

Your Favorite Page ... Children Are Quick

TEACHER: Maria, go to the map and find North America.

MARIA: Here it is.

TEACHER: Correct. Now class, who discovered America?

CLASS: Maria.

TEACHER: John, why are you doing your math multiplication on the floor?

JOHN: You told me to do it without using the tables.

TEACHER: Glenn, how do you spell "crocodile?"

GLENN: K-R-O-K-O-D-I-A-L

TEACHER: No, that's wrong

GLENN: Maybe it is wrong, but you asked me how I spell it.

TEACHER: Donald, what is the chemical formula for water?

DONALD: H I J K L M N O.

TEACHER: What are you talking about?

DONALD: Yesterday you said it's H to O.

TEACHER: Winnie, name one important thing we have today that we didn't have ten years ago.

WINNIE: Me!

TEACHER: Glen, why do you always get so dirty?

GLEN: Well, I'm a lot closer to the ground than you are.

TEACHER: Millie, give me a sentence starting with "I."

MILLIE: I is...

TEACHER: No, Millie..... Always say, "I am."

MILLIE: All right... "I am the ninth letter of the alphabet."

TEACHER: George Washington not only chopped down his father's cherry tree, but also admitted it.

Now, Louie, do you know why his father didn't punish him?

LOUIS: Because George still had the axe in his hand.....

TEACHER: Now, Simon, tell me frankly, do you say prayers before eating?

SIMON: No sir, I don't have to, my Mom is a good cook.

TEACHER: Clyde, your composition on "My Dog" is exactly the same as your brother's. Did you copy his?

CLYDE : No, sir It's the same dog.

TEACHER: Harold, what do you call a person who keeps on talking when people are no longer interested?

HAROLD: A teacher?

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Greetings, my friend!

Under my clear desk pad is a greeting card sent to me long ago. The cover is a drawing of an ancient tree, and the text reads: "Life is the spring name of God; Warmth is the summer name of God; Color is the fall name of God; silence is the winter name of God."

There's just something about winter that facilitates silent introspection. It might be the early darkness and the long nights. Perhaps it's the cold and ice that force us to remain inside, our horizon limited to the 4 walls. We seem to move more slowly, and the warmth of human companionship is felt more deeply. The two major holidays in the winter season bring back pensive memories of special times shared with loved ones, who may or may not be present to us now. We're in the Advent season now, and soon will be in the Christmas Season. Note how many carols and songs speak of silence in one way or another.

Christmas Prayer

During the Christmas Season (which lasts until January 9th), we in Holy Cross offer you the gift of our prayer for you and your loved ones. If there are any specific individuals or intentions you would like us to remember, please jot them on the prayer list and send it back to us.

No offering is required. If you choose to send one, it will be used for the special needs of Holy Cross at this time, especially in formation and health care of our ill and retired priests and brothers.

Of course, there's a lot of gaiety in the air too. You hear the shouts of kids tobogganing down hillsides, or engaged in snowball fights. For those who have children or grandchildren young enough to be enthralled by Santa Claus, this is a special (and expensive!!) time. Families and couples take neighborhood tours to see the Christmas lights. The smell of baking cookies fills a house, and perhaps there's competition from a freshly-cut evergreen.

Let's pray for each other's safety, especially if travel is a part of the holiday. Please pray also for those folks for whom this is the first holiday season without the physical presence of someone they deeply love. These are hard days for them.

I'm glad that folks had fun with the last two newsletters, with their little quizzes on the Old and New Testaments. If nothing else, it helped you to see that there's all

kinds of odd tidbits in Scripture that we never hear in the Mass readings. I was tempted to do another quiz later in the year, this time on the Baltimore Catechism...just to see how many of the questions and answers you old-timers remember. But I will refrain!

How are you doing with the new Roman Missal, the new prayers and responses? I'm writing this two weeks before Advent, and confess to some nervousness about using it...mostly because it's so wordy!

And before I get much more wordy, let me sign off with my hope that you and yours will have a gentle Christmas, filled with promise and hope. May the New Year bring all of us relief from the anxieties and burdens that grip our lives and the life of our nation. God bless you all!

Much love, many prayers!



A CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

Once upon a time there was a man who looked upon Christmas as a lot of humbug. He wasn't a Scrooge. He was a kind and decent person, generous to his family, upright in all his dealings with other men. But he didn't believe all that stuff about Incarnation which churches proclaim at Christmas. And he was too honest to pretend that he did. "I am truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, who was a faithful churchgoer. "But I simply cannot understand this claim that God becomes man. It doesn't make any sense to me."

On Christmas Eve his wife and children went to church for the midnight service. He declined to accompany them. "I'd feel like a hypocrite," he explained. "I'd rather stay at home. But I'll wait up for you."

