

Living the Spirit Christmas Memories

You will find Advent themes on the parish website. I am now writing about some personal thoughts of Christmas. Like many of my age, my mind goes back in memory to early days of my life. In this eighty-seventh Christmas of my life I shall find Christmas present in its ever changing way.

Many retired priests, among whom I place myself, find Christmas has become a more spiritual celebration. This is simply because so much of the material celebration has become less important in their lives. Yet there remains the usual awe at how the Lord manages to reveal Himself once again as the infant Savior.

As human powers begin to wane, it is possible to go beyond the worldly images of Christmas. Long ago we have set aside the gift-bearer of childhood days. We find ourselves not looking forward to receiving gifts. In fact, I find myself hoping I don't receive things. I feel they bring attachment that soon enough I must let go.

One precious and joyous memory treasure chest contains the recollection of the people who were the real gifts of God in our lives. I cannot celebrate these days without thinking of the good Mother given me. She was all mine, and I was all hers. I hope my readers have similar memories. Right now I can recall so many ordinary things. I think of how one day in my youth we were out to dinner at a Chinese restaurant. I have not the slightest memory of what we ate. I do recall how cold it was as we were waiting for the trolley to take us home. The cold, however, seemed to be held away from me by the warmth of the closeness of --- what am I say here? -- yes, Love.

I was to marvel at how a mother's love does not change with time. In her last years in no doubt painful times for her, she proved herself still the mother who did not hesitate to give good advice. Mother loved priests, and she made sure I knew I was not the only one! I was the one who needed the haircut; I was the one who wasn't to forget my sister's birthday. I am still wondering just what she would say to me today.

There is a loneliness in recalling past friends and loved ones. One can get emotional smiles from recalling such little things. I recall how my grandmother always made a fruitcake -- is there anyone who really likes fruitcake? Since I took the pledge, as the saying goes, at my Confirmation at an early age, you can only imagine how upset I was when I found out she put rum or some other thing in her cake. From that time I shunned it -- and I admit I was glad to do so. But I also admit I could never forego her apple cake. It didn't have to be Weihnachtsfest to persuade her to make it!

My memory goes back to a Christmas that was my first away from home. It was spent in 1962 at Engleburg in Switzerland. School was on holiday, and the trip from Rome was itself an adventure. We woke up to find that an avalanche had delayed our trip, and there was no potable water or food on the train. That made for a good old fashioned Advent!

On arrival at St. Josef's Haus the nun looked at me and said, "You will say the 5:30 A.M. Mass. I looked at my younger confreres and said –"No- Not me, one of you!"

I am writing all this to show that Christmas makes no sense unless we bring to our understanding of it something of the meaning of the Incarnation. It is a proof that the divine became human in a way that transcends the ordinary life of all of us. It means that Jesus is the One always present to those who allow Him to be so. At this time of year we think of Him as the Infant – very human indeed. But we never forget He is all-powerful, truly the Son of God. We renew our faith, and accept that the real music of Christmas is that of the angels. Our carols and hymns and even our modern songs about reindeer may well be a renewal of the angelic notes. Time for Glory! Time for joy! Time when expectancy has become reality! The loneliness we may have seems so much less powerful. Why? I will let you think why this could be. I may not be sure enough to give one only answer.

If I have memories of the past I also have present thoughts. I write this before Christmas but I do manage to get what is called the Christmas spirit. Not as much as before maybe, but enough. I am engrossed in preparing my cards to send out. I have already received a few, but I will not open them until later. If I read them at Christmas, I usually reread them afterwards. I admit that the sentiments are from Hallmark, but I marvel at how the words reveal the love that is sent with them.

The Savior came to bring good news. He tells us so much truth, so much wisdom that a lifetime is never long enough to make it come alive in our own thought and way of living. This brings me to the message that we must somehow find a way to make some of the time at Christmas a time of silence. Is the message of the Christmas "Silent Night" not meant to ask us to share the silence of a love that cannot be expressed?

This is a time to tell the good news. We must take up the angelic mission and go tell it to all. No more "Happy Holiday" greeting, only the powerful greeting about Christmas. And for us it means the Mass. How we should wish all to know the value of the Mass as the prayer of a grateful mankind to a God who did not think it below His dignity to become an infant like one of us! If you have seen any infant babe lately, do you manage to realize once you were that too? If we have grown up, it is to multiply all that is good in humanity – and its creative force placed within us by a loving Father. Time, then, to become again the infant, the child, the youth, the adult, and even the old – but always the image of that same loving God, who creates nothing that is not good.

It is my sincere prayer that all of you who read this may have found some spiritual thoughts, but also managed to recall some very human memories of your own life story. Pope Francis likes to talk about his grandmother. Doesn't that make him seem more human to us. It does to me. So we recall the gifts we have received that are signs of love that was behind them.

But do not forget the real gift of Christmas. It was a Child. The gift changed the world of humanity, and opened the way to new life, and life in abundance. Time to live Christmas! May yours be Merry and bright!

God love and bless you!

Monsignor Morrison

***O Come, All You Faithful, Joyful and triumphant!
Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ the Lord!***