coal and presents and stockings, something that we should cherish with all our hearts. We have received the presence of our Lord in our midst, the gift that will guide us to the eternal Christmas that awaits us in heaven. May we recognize this gift, embrace that gift of Christ in our hearts, and share this gift with others for no other reason than to reflect the unconditional

love that our Lord showers upon us every moment of our lives. In other words, let us make this Christmas Merry by allowing God's charity to become part of the season, to become *all of the season*. This is our prayer.