

Traveling Companion: A Special Christmas Gift

Fr. Michael Tracey

Last Christmas, our Nativity Crib had an extra special gift. Of course, all the figures were there – Mary, Joseph, the Christ Child, the Shepherds and, later on, the Three Wise Men. Many people stopped to look; some knelt to pray but I wondered how many noticed that extra special gift that lay in the straw.

What was that special gift and who brought it? The special gift was a green frosted cupcake with one candle. It was placed there on Christmas Day by a little child.

We live in an age when we are conscious of being politically correct in what we do and say. Our political correctness is an effort to make sure that everyone is included and that no one feels slighted or offended by anything we do or say. During the Christmas season, the politically correct greeting is, “Happy Holidays.” If we say, “Happy Christmas,” we might be in danger of offending someone.

When someone greets us with a “happy holiday” greeting, it could refer to any and all holidays. It would be just as fitting to greet one with “happy holiday” on Thanksgiving instead of “Happy Thanksgiving. Of course, one would greet a person at Easter with the same “happy holiday” instead of “Happy Easter.” This is to make sure that we don’t offend anyone even though they might even believe in the Easter Bunny instead of the Risen Christ. If one is going on vacation, the politically correct salutation might be “happy holidays,” instead of “have a wonderful vacation.”

It seems we have become so politically correct that we have become antiseptic in all our salutations, our relationships and our decision making. We have become disjointed human beings caught up in the dichotomy of the secular and the sacred.

Political correctness is an effort to be sensitive to people and situations in all walks of life. Its motives are admirable but it has generated its own paranoia. Now, we are afraid of saying anything that might offend, embarrass, or challenge someone’s sensitivities. Instead, we say nothing meaningful by saying something generic, making sure that the recipient is okay with it even though the giver may not be okay with it.

At this time of the year, success is measured by the jingle of cash registers; by the volume of “Sale” items; by the success of internet shopping; by packed planes that crowd our skies and cars that dot our highways. Each, in their own way, is making sure that everyone has a “happy holiday.”

The little child who placed the green-frosted cupcake with its one candle in our Nativity Crib this past Christmas knew nothing of political correctness. Maybe, to be politically correct, I should indicate that the little child put the cupcake in our holiday crèche instead of our Nativity Crib.

Still, without such knowledge of political correctness, that little child knew more than all the experts who posture their relationships by being politically correct. That child cut through the semantics and the human dichotomy created by political correctness, to the heart of the matter. Instinctively, that child knew that it didn’t matter how you define the Christmas or holiday season; that what really matters is a gift; a gift of simple green frosted cupcake; a reminder of a hungry world awaiting its Redeemer. That child had more faith in the reason for the season than in any and all efforts to be politically correct.

So, this Christmas, or to be more politically correct, this holiday season, I will watch for a little child with a cupcake and its one candle, placed in our Nativity Crib or holiday crèche. Once again, it will be a reminder that the Christ Child came into a hungry and waiting world, to show us all, that love transcends all political ideologies and correctness.