Shortly after his family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window and watched the flurries getting heavier and heavier. "If we must have Christmas," he thought, "it's nice to have a white one." He went back to his chair by the fireside and began to read his newspaper. A few minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound. It was quickly followed by another, then another.

He thought that someone must be throwing snowballs at his living room window. When he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the storm. They had been caught in the storm and in a desperate search for shelter had tried to fly through his window. "I can't let these poor creatures lie there and freeze," he thought. "But how can I help them?" Then he remembered the barn where the children's pony was stabled. It would provide a warm shelter.

He put on his coat and galoshes and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the door wide and turned on a light. But the birds didn't come in. "Food will lure them in," he thought. So he hurried back to the house for bread crumbs, which he sprinkled on the snow to make a trail into the barn. To his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs and continued to flop around helplessly in the snow. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking

around and waving his arms. They scattered in every direction - except into the warm lighted barn.

"They find me a strange and terrifying creature," he said to himself, "and I can't seem to think of any way to let them know they can trust me. If only I could be a bird myself for a few minutes, perhaps I could lead them to safety. . . ."

Just at that moment the church bells began to ring. He stood silent for a while, listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. Then he sank to his knees in the snow. "Now I do understand," he whispered. "Now I see why You had to do it." "

The above story is **A Christmas Parable**, written many years ago by Louis Cassels, a religion editor of United Press International. It is a simple but beautiful way to explain the mystery of Christmas.

Originally I started this particular paragraph by saying that "No human being knows the mind of God." But that is not accurate. Through Jesus, we do know the mind of God....we know exactly what the Father thinks and exactly what he desires of us. And what the Father wants and desires is not at all onerous or burdensome.

So why is it that we find it so difficult to follow the Gospel, which expresses so clearly what God desires?

This is not a problem restricted to 21st Century people. It goes all the way back to the dawn of salvation history. Time and time and time again, Yahweh offered salvation and freedom to his people. All they had to do was uphold their end of the covenant as manifested in the Commandments and the Law.

Oh,...this fidelity would happen for awhile, especially after some disaster. People always "get religion" when their lives and livelihood are threatened. The covenant with Yahweh was renewed many

times via Moses and the Prophets, and the people of God said, "Yes, we will keep the covenant!" But it wasn't long before folks were back to their old ways of worshiping false gods, looking after their own interests, neglecting the less fortunate in their society. It's happening even now in our world.

So I can see God, sitting on his throne, scratching his head in frustration, and thinking: "What do I have to do to get my people to believe in and trust my providential care for them? What can I do that I haven't already done?"

And that's why we have the Incarnation. Instead of working through intermediaries, God himself decided to move among the human race in an effort to discover what the problem was.

I'll bet you know what the problem is! Take a moment now, and think about the Gospels. What is the one saying that Jesus uses the most?

Love one another? Nope. The Kingdom of heaven is with you? Nope. Turn the other cheek? No. Anything that speaks of fire and punishment? No way.

What Jesus discovered as he moved among us was how deeply afraid we are. So time and again we hear him saying: "Do not fear " or its variation "Do not be afraid."

We human beings are afraid of our limitations, and because of that are tempted to turn away from God and seize what we want for ourselves. We seek to be like God, powerful and without limitations. But then comes the downfall.

When we realize that we can't do everything we want to do, we fear our powerlessness. When we realize that we will one day die, we are afraid and fight to delay it as long as we can. When we realize that we are not in control of something or someone,

we are afraid of what might happen to us. When we realize there is something we cannot have, we desire it more intensely and fear that someone else might have it. We're afraid to take risks - both action risks and love risks - because we're afraid of getting hurt.

Of all these fears, it is the fear of death that is most powerful. We know neither the time nor the manner of our death....talk about the ultimate uncontrollable! Even though we believe in the resurrection, there is still the fear: "What will it be like after I die?" And if there is a judgment, we're deathly afraid that we will hear the Lord say these words: Depart from me, you evil doers. I don't know who you are.

Now admittedly, this is not the most cheerful Christmas reflection, but truly, it is at the heart of the Incarnation. Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we truly have nothing to fear. Through Jesus we learn how precious and valued we are to our Father. Through Jesus we learn that nothing we do is greater than God's love for us. Through Jesus we learn of God's desire that we have life to the full. Through Jesus, we learn how God is able to take all the injuries and pain of our lives and work them out for our good. We hear that God can give meaning, purpose, and significance to everything that happens to us, as individuals and as a community.

And best of all, through Jesus we learn that death will never have the last word. Once the Resurrection takes place, we never again hear Jesus saying, "Do not be afraid." Instead, we hear him saying "Peace be with you." We need not fear death because it has been destroyed. It will never have the last word. This is truly great tidings, worthy of countless Gloria's and Hosannas!!

If only I could be a bird myself for a few minutes, perhaps I could lead them to safety. . .