



Find the Child in the Manger

*“The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”*

Dear Mission Friends:

The couplet above opens a sonnet written by William Wordsworth in the early 1800s, well over two centuries ago. It would seem that many of us have not learned much about what is important in life, an ignorance manifested especially at this time of year. While Advent should be a time of tranquil peace, joy, and love, every minute is packed with the assumed obligations of hurried baking and card-writing, decorating and tree-trimming, shopping and wrapping, all on top of our regular full schedules. For many it's an endurance marathon of way too much to do, way too much to eat, way too much stress, way too much “getting and spending,” often to impress others more than anything else.

Certainly gifts are a big part of Christmas, but motivation is key if we are to find that peace, joy, and love. We exchange gifts, often re-gifting items we didn't need or like; grabbing several of the same last-minute generic throws or candles; or spending a couple hours on Amazon to “cross off” the last few people on our list.



*Newborn
incubation
ward in
Hospital
San Carlos,
Altamirano,
Chiapas.*

Our giving often gets caught up in materialism, competition, or thoughtless obligation. Imagine eliminating the hasty shopping we do, in whatever form, and instead consider more meaningful gifts—items we've handmade throughout the year; household objects special to us that the recipients have admired; heirlooms; gifts of time (baking, cleaning, planting, visiting, etc.); or donations in the recipients' honor. Giving such gifts motivated by love would prime us to make some time for what is really important: preparing our hearts to receive **the greatest gift given to humankind—the comfort, joy, and tidings of the baby Jesus brought to earth.**

Indeed, keeping things simple and motivated by love has to be what Jesus would want on his birthday. The first witnesses to his birth were simple, humble shepherds. And born to poor parents, not only did he live poorly himself, but the poor and vulnerable—women, children, sinners, and the sick—

were his favored people, not because they were better than the wealthy but rather because he did not want the lives of his littlest or weakest to be at all diminished.

Wealth in itself is not evil, but the unfair distribution of wealth—and the pride and arrogance that is sometimes found in the hearts of the wealthy—is. While we live in a world that encourages personal gain, and many of the things we do have are blessings from God meant for us to enjoy, we should also be generous with those who have less, as written in 1 Timothy:

Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others (6:17-18).



Left, gifts donated to Fr. Tim for children in the villages outside Rabinal.



Fr. David O'Rourke, O.P., our one-time missionary at our previous mission in Vilnius, Lithuania, recalls a special gift he received from the 'lower class of holiness,' a group of faithful church-goers there in the late 1990s (*left*):

Even those who are blessed with a surplus of riches, however, and give generously, will not necessarily find peace, joy, and love. Again, motivation is key. Elke Govertsen wrote,

We are stewards of each other's dignity every day: how we give, how we take, how we are stretched or bent by each other...So Give. Donate. Volunteer. Share. Feed. Clothe. Hold. Acknowledge. Make eye contact. Greet. Really see people...There is nothing more undignified than ignoring another human being. It's as much about your dignity as it is about theirs.

And certainly one doesn't have to have a surplus of riches or possessions in order to give of oneself and enjoy a tranquil Advent, if one's motivation is pure and unconcerned with one's image. Gifting online through social media, for example, can be time-saving and efficient, but one must be honest and, again, motivated by true compassion. Pope Francis refers to "the superficiality of digital media with all of its negative effects" as one of the "dark clouds currently plaguing our global disunity," so beware. A current, increasingly growing trend is to *appear* empathetic—adding links or quotes or symbols (e.g. rainbows or black backgrounds) for various causes but not tangibly supporting them.

Such users "like" or "follow" a charity but rarely take any action or make any concrete effort to help, putting their phony social profile ahead of such advice as James's: *Faith without works is useless* (2:20).

Pope Francis said in a recent homily that we mustn't be concerned with who is watching :

To be sure, the testimony of faith comes in very many forms, just as in a great fresco, there is a variety of colours and shades...In God's great plan, every detail is important, even yours, even my humble little witness, even the hidden witness of those who live their faith with simplicity in everyday family relationships, work relationships, friendships. These are the saints of every day, the 'hidden' saints, a sort of 'middle class of holiness' as a French author said ,... to which we can all belong.

