

Christmas 2010

OK, we have an annual tradition here at St. Bernadette. At this particular Mass, I say "Happy Holidays!" And you say, ["Merry Christmas!"] Do we need to go over the words?

Our story begins last Saturday afternoon, before the 5:00 pm Mass. One of our most important and active parish members was there. I'll call her Sophie—because that's her name. Did I mention that Sophie is 3.5? Just before the 5:00 pm Mass began, Sophie asked her mom what was for dinner afterwards. Mom answers, "Lasagna." To which Sophie answers (sing) "In the highest!"

Yes, Lasagna in the highest: God so loved the world that He gave His only Son!

Roast turkey in the highest: In Jesus, God became a human person, like us in all things but sin!

Sweet potatoes in the highest: And Jesus has never left us, even after the human race tried to exterminate him!

Chardonnay in the highest: Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is here with us right now—in the community, in his Word, in Holy Communion, his Body and Blood. Lasagna in the highest, indeed.

You remember the story of Jesus' birth as Luke tells it: how the family walked 75 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem because of the census, how Mary gave birth in a stable, because there was no room at the inn. Is there room for Jesus this Christmas?

Here's a quick story about another 3 year old; it goes back about ten years. We'll call her Megan—because that's her name. Little Megan and her parents visited several different homes that particular Christmas and admired their Nativity Scenes. Soon, phone calls began to come in, "I don't know how to say this, but our Christmas crib is missing Baby Jesus. Do you think maybe Megan might have taken it?"

Mom investigates: "Megan, these homes are missing Jesus! Did you take him?" And in the child's room finds quite a collection of Baby Jesus-es. "Mommy, Jesus was cold! I brought him here to warm him up!"

Who has taken Jesus from our Christmases? At Inner Visions bookstore, someone—not a baby—looked at the baby in the manger and said, "Who's that?" True story! Who has taken Jesus away?

And we are told that in outdoor Nativity Scenes, the Baby Jesus now sometimes has a GPS device imbedded—because so many are stolen! Who can bring Jesus back to Christmas? Is there room for him this year? Is there time, for example, to stay until Mass is completed? Or to say a real prayer before Christmas dinner?

Because God did not take human flesh so that we could eat a lot of food! Or so that we could receive a lot of gifts. (It is estimated that \$13 billion will be spent this Christmas on gifts that people don't want.) God was born at Bethlehem to rescue us, to transform us, to be with us. God the Son came to earth in search of the human race, and still is.

And Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is here with us right now. We can come to him just as we are: peaceful, happy, full of faith and love---or perhaps a mess: troubled, weak, confused, spiritually lost.

It is not so easy to follow Jesus, not so easy to pray, not even easy to be at Mass every Sunday, as we should. So, amid these beautiful flowers, I will end with the Legend of the Poinsettia. The legend tells of a poor Mexican girl who had no gift for the cathedral altar on Christmas Eve. Out of desperation, she picked a bunch of unsightly weeds on her way to church. As she reluctantly presented her gift, a miracle occurred: the weeds were transformed into deep red poinsettias. May Jesus transform you and me and everyone at Masses this Christmas into something beautiful for God!

And remember little Sophie of "Lasagna in the highest?" Sophia means "wisdom"—and she got it right: "Lasagna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest! Glory to God in the highest!"