

EMatrimony

12-12-03

A Reflection for the 2nd Week of Advent—Putting Christ back into Christmas

Dear WWME Companions,

Are you and your family being sucked in to commercialism and secularism? For so many of us it is a constant battle. Often, the day after Halloween, the Christmas decorations are up and the radio stations are starting the around the clock programming of Christmas songs. What happened to celebrating Thanksgiving? Sometimes, with the flurry of the holiday preparations, I (K) feel inundated like being caught in the middle of huge shopping crowds that push me past the counter where I want to stop.

One year, several couples in our WWME family in the small town where we lived, decided we would try to prepare and celebrate in a more wholesome way. During Advent we toned down the buying and the parties, we made plans for a more simple and meaningful Christmas celebration. During days before Christmas we prayed together regularly, and coordinated a potluck for Christmas Eve. The plans were made simple. So what was so special about planning a potluck, you ask? Well, it was the activity that preceded the dinner that would set the tone for the rest of the night. It was decided that in early afternoon of December 24, a few families would gather at the host's home and deposit our family dish for the dinner to be held later. What follows is the description of that memorable Christmas Eve.

All of us, young and old, were dressed for the snowfall that was just starting. With song sheets in hand, we traveled by car and by foot to the families in our neighborhoods, Marriage Encounter friends, and shut-ins for our attempt at caroling. A professional melody, we did not have, but our hearts grew with joy as we went from door to door trying to "put the Christ back into Christmas". (the "Christmas cheer" along the way didn't hurt). Some families joined along the way, much like a posada, as we made our way to church for early Christmas Eve Mass. It was close to sunset at we entered the church parking lot. Christmas lights were already shining brightly. Big and little feet drudging through several inches of new fallen snow broke the hush of the early evening hours. Spirits were high as we approached the rectory. There was Father on a small tractor trying to clear the new fallen snow in the parking lot in preparation for services soon to begin. From time to time, he climbed from the tractor with snow shovel in hand to "groom" the edges of the parking lot that continually became snow covered. All of us encircled the tractor that our somewhat frazzled priest had stopped so he could use the shovel. Then we began a new chorus of Christmas carols. By now, the harmony was not sounding too bad, but we were not ready for "prime time" singers. The joy of the anticipation of Christmas Eve Mass was spreading. After a short serenade for our priest we sent him in to church to prepare for Mass. We all helped to clear the parking lot and walkways to make a clear path to church. By now, we all had red faces and cold hands and noses, but our hearts were so full of joy. As we settled our families in the balcony of church, we looked around at others dressed in their finest church clothes. We were in warm jackets, snowsuits, hats and boots! It did not matter. Christ was in our hearts!

With all of our little ones in hand, we stopped at the nativity at the close of Mass. It was a dark by now, but there was a glow about us that reminded me of the Bethlehem star.

At our dinner, there was no exchange of purchased gifts. We had given the gift of fellowship to one another and reached out to others. We were spiritually full and bursting with joy. What more could we ask for? Christ was surely in our Christmas!