

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

December 2013 – Issue 29

Giving and Receiving... A Holy Season

The Host Apostolate
www.thehostapostolate.org
14, Goatbeck Terrace,
Langley Moor,
County Durham,
DH7 8JJ
United Kingdom

Every day of our lives we receive beautiful gifts from the Lord. We receive our life, friendship, a means to live, food, shelter, family and for this we must be always grateful. For those who do not have these things they have at least the certain knowledge that they are loved by the Lord and that His coming brought certain Hope that one day suffering would end and continued joy would be theirs as it is for all who live by faith. Above all we receive the Lord Himself in Holy Communion – a gift beyond telling.

But at this time it is worthwhile to consider the importance of giving and receiving and why this is important in our lives. We all know of people whose generosity of giving charitably to others has no limits. Such often are the lives of saints greater or lesser. They not only give ‘things’ but time and love. We know of those who like to give gifts and presents to others. Isn’t Christmas the pinnacle of such giving for we rejoice and are glad that this Infant who was born of a woman has come to prepare us for the joy that awaits and to show us how to live. He too gave generously of Himself even to dying for us in a shame filled way. He also gave healing and encouragement, love, patience. The gift of inner healing and health was very evident in so many of his interactions with people.

But at this special time it is important to focus on the nature of giving and receiving. During this Advent period we focus on Jesus’ coming. The prophets received the gift of speaking of the coming of the Messiah and the call to conversion – and the nature of His coming. Isaiah clearly comes to mind. Our Lady Mary having received the news, carried her son to Bethlehem to fulfil the promise made by God for a Saviour. Her gift to be a bearer of the son of God- and her fiat – a gift to us too. His blood relationship to John the Baptist was also a gift to John who led the way for Jesus to give the Good News. The shepherds received the gift of receiving the news - oh such good news of His birth and took the best of what they had to



the cave, the stable –a new lamb. Then we have the three wise men, the kings who came with bounty rich to visit the Infant king but went away humbled and wiser for understanding the nature of this child.

Today when commercialism seeks to destroy the gifts of the heart with ever increasing packaging and glitter and an assault on the very purpose of the giving of gifts – to bring thanksgiving and joy – it is perhaps twice as important to reflect on the nature of giving. A truly generous person seeks nothing in return and more often than not hides his/her generosity. We are not supposed to ‘let one hand know what the other one is doing’. Our gifts and alms giving should be private. A gift given in love conveys just this to another. A present from parents tells the child that it is loved and cared for. Some people enjoy and delight in giving gifts but there is always a danger of other motives, a kind of buying of the other person, or a showing off of resources – never the best motives for such action.

Sometimes the smallest of gifts brings pleasure because it is given with love. One of my personal ‘best gifts’ to me was a –goat, bought for a poor family in Asia. This brought great joy (and humour) for it not only signified that I was loved, but that my desires and dreams were understood and even more, that another would benefit. A truly wonderful gift. Truly generous presents are like ripples on the sea they spread out and affect others.

Receiving gifts is always a pleasure- yet there is also another aspect which in a way hides the value of gifts. Some people find it very difficult to receive gifts. Often they will give but actually thwart the receiving of gifts. They cannot bear ‘the other’ being generous, or being valued and loved, or suspecting other motives for such kindness... This too is very sad for this inhibits the generosity of others. We have all got caught up in a ‘market exchange’, the true purpose of giving has been lost in a kind of ‘barter exchange’: He/she got me a gift

‘He that is kind is free, though he is a slave; he that is evil is a slave, though he be a king’: St. Augustine



so I have to, or there is pressure to buy bigger or better. None of these attitudes speak of the purpose of gifts- only a humble person can receive graciously – The gifts that come from the Lord are given totally freely and so should our gifts to each other. The truly great gifts are of *ourselves*, our patience, our love our self-sacrifice to help someone, our attention. Surely the greatest gifts are those that cost nothing except a dying to self and an increase in love. Isn't that what Christmas is all about? The God who has/is everything above reason, above understanding, comes as a small child. And like some, many still today, very poor and without creature comforts save for the love of The Father, and his 'earthly parents'.

One story of a Nativity play in South Africa says much of this exchange, and in some ways the unity of giving and receiving – two ends of generosity – of poverty of spirit. The scene is one of 'parish' with a very overworked priest who was somewhat reluctant to attend the play thinking of the mountain of things to be done in Advent before Christmas. However, he went and all seemed as usual. Shepherd, a very quiet Mary, a real baby Jesus, Joseph etc. The shepherds and kings came and went with a sigh of relief. Our kind pastor was about to leave. But in came three rather bedraggled figures. One was in rags, one with a ball and chain, and a third with an Afro Shirt, grey wig and unkempt. The children's chorus echoed the refrain 'all have a right to baby Jesus'. The kindly Joseph looked at them and picked up the kingly gifts and one by one gave them to the three beggar-like 'men'. To the first he said 'you are poor you need the gold for food and shelter'- I have a trade- we will not go hungry'. To the second he said 'I do not know how to free you from the chains but the myrrh may help to heal your wounds and broken skin on your ankles' To the third he said 'take the frankincense its sweet smell might soothe your troubled spirit- and make you feel happy but to his surprise the three men replied thus- The first smiling said 'do not give me the gift, look at me- anyone will think I have stolen it. The second... do not give me the ointment I am used to these chains, I am strong because of them and the third added I am lost I have no faith at all I have lost contact with God. The incense will not bring back the God I have lost. The 'three men' then said to the Child Jesus 'You belong to the country not of Gold.

You belong to our world of want, disease and doubt. - let us share what we have'.

The first took off his rags-'one day, he said, when they strip you and tear off your garment you will need these.

The second ... 'one day you will be led out in chains but you will undo the chains of many – take mine'.

The third said, I bow before you- take my doubts. My sadness and my loss of faith in God. I am unable to carry them alone. They are too heavy. When you grow up you will take them before the throne of God

The men then bowed and left as free men. They had found a place where their own problems were taken by a small child. They had given all they had and received greater riches than the Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh-their freedom, their hope, and they felt loved. *

Is this not what the coming of the Messiah, our Saviour is all about?

His presence among us is our greatest 'present' especially in the Host, in our lives and hearts. It is the greatest present of all.

May Christmas bring His Presence to us and His present to us be a peaceful, and a generous and kind heart.

* (Nativity edit. from St Joseph's Advocate)

Advent Blessing to all and a prayerful Christmas filled with Hope and Joy



Pope Francis' prayers for this time of year That... Children who are victims of abandonment and of every form of violence may find the love and protection they need.

That... Christians, enlightened by the light of the word made flesh may prepare humanity for the coming of the Saviour.

Feasts in December: 6th St. Nicholas, 8/9th The Immaculate Conception, 12th Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Jane Francis de Chantal, 13th St. Lucy, 14th St. John of the Cross and Advent Sundays

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO COPY AND DISTRIBUTE UNALTERED