

Is 9:1-6
Titus 2:11-14
Lk 2:1-14

Joseph L. Narog, O.S.A.

Jesus Christ: The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Christmas!- one word that evokes so much emotion and so many memories. Trees, family, gifts. Whenever I think of Christmas, I can't help but remember my cousin Mary. She and I grew up together. Born only a year apart, we are like sister and brother.

When we were younger, Mary and I always wanted to extend the gift giving. One year she suggested that we wait as long as possible to open our presents- we actually made it until Christmas night! Another time I came up with the plan where we only would open one gift an hour throughout the day. We really raised some eyebrows in our family the Christmas we organized a treasure hunt. Mary and I wrote out clues on slips of paper that would help each other find the packages we had hidden around our grandmother's house.

Inevitably, however, no matter what we tried, the gift giving was over. Ripped wrapping paper and empty boxes all across the floor. I can still hear Mary's mother telling us- "don't forget to save those bows." Not that we didn't appreciate our presents, but Mary and I often felt a bit left down. By focusing on things, we were overlooking the gifts that last- the love and joy we shared.

Tonight we celebrate the most enduring gift of all - a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger- unwrapped linens, laying in an empty tomb. Jesus Christ - the gift that keeps on giving, the mystery that still unfolds. Some 2000 years later, the very reason we exchange presents is to remind each other of God's great gift of love, echoing through the centuries- "for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy."

Jesus Christ is the gift we can keep unwrapping - not just today, but throughout our lifetimes. He is the grace of God among us, the light that shines in our darkness. Jesus understands our human weakness - for he became one of us, one with us. He knows our poverty and sadness and our hopes and our desires. He supports us as we battle an addiction, he comforts us as we worry about a loved one in prison, he helps us to see the goodness in our neighbor.

Jesus Christ is the gift that is meant for all of us. As the angel declared, this news of joy is "for all the people," beginning with the shepherds, who represent the lowly and the marginalized. Jesus is the son given us, the one who gave himself for each one of us. Look around this church tonight and know that Jesus Christ is gift to everyone - African-American and white, female and male,

young and old. We have walked in from the darkness and there is great rejoicing as God says, "Welcome home!"

Jesus Christ is the gift that can never be exhausted- he is the gift that is meant to be shared. We're called to carry the light of Christ back out into our world - a world desperately in need of God's love. As cousin Mary and I grew up, we found that the real excitement and joy is in the act of giving. No matter our material status, we all have something to give. Mother Teresa, a blessed woman much admired in this city and in our world, once said, "We may not be able to give much, but we can always give the joy that springs from a heart that is filled with love."

Is there someone you know who is homebound or a resident at Carroll Manor? Bring the gift of Christ to those who can't be with us tonight. Is there a single mother struggling to keep her children away from drugs? Befriend that family and share with them the gift of Jesus' love. Is there someone affected with AIDS in our Brookland community? Volunteer to help them, providing a witness to God's continuing gift of care.

Jesus Christ truly is the gift that keeps on giving. Tonight, as we continue this Christmas Eucharist, we are reminded of this gift- as we are every time we gather around the table. "Glory to God in the highest!" For a savior was born to us, a savior who died for us. For gifts of bread and wine - the gift of Christ's body and blood. Receive Christ. Give Christ.

And tomorrow when the packages are opened, remember that there is one gift that we always will be able to continue to unwrap. Merry Christmas!