

I have purposely reprinted the first page of this insert. While this Sunday of Advent tells us to rejoice, we must be aware of those fellow Christians who have little reason for worldly joy. We are seeing in many parts of the world a terrible wave of persecution for Christians. While we may hope to see some intervention by political powers, we know we cannot rely on it.

What are we to do? Above all we must turn to the Lord in prayer. Ask him to give those suffering persecution the grace to be courageous. We must ask the Lord to give them the spiritual graces to bring some good to the world and the Church by their pain and suffering. As we look back in history to the first ages of the Church, we find that the persecutions Christians endured actually bore much fruit. The first good effect was to make saints of the persecuted. They achieved the final and best goal of their living. Their adherence to the faith was an exemplary sharing in the mission of the Lord. By their lives they presented the model for all future Christians in an age of persecution. We all know how the blood of the martyrs was the seed of building up the Church.

It is my hope that you will stop for a few minutes before Christmas to pray for the persecuted. Pray also for those who find living their faith a great difficulty in other situations. Beseech the Holy Spirit to give them the graces they need, even if they do not ask for them. In doing this, we must always persevere. I think of the example of St. Monica who prayed for years that her son Augustine would be converted to a life of being a Christian. Perhaps this is the kind of prayer we need to offer for many of our own friends, loved ones and those close to us.

I have mentioned a number of times the work of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. From time to time you may have seen Bill Donahue, its spokesman, on TV. This League publishes a newsletter or journal called "*Catalyst*." In it this month's edition we learn of many attacks on Christmas. There is a desire to be "politically correct" by abolishing in big or little ways the celebration of Christmas as a recognized civil holiday. Our public schools fear using the word "Christmas" as a violation of others' religious rights.

There is in this journal a discussion of Selective Sensibilities. The Catholic League continues to confront bigotry, while wondering why Catholics seem to accept that they should be the butt of malicious humor. Here is an example: "When a woman in her 60's is fired for saying "God Bless you" – she had the audacity to say this to voters after they had cast their ballot – we have another case of madness. Believe it or not, she actually invoked this phrase when someone sneezed. It's true. Why she wasn't guillotined is not certain."

"... it is open season on Christians: in nations run by Muslims and communists, they are being murdered and oppressed in record numbers; in democratic nations, they are being discriminated against by militant secularists. This is where religious extremists and secular extremists come together. Both are a menace to religious liberty."

Advent is a good time to pray a little more than usual. Why not? Meanwhile, let us do all our preparations for Christmas in a truly Catholic and Christian spirit. Make your actions come alive with the virtues of faith and love. And do not fail to pray to the Lord for your own spiritual good. He is ready to give you the best of Christmas gifts – Himself!

God bless you!
Monsignor Morrison

12/14/14

Living the Spirit- a Story

[Another reflection worth rereading in this time of grace]

As we celebrate this third Sunday of Advent we take time to realize how our faith is the source of great spiritual joy. The opening antiphon (Introit) tells us “*Gaudete!* Rejoice in the Lord always!” Sometimes this joy can only be found in hope. It is found so often in our relationship to others. *The Tablet* had this short excerpt describing a different Christmas from our own.

“Christmas 1941, in Ravensbruck concentration camp.

Days in the camp could not be measured against any normal yardstick. Every day lasted an eternity. It was an unimaginable nightmare. And so we went on, with no day of rest and the voice that goaded without cease: “Get a move on, faster, faster, faster!”

Our first Christmas in the camp. I remember it so well! Winter was especially cruel to us that year, with howling gales and sharp frosts, and Christmas Eve exactly like any other day. The overseer that night was a “good one” and she allowed each group to sing a national carol. The Germans sang first, though “Silent Night” sounded strangely ill-suited to those surroundings. We Poles at first didn’t want to join in, but then we changed our minds. Why not sing a Polish carol and hear it wing its way into the night sky? But when we came to the words, “Take my hand. O Christ Child”, we choked on our tears and could not continue....

We always tried to avoid tears. On that occasion darkness swam before my eyes. In our mind’s eye we all pictured the familiar images of home: the Christmas wafer...the Christmas tree... well-loved faces...the church organ...the church itself at Midnight Mass. What were our loved ones doing that night? Were they really people, somewhere in the world, who were gathering peacefully round a green fir tree in love and celebration?

Getting through that day - or rather that Vigil night - was painful. On our return to the block we broke down completely and cried our hearts out. It was Joanna’s and Wladka’s fault. On a table they had placed a tiny Christmas tree – where they obtained it was their secret – and on the tree were little toys Joanna had carved out of toothbrush handles.... Along with our little Polish Christmas tree, [all] reminders of our lost freedom.

We felt terribly sad, and yet somehow that day we regained our identity. **Once again we discovered the hope that, after all, we were still living, breathing, sentient human beings and suddenly we felt very close and peaceful in each other’s company.**

And so Christmas passed without any more tears being shed, though they were always just below the surface.”

Wanda Poltawska in *And I am Afraid of my Dreams*, 1987; *The Tablet*, Dec. 1989

Reading this brief story reminds me of how blessed I have been. I hope you can say the same. Yet sometimes our memories of Christmas can be reminders of difficulties and sadness, or expectations not met. We miss loved ones, and need to remember what our faith tells us about the ultimate future of happiness for those who love God. Let us pray that our future Christmases will be spent in freedom, a freedom of the spirit and freedom in our beloved country.

God love you always!
Monsignor David Morrison