

Christmas Eve 2020

One year the little JC Penney's store in my hometown offered Christmas fulfillment. My mother was Christmas shopping, and I was 'in tow'. Mom was looking for who knows what and I, 7 or 8, was bored out of my little skull. Then I noticed a toy display table on which were bright red 1961 Corvettes, just like the one Todd and Buzz drove on the TV program Route 66. Oh, to be on the road to adventure, to be unspeakably cool like Todd and Buzz! I politely drew my mother's attention and humbly asked if, perchance, my loving parents might purchase one for their respectful, youngest son to receive on the morning of the Feast of Our Lord's Nativity. I may have mentioned in passing that a lifetime of obedience would result.

Christmas is, on the face of it, for children; yet the older I am, the more I enjoy gift *giving*. To receive a gift with a grateful heart is a blessing. To *give* a gift with a grateful heart is a greater blessing, and more lastingly fulfilling; giving grows us more human; giving with a grateful heart is to be in our humanity as God is in His divinity. To give in joy is a divine act.

There is a two-part secret to being a gracious gift giver. It is secret because to know it one must first accept it, which takes experience and maturity, of which children do not have much. Also, it is secret because it seems absurd. Many secrets seem so because we are ignorant or foolish. The first part of the secret: joy comes from what we give, not what we have; the more we grasp the less joy we know. Consider Scrooge, the most Biblical non-biblical story ever written. Generosity grows joy.

The second part: the more you give, the more you will be filled. A young seeker after wisdom visited an old monk. He began telling the monk his life-story: his triumphs, failures, and challenges; he told his family history, education, work experiences. He recounted his search for truth, his beliefs and what vexed him. He talked the entire day; the monk listened patiently. At dusk, the monk got a pitcher of water and a cup. He said, "You must be thirsty," as he handed the cup to the seeker and began filling it. The seeker kept talking, the monk kept pouring until water spilled over onto the seeker's lap. "Father!" he yelled, "the cup is full!" "Yes, my son," said the old monk, "and so are you. A full cup cannot hold more; only an empty cup receives." The more you give, the more you are filled.

At Christmas we celebrate the really real reality that God, in an eternal ecstasy of yearning love burst out of his own complete, transcendent goodness—so beguiled is God by longing love for us—that in Jesus, God Incarnate, such tender, yearning love *for us and for our salvation* is given in superabundance. To celebrate Christmas is to live this reality and share this reality. God gives freely to all who long for joy, and the gift compels us to freely share God's tender, zealous, yearning love—how can we not—and in the giving we grow up "into the measure of the full stature of Christ," our happiness is ever born anew (Ephesians 4:13).

I pray that you will grow more and more into a gracious gift giver. I pray that your heart and mind, your body and soul will be filled with the joy of Jesus Christ. I pray that you will share joy extravagantly and know yet more joy. I pray that Christ Jesus will birth always, ever new the joy of God's zealous love for you and for all. I pray you a joyous, grace-filled, gift-full Christmas. Amen.