

This Christmas Make Room for Silence and Simplicity

By Bishop Victor Galeone

The hustle and bustle of the Christmas shopping season serves as a stark contrast to the lack of silence and simplicity in our lives.

Referring to the Savior's birth, the following refrain introduces two of the Christmas Season Masses: "When peaceful *silence* lay over all, and night had run half of her swift course, your all-powerful Word leapt down from your royal throne in the heavens." (Wisdom 18:14,15)

With the arrival of his Son, God's manner of acting towards us is the reverse of how he dealt with his chosen people in the Old Testament. The hallmarks of the latter were power and grandeur, while the New Testament highlights God's humility. This French couplet aptly captures the contrast:

"On Sinai, trumpets and lightening,
while the earth trembled.
But not a sound was heard of your coming,
when you entered the Virgin's womb."

Our modern society has developed an unbearable dislike for silence. Our every waking moment must be filled with sound - much of it noise, most of it meaningless. A few months ago, I was in an airport restroom, when a gentleman entered who seemed to be talking to himself. In fact, he was wearing ear buds and engaged in a phone conversation. He ah, went about his business and then left, all the while talking. How odd! Yet such oddities are fast becoming the norm.

I am reminded of what Peter Kreeft commented in his book on Pascal's *Pensees* : One of the worst punishments we impose on hardened criminals - solitary confinement - monks of an earlier age sought as the means of achieving closer intimacy with God.

Before making a practical application of the foregoing, let's examine why *simplicity* of life should matter to us as followers of Jesus. Consider the mad rush to purchase gifts for our loved ones in order to celebrate the Lord's birth. Again, a short verse highlights the contrast:

"Jesus was born in a borrowed manger.
He preached from a borrowed boat,
entered Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey,
and was buried in borrowed tomb."

(Radio KNOM)

Please understand me. I am not against exchanging gifts at Christmas time. Nor am I against modern technology. After all, I am preparing this message on a computer, am researching some items on the Internet, and will email the final draft to our communications' office. But both in the matter of gift-giving as well as our use of technology, it's important to maintain a proper balance. Now let's apply this to our individual lives.

These days there is much confusion and depression in our families. Why do you suppose that is? I'm not sure. Could it be that we're involved in so much talk and activity that we can't find time for God? Parents are so busy chauffeuring their children to little league games or ballet classes that there's no time left for God. We always find time for those persons that rate in our lives, so if we are too busy for God, obviously he doesn't rate. Parents, please set aside some time each day to pray as a family. Remember, the family that prays together, stays together.

And finally, let's look at the matter of simplifying our wants. Looking back on my own life, among my happiest experiences of Christmas are those where our family was struggling to make ends meet at the end of the Great Depression. But the love in our home more than compensated for the gifts that were never received. And that brings to mind a touching newspaper article that I read in the mid 90's.

Sixteen-year-old April Fleming was dying of cirrhosis of the liver. The doctors said that she might not live to see Christmas. And that's when Make-A-Wish Foundation stepped in. Their mission is to grant the wishes of children dying from a terminal illness - like flying a major league ballplayer to the bedside of a young kid in the last stages of leukemia.

When the Make-A-Wish Foundation asked April for her dying desire, she asked them to give Christmas presents to homeless kids. The marketing director for the foundation was visibly moved as she said, "I've never had a child want to give something to someone else."

Silence and simplicity! Do you want to have more peace in your life? Then make some room for silence and simplicity.