

Living the Spirit  
After Christmas

**[A reflection from last Christmas season is reproduced here]**

*This year I have decided not to write on the theme of the family. I surely have referred to the Church's teaching on family life in many previous inserts. Rather, I would like to continue reflections on Christmas. I once revealed to you that I was a "saver." I save what I call "bits and pieces" of things I read in various articles. Now I realize that some of these need to be discarded, but – not before I give them one last openness to my meditation. Do share my thoughts with yours.*

"We unwrap thoughts and prayers at Christmas as we do the lights for the family Christmas tree. It is tradition that makes the time and reflection so sacred.... Christmas challenges our perception of the world. How long is the list of why this is a terrible place, a complex of why societies are going to hell with themselves. Natural disasters and foibles that make the daily headlines lead us to lose hope.

But we celebrate that this is God's world. The Incarnation celebrates God's commitment to the creation and re-creation of the world. Jesus entered human history; he did not stop there. The Incarnation calls us to believe that as surely as Christ came, he will come again. We propose a new and clarified faith in the Church. We believe that the Incarnation continues in a special way in the life of the Christian community, its worship, its sacramental action, its witness.... "See how Christians love one another," was the ancient comment on Christian witness. As we celebrate the birth of Christ who became one of us and dwells among us, let our resolve be that our lives and actions truly witness to that reality."

*The above taken from a 1992 editorial in the Brooklyn Tablet makes me realize how every year is in fact a Year of Faith. See how it tells of the content of our faith. It also reminds us of how WITNESS is an integral part of that faith. This is a challenge to us in our present time, when the government wants to restrict faith to the inside of a church. Our resolve must be to live and act with genuine faith!*

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"In our caution to "not be too religious," American Christians have replaced the Christ Child of Christmas with every other imaginable decoration and bauble – from concrete geese in Santa suits to plush "Christmooses" to Santa playing golf, elves in a hot tub – you name it. Years ago, an American newspaperman wrote a letter of encouragement to a little girl who had been told that there was no Santa Claus. Today, everyone remembers the classic line: 'Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.' Maybe the time has come in [2012] to send another message to our secularized world: 'Yes, [America], there is a Jesus.'"

*It may be too late for action now, but isn't it possible that in many ways, by living our faith we can send the message that Jesus Christ is with us? Is it not He Who comes to us in so many ways – in the Eucharist especially? Moreover, the fight for religious liberty for our Catholic institutions of charity and other works of charity is not over. And it may not be an easy fight! But we do have hope, and yes, lots of love to give to our nation!*

*These days I find that my past catches up with me. My thoughts go back clearly to past times. In the years when I was studying theology at the Seminary, I was also working in the summer and other times on my quest for my M.A. It came about that my thesis was on the writings of St. Augustine, as found in the breviary. I had quite a bit of reading to do and it was from sources that were authentic, that is, in Latin. I came to admire St. Augustine for his literary powers. That is why this editorial in 1997 attracted me.*

“In his Confessions, St. Augustine explains why only the Incarnation satisfies. During his spiritual journey, he writes, he was greatly attracted by the philosophy of the Platonists. Studying their books, he found there much that was close in substance to the Christian Gospel. They seemed to know, without saying it as such, that ‘in the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ They understood that ‘the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.’ They believed in the immaterial soul. But that God, the Word, ‘was made flesh and dwelt among us’ – that he did not find in their books.

Again, St. Augustine wrote, the Platonists accepted that the Word ‘was born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.’ But they did not say that ‘he came unto his own, and his own did not receive him’; nor that ‘to all who received him, who believed in his name, to them he gave power to become children of God.’ That would have been too earthy for these philosophical idealists.

They were, St. Augustine wrote, like people who ‘from a wooded mountain-top see the land of peace, without being able to find the way there’. To find the way, we need revelation. We cannot do it by ourselves. We can reach only the point where we see the land of peace, without finding the way there. ...Nothing but the Incarnation will do.”

*The article goes on to speak to how our present values, our modernist age, our folk religions do not lead us to God and his peace. There are limits to secular society. Even high moments where we come together in tragedies with charity to others etc., these cannot be repeated. As a society, like Platonists we see from afar the land of peace.*

“At the end of the path, the revelation when it comes is incredible yet utterly familiar. We can point to a baby lying in a manger and say, ‘That is God. That is what God is like.’ God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. This is the end of all our longing, the fulfillment of our dreams. This is the answer to our dearest wish: yes, hope is possible, yes, love is possible.”

*We are still in the season of Christmas. If the time passes without our meditation on what it means, we have lost the opportunity to grow in our faith. Even a lifetime, it seems to me, is not long enough to come to an understanding of the full meaning of the Incarnation. That is because it is all about love, and a love that is more than our human loves can reflect. St. John knew this when he wrote simply: God is love. I hope that you are finding that Love in the practice of your faith.*

Happy New Year!

God love you always!

Monsignor David Morrison