



STEWARDSHIP

A VISION FOR LIVING AS A DISCIPLE IN THE DIOCESE OF CALGARY

Volume 1, Issue 1 Advent/Christmas

"Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option."
from *Stewardship: A Disciples Response*

Advent Reflection

Advent signals the beginning of a new year in the liturgical calendar. The secular calendar begins on January 1st, usually preceded by a big celebration to blow-out the old year and welcome the new. In some ways the secular New Year celebration is tied to the secular Christmas celebration. Both are dominated by a climate of revelry and impose a stubborn veneer of cheerfulness upon our society. It is no wonder that the secular Christmas season is considered one of the most stressful times of year in North America. After all, how many of us can live up to such a demanding expectation to be happy? It is interesting then that the church year does not begin with a party to commemorate the Nativity of the Lord. Instead, the liturgical calendar offers a more suitably sober start to the year with the season of Advent.

Although it is good news that God fulfils His promise of salvation by sending His Son to be Incarnate, Jesus and His family faced many challenges right from the start. Imagine giving birth in a stable surrounded by animals and strangers. Imagine then travelling on a donkey to a foreign land to escape King Herod's slaughter of innocent children. It is easy to become disillusioned about celebrating Christmas when our own lives and the lives of those around us fail to imitate the saccharine sentimentality with which the Christmas story is often portrayed. It was however, precisely because He cared so much for our suffering, our wounds, and our pain that God sent the Messiah into this dangerous world. By this gift God entered our suffering to save us (J. Richard Middleton, "Let's Put Herod back into Christmas").

The season of advent, which means 'a coming' from the Latin word *adventus*, prepares us to receive God's gift of the Incarnation. During advent we prepare not only to commemorate the historic birth of the Saviour but we also prepare for when Christ will come again. To that end advent calls us to gather up our pain and the sin of our world and lay it before the Lord. We can also welcome Christ's daily visitation in our lives by participating in the sacrifice of the altar, by alleviating the burdens of one another, and by accepting the many hands that lift us from despair. While store jingles may urge us to forget our troubles, the church's season of Advent invites us to bring forward the personal pain in our hearts and the communal burdens in our world as a fitting preparation to receive the gift of the Saviour at Christmas.

Let us prepare an offering of whatever difficulty we are facing in order to welcome with gratitude the hope and salvation offered to us in the birth, return, and abiding presence of the Messiah.

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Disciple's Word

Stewardship lived makes a difference in the heart—*Diane Fisher, Holy Spirit*

We should develop the need to serve and give continuously—*Joe Hemraj, St. Thomas More*

Stewardship is the beginning of renewal within our parish—*LaVar Payne, Holy Family*

Stewardship involves giving oneself totally to the Lord—*Marilyn McClinchey, Holy Trinity*

Disciple's Response



John Arbeau, Dan Frederick, Debbie Parsons, and Brenda Paul from St. John the Evangelist after

In October over thirty representatives from parishes around the diocese travelled to San Francisco California to attend the International Catholic Stewardship Conference (ICSC). The Calgary continent was certainly the largest from Canada and one of the best represented dioceses at the conference as a whole. Participants gathered before the conference to discuss where their parishes were on the stewardship journey and what they hoped to learn at the conference. Then they generously left their family, work, and personal commitments to learn about stewardship as a way of life. In San Francisco the participants enjoyed four jam-packed

days of workshops, plenary lectures, and conversations with hundreds of other parishioners, clergy, parish and diocesan staff, and world famous leaders in the stewardship movement. Participants returned with a deeper understanding of stewardship and renewed zeal to foster this spirituality in their hearts and the hearts of their parish communities. When you meet those who attended, please invite them to share what they learned!



Fr. Jack Pereira of Holy Spirit parish at the Cathedral in San Francisco

Weekly Bulletin Reflections

November 27, 2005

1st Sunday of Advent

It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. (Mark 13:34)

God has left us in charge of His creation on earth. We each have special work that we can do for God. With what has God entrusted you?

December 4, 2005

2nd Sunday of Advent

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care. (Isaiah 40:11)

The Lord is gentle and loving in His care for us. He ensures that we have all we truly need. How do you give thanks to God for His care?

December 11, 2005

3rd Sunday of Advent

The spirit of the Lord God has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me. (Isaiah 61:1)
Gaudete! Rejoice! In baptism the Lord has chosen you. Through your participation in the eucharist

God sends you to fulfil His mission on earth.

December 18, 2005

4th Sunday of Advent

Mary, do not be afraid. (Luke 1:30)

Are you afraid of being a true disciple of Jesus? To express this discipleship through good stewardship is a radical and counter-cultural life choice. Do not be afraid. *The Lord is with you.*

December 25, 2005

Nativity of the Lord

What we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God. (Tit. 2: 12)

For our salvation God gave us everything He had—He gave us His only Son, Jesus. How do we say 'thank you' for a gift like that? Recognising the magnitude of God's gift this Christmas should change the orientation of our lives. Christmas calls us to make stewardship a way of life.

