

Along the track

Commercialisation

Some travellers who go overseas get very annoyed at people selling products in the street. Sometimes these visitors can be rude or aggressive. Admittedly, these 'traders' or spruikers can be a bit of a nuisance and some can be very, very persistent, but in general they are only trying to earn a living in countries where employment or other such opportunities are pretty scarce. It's a case of this or nothing. They live in a consumer society, just as we do.

We often hear people railing against the commercialisation of Christmas or Easter, that Halloween has been introduced or whatever – we seem to lurch from one sales extravaganza to the next. But commercialisation is not the problem – businesses have to make a profit, so most of them take every opportunity available. We too are living in a consumer society. That's not the problem. The problem is us!

Christmas consumerism too often drowns out this special feast. Every year we also hear or read of some local Government authority that has banned cribs or decorations, or parents who have demanded that the words of Christmas carols be changed because they do not believe in God or Christmas or what it represents. As a result, we have managed to make Christmas a sales event, a passing fancy, an exhausting endurance exercise, or just a holiday devoid of its real meaning. But again, who do we have to blame for that?

Christmas is surely meant to be an attitude toward life, not just a carnival. Of course, gifts are fun, the crib, the tree, the dinner all have their place but how does all that touch our hearts and our souls? Do they bring us closer to God, to each other? Do they make us reach out to others, not just on that day but throughout the year?

If there is a dollar in it, why blame the department stores for cashing in? They wouldn't if it wasn't profitable. But when we let all this drown out the real Christmas story and its enduring meaning, then who do we blame?

It takes a very conscious and determined decision to put Christ back into Christmas. It is easy to get swallowed up by all the glitz and frantic activity but the birth of Christ has and should remain to have an extraordinary impact on the world and its history. Perhaps today more than ever, we need to be retelling that story and, even more importantly, re-living that story once again.

Religion is on the nose, as it were. Its reputation has been sadly tarnished by abuse scandals, by incredible violence in its name, by the seemingly unrelenting campaigns by those who see it as a negative force in

our world. It is often portrayed as being rich and powerful, out of touch with the modern world. We can rail against all that or we can take it on board and look again at this simple Christmas story – a story of profound love and generosity, a breathtaking event, that God loved us so much that God gave us Jesus. And all that happened in the most humble of circumstances, when the world was so desperately in need of this message of love and commitment. Not unlike our time.

Others will only hear that message through us. We are not expected to shout it from the roof tops, but Christmas does give us one opportunity to show what this message means, to show that faith and religion still do have a place because at their heart they are about the care of others, they are about justice for all, they are about working for peace, they are about looking after the sick and the lonely, the poor, the refugees, the homeless, the most vulnerable in our midst. And why? Not for any personal gain but because that is what the reign of God looks like, that is what God wants for all and that is what Jesus told us by his life, his actions and his words. Life to the full looks like that. And that's what He asks of us.

We start by re-telling this story in our homes and Christmas is a great place to start. We also tell that story by how we gather together at Christmas, in peace and harmony, without envy or harsh words or put downs. We tell it by how we reach out to others at this time, by what we do to make God present in our homes, by how the story of the birth of Jesus excites us and inspires us. We tell it by what sort of gifts we give, especially the gift of time that we give each other.

The little things still matter – send Christmas cards with a good Christmas message, have a crib in the home, say grace at Christmas, play the Christmas carols. In other words, make this day look and feel different. Go to your church.

This is a time when wonder and awe fill the eyes of children. That is one of the joys of Christmas. If we let it, that can lead us to a renewed awareness and appreciation of whatever we so easily take for granted, life itself, family, friends, good fortune. And remember, that this wonder and awe in children is the very thing that the lonely and those alone at this time miss the most. We might be able to do something about that?

This Christmas, may you give and receive love generously.

Regards
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