

Traveling Companion: No Room in the Inn

Fr. Michael Tracey

He kept whispering, "No Room in the Inn! No Room in the Inn!" At first, I thought I was just dreaming, and then I realized what was happening. God wouldn't let me sleep the other night. He sure got my attention. He slapped me around pretty good and gave me a piece of his mind. I sure hope I can, not only remember all He said but also be able to put it into practice.

He began by telling me that I needed to get my priorities right. "I suppose you know it will be Christmas soon," he began.

"Sure, I know Christmas is around the corner," I said, without trying to be facetious.

"I'm glad you know," He continued, "but you haven't been acting that way lately."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You know what I mean," He shot back.

"Well, if you mean it is a time for gift-giving, of remembering people who are special to me; then I have been doing that."

"Yes, you have been doing that all right! You've been busy buying presents for all those people who are on your Christmas list. In fact, I've noticed that you started a long time ago. Did you not buy some of those Christmas presents at the January sales?"

"Yes, I did," I answered Him. "They were on sale and I saved a few dollars anyway. Aren't you proud of me?"

"Don't expect me to hand out diplomas because you are a shrewd saver. Of course, you might call it, planning ahead," he emphasized.

I felt like thanking Him for recognizing that I was a planner. But, somehow, I knew not to press my luck with God.

"What do you mean?" I asked

"You think that this is what the season is all about, don't you?"

"Well, yes, it is about gift giving, isn't it?"

Before I could finish, he interjected, "What about those generic letters you send to your friends at Christmas. You know the ones! The ones filed with all the stuff you've been doing with your family all year and how you use all that as an excuse for not communicating with them for the rest of the year. And you send the same thing to everyone on your list. Is that the only time you write to or call your friends? Do you think you can make up for a year of non-communication with an impersonal letter? Is that anyway to treat your friends?"

At this stage, I was getting a bit defensive and I said, "But, God, I've been so busy all year, I hadn't the time to be in touch with them. At least, give me some credit for thinking about them now."

It was then that I noticed He had some more important things on His mind.

"So, Christmas is a time of gift-giving," He emphasized. 'And you've done well. You've written your generic letter to your friends. You've even bought presents for some people. Maybe, you expect me to pat you on the back. You really don't get it, do you?"

Now, I was getting a bit confused so I asked, "What do you mean?"

He was quick to answer, "Yes, Christmas is about gift-giving. But have you ever wondered why? Have you ever thought about the real reason for the season?"

"Of course, I have," I responded, sheepishly, "it is because of that first Christmas when you gave the world the gift of your Son, Jesus; how He was born in a manger in Bethlehem and was ministered to by angels in song."

"Good," he said, "You've got the story right. Now have you ever wondered where the people were that first Christmas? Why did they miss it?"

"I suppose they were not ready," I volunteered. "They were probably too busy doing other things."

"Exactly. Just like the people today. You are busy, too, just like them.

"What do you mean," I asked.

"Remember how that first Christmas, Mary and Joseph found no room in the inn; that Jesus had to be born in a stable filled with the fragrance of the animals!"

"I felt like interrupting Him but decided not. I nodded and He continued, "There is no room in your heart today for Him to be born there. You are so busy, so preoccupied with your 'lists' for Christmas, with your generic letters that you don't have time for the real reason for the season. There is no room in the inn of your heart because it is filled with trivial busyness. Part of it is filled with past hurts because you are not willing to let go and be healed. Part of you is filled with your own importance, trying to make an impression on people. Part of it is because you don't realize that Christmas is not a day or a season, it is a lifetime. What do I find? I find you busy, preoccupied, stressed out, filled with distractions that leave no room in the inn of your heart for me. Think about it!" he concluded.

In an instant, He was gone and I was left wide-awake trying to do some housecleaning and find some room in the inn of my heart for the Mysterious Visitor.