

I present this insert with the Christmas insert. I hope you are enjoying these happy days. Will be it for returning gifts? Shopping? Taking a well-earned rest? Looking forward to the New Year? This insert originally presented post-Christmas suggestions. I have deleted from the original only what is necessary. Meanwhile, Happy New Year, and a grace filled year ahead.

Living the Spirit
After Christmas Reflections

It occurs to me that it would be a good theme to look back to the Christmas season. In my inserts for Advent and Christmas I made suggestions for making Christmas a truly worthwhile event for our souls, as well as for our everyday life. Let me give a few reflections on my own results.

First of all, I really did find a few moments, not many, to examine what the holidays mean to me. Spiritually, just fulfilling the obligation to recite the Liturgy of the Hours contributed to that. But there is always much more to Christmas than our spiritual activities and prayers. We still manage to live in a cultural or social setting that leads us to observe many traditional customs. These invariably require effort, but bring much joy. Perhaps, even a bit of fulfillment and satisfaction that our efforts have achieved some success. I found myself able to follow many of my traditions.

As a young priest I had often found my rectory-residences largely devoid of decorations. As a young priest I began a tradition of trying to take care of that emptiness with some surprise from others. To this day I manage to encourage -- with help, of course -- decorating an otherwise al-too-often institutional setting. I thank those who helped lift the spirit of those who live and work in my present home. It brought us great happiness.

In a previous insert I suggested that we place Christmas in the context of our loved ones. I hope you were able to do this. I did. I let my mind go down memory lane to find memories of past joys and, moreover, of dear loved ones. If you examine yourself as to how you managed the past holidays, do so with ease of conscience. Do not dwell on what you did not accomplish on behalf of others, but rather on what you did. If your activities gave you good feelings, so much the better. However, we are at our best spiritually, if we do not expect undying gratitude from others for any goodness we show them. Spiritually, it helps if we have a firm foundation for all our good works. That foundation is found in the Person of Jesus. At Christmas, we make Him in many ways the reason for the season.

As to other suggestions, I did manage some of them. I listened to favorite Christmas music. I tried to be a better friend -- in quiet ways. [This gets harder, it seems, with advancing age.] I read my favorite Christmas story. I watched some good TV programs. I took time for silence, too. I hope you managed to enjoy similar activities. Finally, let me assure you that Christmas is now in the past, your past. Whatever good it brought you should be nourished throughout this New Year. Whatever problems, difficulties, even pain, it may have brought you should be placed behind you. Just, let's not forget the good, the joy and the peace of soul we have received. Above all let's remember that the real gift of Christmas is and always will be Christ, as God with us. Living the Spirit means living with His presence -- every day!

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Turning to another theme I would like to call attention to the campaign for life, especially for the end of abortion in our land. January is a time to think about the Pro-Life

apostolate. We must not forget what life should mean. All human life is the gift of God our Creator. It is a gift that derives immediately from His will and the cooperation of our human parents. We must try to appreciate not only life in a general way, or in regard to others, even the unborn or the elderly disabled, we should value our own life. Our life should be seen as a blessing. Too often when we find challenges to our wishes or even our needs, we may think otherwise. It is then that we need to turn to spiritual truth to bolster our appreciation of a divine plan that only gradually we can come to know.

In the last week of Christmas time we hear again about the baptism of Christ and consider our own Baptism. By that sacramental rite we have been made children of God. When I preached at the children's Mass, if I mentioned baptism, I would find the littlest ones so ready to let me know what baptism means to them. Could it be that sometimes as we grow and mature, we forget it?

In the past certain spiritual methods set forth a distorted appreciation of how our individual accomplishments affect our spiritual life. It was thought to be an act of pride to admit one's talents and capabilities. What an error! Rather a better spiritual way is to realize that we have such talents because God has placed them within our reach, and given us the means to make them ours. By our acts of faith we embrace truth, even the Truth that Christ identifies with Himself. By our hope we embrace a vision of a God who promises us a bright future, no matter what darkness may or may not invade our life history. By our charity, or love, we find ourselves being remade into an image of God that bursts with abundant life.

If we are to appreciate fully the life that is in others, even the unborn and those who suffer all kinds of illness or disabilities, we must have a vital understanding of life itself. It is clearly for believers a spiritual reality, as well as a material or physical one. In its origin, life comes from God. We profess in our Creed "I believe in God!" Life has been redeemed and given a meaning beyond this world by the power of Christ, our Savior. The Spirit is the Spirit of life Who enlivens any coldness that invades our own spirit.

The Church encourages each of us to be apostles for life, as we may be able to be. Some will work at this mission by personal involvement in pro-life activities. Others will seek the way of prayer. Whatever you are led to do, do it with the understanding of what I have said above. In the political realm, where the battle is often fought, be wise as serpents but gentle as doves. Win souls by love. In doing so, preserve the integrity of your own life, a life of the spirit.

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Soon enough we will be thinking about Lent and Easter. As I think of these inserts, I am trying to decide just how often and in what way I can best continue them. I trust that many themes have value even in repetition. In the meantime I will give the matter some serious thought. Just as I was about to end these inserts, I received so many comments of appreciation about them, that I hesitate to bring them to an end. Know, too, that you can find inserts of the parish web site (home page). [Thanks to Ralph Sullivan]

Meanwhile I share what Terence Cardinal Cooke wrote shortly before his death:
*"Life is no less beautiful when it is accompanied by illness or weakness, hunger or poverty, physical or mental diseases, loneliness or old age." Yes, life **IS** beautiful!*

*May God love you always!
Monsignor David Morrison*