

1st Sunday of Advent – November 28/29, 2020 – Reflection for the Giving Tree

When Jesus hung upon the Giving Tree of Life, giving His life for our salvation, many in the crowd looking on regarded Him with cynicism. The Romans thought Him a joke; Pilate had a sign placed over His head, "The King of the Jews." The Jewish High Priests mocked Him: "If you are who you say you are, then save yourself and come down from that cross. Even one of the criminals hanging in punishment for his crimes sneered at Jesus, "If you really are the king they say you are, then save yourself, and us too while you're at it."

But others saw through the laughter and ridicule, saw through the sweat and blood and pain, saw the real gift that was being given and they believed: the thief: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom;" the Roman Centurion: "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Today, we enter upon the Advent and Christmas Seasons that should be a time for generosity and giving. But many of us are cynical when it comes to charity, "Why should I give anything when all they'll probably do is smoke it or drink it away?!!" Maybe some of you might remember that about a year ago, I shared that I had a similar attitude about those who in our cities, ask for handouts from drivers at every intersection and highway exit ramp. Yet I felt guilty about not giving anything and pretending not to see ... what if it was Jesus in disguise asking me for a little help? A friend told me she now keeps small amount gift cards on her for just such occasions. I thought her idea was brilliant and so I went out and purchased a bunch of \$5 Dunkin

Gift Cards hoping I could become a Dunkin Donor. Just last week, I gave away two of those cards to men who were begging on the street. I guessed I would see disappointment when they realized I wasn't giving them money, but instead, in each instance, each man's face broke into a big smile followed by a warm and grateful Thank You. My cynicism went away and I believed I had really done something good, something nice, something to help out a fellow human being.

Today in the shadow of the cross, that tree of life-giving love, we come to the branches of the Giving Tree. Its leaves represent the needs, the wishes of a real person in this most difficult of times. How many are out of work, not even able to put a roof over their heads and food on the table for their families, let alone buy gifts for their kids? How many have lost loved ones to the virus who were their support and their wall against the flood of homelessness and hunger? The Giving Tree this Year may look very different, but the need for our help was never more acute.

In a few moments, I and others will be moving through the congregation with bagged Gift Tags representing the needs of a child, an adult, a family in this season of giving. If you're willing, just raise your hand to signal you'd like a Bagged Tag and someone will deliver one to you. You might even want more than one ... just hold up the number of fingers for the number of Bagged Tags you'd like.

Wrapped Gifts with the tag you take as the gift tag must be returned to St. Brigid Church Hall at the parking lot door on the weekend of December 12 and 13 for a half an hour before each scheduled Mass where members of our Young Church will collect the gifts and give you a grateful smile and a warm Thank You on behalf of the ones you are

helping, and I'm sure in that moment, any cynicism you may have will melt away in the belief that you've really done something good, something nice, something to help out a fellow human being, something wonderful for Christ.