January 1, 2006

Mary Mother of God

The shepherds went back glorifying and praising

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Christmas Season Stress Relief

From the Pastoral Centre

1. **Being, not buying.** Give gifts of personal presence. Examples include promising to pray for someone, committing to a date-night with your spouse, or making a coupon book of services such as babysitting, cooking, and help with housework.—*Julie Kohler, Family Resource Centre*
2. **Know what is important.** Focus on the birth of Christ and spend time with your family.—*Dennis Gruenwald, Charities and Development*
3. **Alternative Gifts.** Contribute to a charitable organisation in the name of the gift recipient. Buy items that have been obtained using fair trade practices, that support local artisans, or encourage environmental conservation.—*Simone Brosig, Stewardship*
4. **Celebrate with those who are waiting.** Look to see who is living the Advent experience today: parents waiting for a child, the elderly and infirm waiting to die, those waiting for healing, the unemployed waiting for a job, and the anxious waiting for news.—*Christine Mader, Liturgy Office*
5. **Plan ahead.** Buy all your gifts before December to avoid crowds and buying under pressure. Spend December doing activities with those you love such as skating, baking, decorating, attending Christmas concerts, and church services.—*Gina Hunter, Catholic Charities*
6. **Keep in mind the true meaning of Advent and Christmas.**—*Fr. John Schuster, Vicar General*
7. **Silence.** Give yourself even just 5 minutes in a peaceful environment. I turn off the television, the stereo, and the lights and sit in the glow of the Christmas tree and crèche that I set up in my home.—*Mary McGinness, Health Care Apostolate*
8. **Sing!** It makes us feel good and proclaims the saving message of the coming of our Saviour.—*Carol Hollywood, Library*
9. **Don't overdo it.** Don't over prepare. Don't overcook. Don't overeat. Don't overbook. You'll feel better all around.—*Estelle Thoen and Lea Blust, Youth Ministry*
10. **Ask for help.** Instead of taking on a whole Christmas dinner, make it a potluck or divide up the work among different people.—*Diane Jackman, Bishop's Office*
11. **Be Grateful.** Receive and open gifts mindfully, appreciating what they are and what they represent. Say thank-you to the giver. And most of all, thank God for sending his Word into the world as the Child Jesus.—*Simone Brosig, Stewardship*

(Continued from page 2)

God for all they had heard and seen. (Luke 2: 20)

The shepherds proclaimed the good news of the Messiah's birth. What miracles have you seen this Christmas season? How can you proclaim the good news?

January 8, 2006

Epiphany

Arise, shine out, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising on you. (Isaiah 60)

The glory of God has been manifest to us in the birth of a Saviour. How can your discipleship spread the light of Christ upon the dark places of the world?

St. Nicholas

Bishop of Myra



St. Nicholas

Growing up, I never knew what to make of Santa Claus. My family is of sufficiently recent German heritage that we always celebrated the gift-exchange portion of Christmas on the eve of the feast. While Santa was flying around the globe delivering presents to my peers, I was already playing with my Barbies and trying on new clothes. After several imaginative attempts at constructing an explanation for Santa's delivery discrepancies and in the absence of a chimney in our home, I gave up on him. Instead, the legendary St. Nicholas captured my imagination.

The traditions associated with St. Nicholas are many and varied. In a subtle way, they reflect the paucity of historical information known about the fourth-century bishop of Myra (in today's Turkey). More vividly they embody the beliefs, hopes, values, and fears of the different cultures that adopted him. It is a combination of these traditions that has morphed into today's Santa Claus.

The most famous legends associated with the historical St. Nicholas focus on his acts of love and justice. The Greek name Nikolaos, in fact, means 'victor for people'. Several stories exist that tell of the saint's role in actively liberating innocent victims of injustice. During a time of famine, Bishop Nicholas diverted a shipment of grain headed for the West in order not only to feed the people of his diocese for two years but also to provide them with seed to ensure the harvest for years to come. In this latter tale, the foresight he showed demonstrated excellent stewardship and an understanding of justice beyond charity. The most famous of the tales reports that Nicholas secretly provided the dowries for three poor girls by tossing a bag of gold coins through their father's window. This story combined with folklore in Germany to make St. Nicholas the bringer of secret presents for children upon the eve of his feast, laying the precedent for today's Santa Claus.

In my mum's family and also my own, the feast of St. Nicholas was marked simply by the giving of cookies and candies to children as a reward for being good all year. My dad, however, told a very different story from his childhood. On the eve of the feast the children waited in anticipation—nervous anticipation—because as likely as it was for St. Nicholas to come bearing gifts, so could it also be the infamous Krampus!

There are various explanations of Krampus but basically he is the anti-Santa, a hairy horned hideous creature who carried with him instead of treats, a birch switch with which he beat the naughty children. Now in dad's family Krampus didn't beat the children but he did give them a good scare and I believe that on years when Krampus arrived, the cookies and treats were brought out in the morning of the 6th. What does



Krampus



St. Nicholas and Krampuses

this anti-Santa tradition have to do with St. Nicholas? I think it serves to legitimise the kindness of St. Nicholas' generosity by introducing the element of judgement.

Judgement has become unpopular in our society. Acceptance has replaced it at the expense of accountability for the consequences of our actions. A more positive view of judgement calls each of us to responsibility. The Lord is the gentle Saviour who comes to us at Christmas. He is the kind Companion who walks with us through life. He is also the just Judge who has promised to come again. Rejoice and give thanks for the gifts you receive from St. Nicholas, from Santa Claus, from your friends and family, and from God. Then like children be good: cultivate your gifts responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.

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