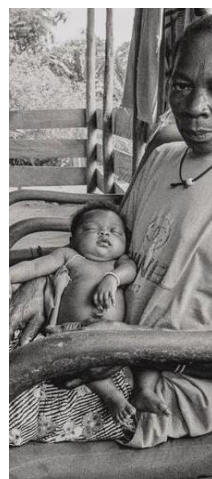


... coming up the walk into our church, they always looked down. Never greeted anyone. Never smiled. Never had expressions on their faces...They had been living in a [Russian] prison since 1945... the Russians had been heavy-handed with these more-western, often Catholic peoples, whom they distrusted. Mostly women, [they] came to our church every day for Mass...in their rough clothes. An hour or two early. They would keep to their own prayers, rather privately. Then before the Mass they would chant the Rosary. And at communion they would shuffle painfully up to the altar in their heavy, old winter boots, and then, one by one, drop painfully to their knees—many holding out their fingers on the floor to keep from falling forward—and then turn upwards, their hands clasped in front of them. They would receive the host with their quiet Amen and slide sideways on their knees to make room for the person behind them. To me, these holy people are the church. They and their faith are the living language that gives my own reflections context and depth.

And while “these holy people are the church” for Fr. David, Fr. Timothy Conlan, O.P., our missionary in Guatemala, extends the equation in a recent meditation. For him,

*The church is the hope of mankind if we not only celebrate the birth of Jesus but also follow his path to death and resurrection, heeding his call to rise with him to glory. The whole world rushes to find a new beginning. It means we take on the burdens of the world today... But can we bring enduring light even to the remotest niche? That was the message that the Angel Gabriel gave to Mary of Nazareth when he announced she would be the Mother of God/Man, Jesus. The new creation began at that moment in Jesus. We, the family of God, are that new beginning. We need hope in a life that endures forever. **This Advent, find the child in the manger and know hope is here.***

Indeed, all babies “come to bring hope with them, to make a difference. Our world needs hope, needs little ones who come with such power in their hands and hearts...[They] are pure potential” (Bass Mitchell, “In Every Blade of Rustling Grass”), precious gifts without any ulterior motive.



But they are also vulnerable, totally dependent on others to care for them. Jesus was no exception, even in his divinity. His Blessed Mother—and ours—and his dear father on earth cared for Jesus with the purest of peace, joy, and love, and received the same in return. In our mission areas, our primary focus has always been on the children, especially those who have been orphaned or abused or whose parents are unable to provide them with adequate care or education.

Our tirelessly optimistic Fr. Tim is one such missionary, choosing to stay in Rabinal, Guatemala—since 1998!—steering the poor, indigenous Achi-speaking youth toward education, decent jobs, a sense of responsibility, and self-esteem with scholarships, safe housing, and hope. I am also reminded of—and ever-amazed at—the mutually loving relationships between the Iraqi Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena who chose to return to the destroyed, still-volatile city of Mosul and the young children they teach, children with deep-seated memories of witnessing indescribable acts of evil;

between the Dominican Sisters of Christian Doctrine who have chosen to travel across oceans to Ayene, Equatorial Guinea, with its extremes of unbearable heat and heavy rain, and the eager but malnourished, parasite-ridden children they teach; between the Dominican sisters of Christian Doctrine in Mexicali and the poor, desperate migrants or deportees, often children without their parents or escapees from sex trafficking rings, to whom they offer sanctuary, hot meals, showers, clean clothes, and counseling; and between the Daughters of Charity Sisters in Altamirano, Chiapas and the high-risk babies and patients with TB and other diseases common to remote mountain villages to whom they compassionately open their Hospital San Carlos doors to treat, all free of charge or drastically discounted.

All these relationships and more—including those at the newest missions we support in Alaska, Puerto Rico, and Ukraine—are based upon reciprocal gifts motivated by love. **Thank you for recognizing, with your generous assistance, the baby Jesus and his humble parents in the poor and needy whom we currently help support.**

This Advent, let us continue supporting these holy caregivers in their loving task of caring for the baby Jesus by seeking out and assisting the poor and vulnerable and weak in our lives as our situations allow. Let’s try to slow down, “find the child in the manger,” and bestow, and in turn receive, gifts of peace, joy, and love.

Lesley Wannshuis

*It doesn't matter how great you are
but how good you are.*

~Fr. Anthony Leo Hofstee, O.P.



A Christmas Prayer

by Robert Louis Stevenson

Loving Father,

Help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts. May the Christmas morning make us happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.



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As you do your tax planning, we hope you will consider making good use of the income tax charitable deduction. Your year-end gift can reduce your income taxes while providing meaningful support to our missions.

Watch for our updated and refreshed [website www.dominicanmission.org](http://www.dominicanmission.org) after the first of the year. It will provide information on all our missions and missionaries old and new; newsletters old and new; articles of interest; contact and donation info.; and lots of pictures.