

Christmas – December 24/25, 2020 – Reflection

Christmas should be the season when people are filled with comfort and joy in the knowledge that God has loved us so much that God sent His only begotten Son, born a helpless little baby in a stable in Bethlehem, born to set us free from sin and death, born to open the gates of heaven for the likes of us, born to show us in flesh and blood how much God really loves each and every one of us.

But nowadays, Christmas has become the season of Hallmark, the time when that company which began by designing and selling greeting cards, makes all its money in those same cards and made-for-tv movies that tug at the heartstrings.

Many of you are still flexing your aching fingers from writing out all those Hallmark Christmas cards and nursing the papercut tongues wounded while licking all those envelopes you put them in to send far and wide.

And this year of all years, when people are home, fearing to gather with friends and family for those cherished Christmas traditions, many of us are bleary-eyed from watching all those Hallmark channel movies. And who could be blamed for watching movie after movie, night after night, season after season, that celebrates the warmth and joy of Christmas all year round on Hallmark? Afterall, each film is a work of art, a unique creation, filled with unforeseen plot twists and surprise endings that keep us coming back for more! Why, just think of the almost infinite variety of storylines that keep the audience guessing,

on the edge of their seats, never seeing the heartwarming ending coming, before it smacks you like a love punch and keeps you coming back for more! Their writers are geniuses, never once repeating a plot, never once retelling an old familiar story ... boy meets girl, girl's not too impressed with boy, but somehow, the sparks fly between them and love blossoms, boy is caught kissing - hugging another girl, first girl is crushed and dumps boy, boy explains it's not what you saw, boy and girl live happily ever after. Or, how 'bout this: girl leaves high-powered big city job - partnership - promotion - fiancé to come to small town to sell the family home - ranch - ski lodge - bakery - holiday house where she meets high school boyfriend, girl's not too impressed with boy, but somehow, the sparks fly between them and love blossoms, boy is caught kissing - hugging another girl, first girl is crushed and dumps boy, boy explains it's not what you saw, girl quits big city job, refuses big promotion or partnership, jettisons the fiancé, moves back home, boy and girl live happily ever after. Or, how 'bout those stories touched by royalty ... girl comes to work in royal palace, girl meets stuffy, pompous prince, girl 's not too impressed with royal boy, but somehow, the sparks fly between them and love blossoms, royal boy is caught kissing - hugging - dancing with a royal princess much preferred by boy's royal parents, girl is crushed and dumps royal boy, royal boy explains it's not what you saw, royal boy and girl live happily ever after as they dance away the years in the royal ball.

Ya gotta hand it to these guys at Hallmark ... they keep the suspense comin'!!!!!!

Hallmark wasn't always about cards and sappy movies. In old England a hallmark was a stamp placed on gold and silver articles that testified to the buyer that what they were getting was pure, genuine, and of the

highest quality. Just two weeks ago, Pope Francis reflected upon the Christmas feast and the joy that should accompany the celebration of the Savior's birth: "Joy should be the hallmark of the Christian's life, knowing that one is loved by God, saved by Jesus Christ and committed to lead others to Him."

The Holy Father went on to say, "The closer the Lord is to us, the more joy we feel (like holding a baby on your chest close to your heart, your heart and theirs beating almost as one), the farther away He is, the more sadness we feel. This is a rule for Christians."

But Pope Francis is not a man given to sappy, happily-ever-after sentiment: "Once a philosopher said something more or less like this," the pope recalled, "I do not understand how one can believe today, because those who say they believe have a face from a funeral wake!" Francis observes rightly, "Many Christians have that face - yes, a face from a funeral wake, a face of sadness, but, Christ is Risen! Christ loves you! And you have no joy?!" God so loved you that He came to be with you, to see you through everything until that happily-ever-after ending in heaven, and that, O Christian, should light up your face!

Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her King.