

A Realistic Christmas

Christmas is a time of great blessing for all of us. It focuses our attention on God's love for all men, on the peace that can come only from above, on the need we have as Christians to love our neighbor as God has loved us. And while none of the lessons of Christmas should be ignored, they are sometimes dealt with in a sentimental and unrealistic setting. As I celebrate my fourth Christmas as Bishop of Rochester, I am much more aware of what Christmas means to all of my people.

This awareness brings to mind the second verse of Longfellow's Christmas poem, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day":

And in despair I bowed my head,
There is no peace on earth, I said,
For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Some of us will celebrate Christmas this year with the warm glow of family and friends, presents and merriment, lots of love and peace on earth. But countless others will "celebrate" the holiday as they live all of their lives: with hunger, cold, sorrow — and a great deal of anger. They will lash out at a God who is said to have

The Slot Man

At about this date a year ago I wrote a Christmas column listing about 60 things that would happen if I had my way. Well,



Brian's Song did get repeated on television but I wasn't too successful with the rest of my "would-be's" — for instance Spiro Agnew didn't join the Trappists and Mayor May's camera still is intact.

But hope blooms eternal so if I should get my way this Christmas

Buses would be manufactured with an eye to older people whose legs have lost elasticity . . . no child would have to wait to be adopted while their prejudiced elders argue over theoretical stumbling blocks . . . sales clerks would say thank you at least half the time you buy something.

TV broadcasts would drop the halftime band shows . . . Joe Saliceti and his bride Cynthia would have the happiest marriage of all time . . . Henry Aaron would break the home run record in 1973 (I can't wait

become man and yet removed none of the evils from mankind. They will mock the men who believe in a good God and yet do nothing to help the poor and suffering. Yes, Christmas this year, as always, will be celebrated with a great deal of love — and a great deal of hate.

What does a Christian answer, what does a Roman Catholic bishop say in the face of this reality? Perhaps we can only speak in parables. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, tells a parable of the king and humble maiden. He speaks of a king who fell in love with a girl in one of the villages of his kingdom. He loved her dearly and wanted her to be his wife. But he faced a great conflict. If he married the girl and made her the queen, he ran the risk that she would love him only because he had made her queen. If he gave up his throne and joined his beloved as a commoner, he ran the risk of being hated by her for being able to make her queen but not doing so.

In the Incarnation, God chose the second part of the king's dilemma. He gave up His throne, as it were, and became one of us. In so doing, he designated the human as the means to the divine. He said that salvation could be gained through the human condition. He announced that the reign of God had begun, not in some far-off place, but here in our midst. But He also said that the reign of God, the moment in the future when the lion would lie down with the

lamb, was like a mustard seed. It would take time and effort for it to grow and become visible. In telling us the parable of the wheat and weeds, Jesus is telling us that in this world good and evil will continue to grow together. Evil is a real part of life and it must be taken seriously. We must fight against it, trying to root it out, knowing that it will only be completely conquered when Jesus comes again.

The great temptation, of course, is for Christians to realize that they have been saved and then become smug and indifferent. The sickness is to become complacent, tired, comfortable in our theological rut. The danger is to forget that we must continually do battle against those forces of evil that would prevent the reign of God from coming about. We cannot celebrate Christ's birth in a manger one day and fight against open housing the next. We cannot speak of peace on earth in one breath and call for war in the next. We cannot delight in children one day and abort them the next.

My prayer for this Christmas is that we may celebrate it realistically. May we celebrate the Lord's coming by continuing to fight against the evils of the world. May we never tire of the mission to help bring about the reign of God and the peace that will come with it. It is then that God "will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death and no more mourning or sadness." (Rev. 21:4).

By Carmen Viglucci

Some Christmas Wishes

another year) . . . John Canepa would put on a little weight (friends say he looks peaked).

CBS would drop Maude . . . we would stop judging people by their ages . . . President Nixon would leave his necktie home, just once . . . the four newest Democrat and Chronicle editorial retirees, Bob Fischer, Tom Hicks, John Kenny and Jean Walrath, would find life better than they ever thought . . . and each would write at least one book.

All prisoners of war would come home . . . Martin Bormann would contact the Courier-Journal . . . Jesse James, too . . . Henry Kissinger would get married and settle down . . . my Johanna, age 7, would understand her First Communion far better than I did back in 1939 . . . our missionary priests and Sisters would have a full and rewarding year . . . as well as our cloistered nuns . . . The Blue Army would have a successful year.

Msgr. Cuffney would learn to speak up . . . baseball would name a black manager . . . Henry Clune's book would be a best-seller . . . discrimination would end in Northern Ireland . . . Fred Allen would

come back to emcee a talk show . . . Johnny Carson would get lost on the freeway . . . everyone who thinks he knows how to run a newspaper would get sentenced to one for a year . . . every newspaper worker who forgets that the reader comes first would spend a year working for public relations people.

Tony Malone would find a Sherpa guide afraid of height . . . Peter Taub 'll get a hauble . . . Bishops Hogan and Spears would learn that their Washington trip for peace paid dividends . . . Roger Gorman would get an honorary law degree.

People would be nice to bus drivers . . . we would all put aside our inferiority complexes and stop faulting others to buoy ourselves . . . conditions would improve in Latin America, if for no other reason, to avert a major war there . . . I wouldn't see another story about Onassis and his wife . . . President Nixon would become a Democrat . . . the Legislature would again defeat liberalized abortion and then would override Gov. Rockefeller's veto.

We would give the Prince of Peace world peace . . . and you and yours would have a merry Christmas.

Editorial

Jesus Christ Is Coming to Town

"Oh, you better watch out,
You better not cry,
You better not pout,
I'm telling you why,
Jesus Christ is coming to town."

We hope that no one will accuse us of irreverence because of the above jingle. We use it only to pose the question do we really believe that Jesus is coming to town as strongly as we do Santa Claus is.

Let's think about it. Santa Claus, after all, is easy for most of us to cope with (leaving out for the instant those who can't afford him). He is even an ally for parents who wave him in front of children in hopes of their behaving to the point where they are not adding to the holiday tension.

His approbation, or lack of it, is limited to who is "naughty and nice" and everybody knows that Santa never picks on adults.

But the thought of Jesus coming to town raises other issues.

He is particularly concerned with our wars, both the global variety and the backyard types.

Could we explain to the Prince of Peace on His terms why it is necessary to bomb cities, or to slander another human being?

He'll want to know how we have treated His brethren who have been sidetracked from the main line of our society — the poor, the lonely, the addict, the ill, the elderly, the victims of bigotry, the retarded, the abandoned, the hopeless.

Would any of us dare to say, "Well, look, Jesus, I was just too busy."

The irony is, of course, that Santa Claus really isn't coming to town, not literally — and for many of us, not even figuratively.

But Christ is.

Perhaps we have conveniently substituted that old softy Santa Claus for the penetrating insight of Christ. This is not to de-emphasize the gentility of Jesus but to point out that we subconsciously realize we have filthy corners in our society that would shame us before Him.

Obviously then we have to put the house in order for Jesus; He has given us the directions. Put it on your list for Christmas and for the Year of Renewal.