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*A Priest's Christmas*

Christmas began early for me this year – around the end of October. I had been counseling a young family with three children who were having serious problems in their marriage. I once again encountered the face of evil in the form of adultery and how its poison seared through the veins and life's blood of the family, especially the children, leaving the effects of its poison. But the poisoning was not to end in death – divorce – because the Great Physician Jesus Christ was invited into the center of the family to restore his love and to provide healing.

Each meeting would begin with a prayer thanking God for his goodness and presence in our lives; a prayer asking Jesus to once again be among us as Lord, Savior, and friend. Throughout the months I marveled at each of the meetings with the husband and wife and how God not only touched their lives but also mine. I could plainly see how God took a hopeless situation of human failure and pain and began to turn all the darkness and despair into hope, renewed trust and happiness, but especially love.

During our meetings I could see the future blood of the Christ Child poured forth into the veins of this couple, diluting, diminishing and healing the poison that had once threatened their marriage and the love and security of their children. The blood of Christ was once more flowing freely for his people; to renew, strengthen and to heal. The children were once again laughing and not fearful of daddy and mommy arguing on the other side of the wall where they slept. Their tears subsided and tranquility once again permeated the home. Their grades in school were once again on the rise reflecting a peace that allowed them to study and not worry about their parents next fight or whether or not this was the day that daddy would be coming home.

The Christ Child graciously allowed his priest to participate in his ministry of love and healing to this family torn apart with the darkness of sin. This is only one of the numerous gifts God provides his children who but ask for his healing and his love. This was God's early Christmas present to his priest.

God's gift to us this Christmas is the gift of his son, Jesus the Christ. Like all God's gifts, they are not meant to be retained or hoarded, but freely given away. The gifts Jesus received from the Magi are once again given to us. The gold of grace is abundantly poured upon us from the treasury of Jesus' most Sacred Heart. The Frankincense reminds us we share in the royal priesthood of Jesus for the good of our needy sisters and brothers. Finally, the gift of Myrrh, the most shocking of the gifts given by the Magi. Oh to see Mary's expression when given a gift of embalming ointment. Did Mary know that her infant child, our Savior, would allow us to be anointed with himself in his passion and death, a death that allows us to share in his resurrection and eternal life?

Christmas truly came early this year not only for a family struggling to put their lives back in order with Jesus at the center, but for a middle aged priest who had become

somewhat discouraged and saddened with the imperfect world in which Jesus called him to minister. Christ gave his imperfect and weak human priest the greatest Christmas gift of all – himself.