

OPINION & FEATURES

Christmas is in our hearts

MOST of us are looking for some sort of a sign this Christmas—something that could calm our fears about what lies ahead, given the unsure situation the country is facing today.

We have seen the signs—thousands losing their homes, their jobs, shoppers cutting down their Christmas lists and people who just see the holiday season as a bleak one. Yes, probably at one point or another, a lot have asked if Christmas still exists.

But we would like to remain optimistic.

It's a reality we all have to face – times may be hard, but Christmas and its spirit of love, faith and hope will always endure, not only during the season, but the whole year round.

So as we look for answers, and as we try to search for Christmas and its true meaning in these troubled times, we must be reminded that our focus should not be on what we don't have today. Christ was born in a manger, with hardly any possessions. And yet His birth is a symbol of hope for all Christians.

EDITORIAL

Christmas is also about sharing more than material things. It is embracing its true meaning, and knowing that it should always be in our hearts.

We at Asian Journal wish all our readers a blessed Christmas. May this season be filled with love for one another, faith that we will be able to endure these trying times and hope that the next year will hold a better life for all of us.

Maligayang Pasko! (AJ Press)



AP Photo

A Christmas story

SHORN of tinsels and trimmings of a highly commercialized and over-worldly celebration, Christmas can be observed as a pure and simple story of strong faith, of pure love and of unwavering hope. We firmly and strongly believe that more than two thousand years ago, God himself came into this world to become human like us in the person of Jesus Christ born of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came into this world because "God so loved the world that He gave His only son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life" (*Jn 3:16*).

Jesus is thus named "Emmanuel" or God-with-us. "He is the mediator because he is both God

A LAW EACH DAY

Jose C. Sison

and man. He holds within himself the entire intimate world of divinity, the entire mystery of the Trinity and the mystery both of temporal life and immortality. He is true man...Thanks to this, the entire world of men, the entire history of humanity, finds in Him, its expression before God; and not before a distant, unreachable God, but before a God that is in Him—that indeed is He" (John Paul II Crossing the threshold of Hope, 43). Hence Jesus Himself said that "whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do it to me".

In this light let me share with you this story

circulating in the internet. Some may have also come across it. It may have been told many times before in different ways but it is worth retelling and sharing especially during this Christmas time because of its simple message of true faith, hope and love. This is the story of Joanne who we can associate with our own "Juana."

"Joanne went to the mail box, and there was only one letter. She picked it up and looked at it before opening, but then she looked at the envelope again. There was no stamp, no postmark, only her name and address. She read the letter.

*Dear Joanne,
I am going to be in your neighborhood Saturday afternoon and I'd like to stop by for a visit.*

*Love Always,
Jesus*

Her hands were shaking as she placed the letter on the table. 'Why would the Lord want to visit me? I'm nobody special. I don't have anything to offer.' With that thought, Joanne remembered her empty kitchen cabinets. 'Oh my goodness, I really don't have anything to offer. I'll have to run down to the store and buy something for dinner'. She reached for her purse and counted out its contents; five dollars and forty cents. Well, I can get some bread and cold cuts, at least'

She threw on her coat and hurried out the door. A loaf of French bread, a half pound of sliced turkey and a carton of milk...leaving Joanne with a grand total of twelve cents to last her until Monday. Nonetheless, she felt good as she headed home,

her meager offerings tucked under her arms.

'Hey lady, can you help us lady?' Joanne had been so absorbed in her dinner plans she hadn't even noticed two figures huddled in the alleyway. A man and a woman both of them dressed in little more than rags. 'Look lady, I ain't got a job, ya know, and my wife and I have been living out here on the street, and, well, now it's getting cold, and we are getting kinda hungry, and, well, if you could help us lady we'd appreciate it'.

Joanne looked at them both. They were dirty, they smelled bad and frankly, she was certain that they could get some kind of work if they really wanted to. 'Sir I'd like to help you, but I am a poor woman myself. All I have is a few cold cuts and some bread, and I'm having an important guest for dinner tonight and I am planning on serving that to him. 'Yeah, well, okay lady, I understand. Thanks anyway.' The man put his arm around the woman's shoulders, turned and headed back into the alley.

As she watched them leave, Joanne felt a familiar twinge in her heart. 'Sir, wait!' The couple stopped and turned as she ran down the alley after them. 'Look, why don't you take this food. I'll figure out something else to serve my guest.' She handed the man her grocery bag. 'Thank you, lady. Thank you very much. Yes thank you.' It was the man's wife, and Joanne could see now that she was shivering 'You know, I've got another coat at home. Here why don't you take this one' Joanne un-buttoned her jacket and slipped it over the woman's shoul-

ders. Then smiling, she turned and walked back to the street...without her coat and with nothing to serve her guest. 'Thank you, lady! Thank you very much'

Joanne was chilled by the time she reached her front door, and worried too. The Lord was coming to visit and she didn't have anything to offer Him. She fumbled through her purse for the door key. But as she did, she noticed another envelope in her mail box. 'That's odd. The mailman doesn't usually come twice in one day.'

Dear Joanne,

It was so good to see you again. Thank you for the lovely meal and thank you too for the beautiful coat.

*Love always,
Jesus*

The air was still cold, but even without her coat, Joanne no longer noticed."

During the few remaining days before Christmas, therefore, it may be good to ponder and to remember how God loves us through His death on the cross; to celebrate for He is still with us here, among our brethren especially the least among them, the "Emmanuel, God-with-us, a God who shares man's lot and participates in his destiny." (*John Paul II idem p.62*); and to believe and hope that we will see Him again in all His glory forever and ever.

Sisons' greetings to one and all, may you have a blessed and joyous Christmas and prosperous New Year! (*Philstar.com*)

Christmas in a nation of political hamlets

I have to confess that writing this column for today comes with a measure of difficulty. From now till Christmas day, I am certain that every Filipino will be so distracted about the holidays that nothing short of an earthquake, a real successful coup, or a major volcanic eruption could possible get their attention.

Then there is the matter of picking out the appropriate topic. Just observing people around me and I can tell that the only thing they seem to pick up are traffic re-routing, Bazaar announcements, and airline announcements.

There are of course a handful of issues that could and should be given attention by government officials but given the incestuous and parasitic relationship of national and local government officials don't hold your breath waiting for people like DILG Secretary Ronnie Puno or even the President to do something about it.

Consider for instance how "traffic" in Metro Manila essentially defeated the conduct of business because people simply could not get anywhere. Don't blame the MMDA on this one because most of the traffic jams that happened in the last two weeks were courtesy of local government officials from cities to barangay not doing their jobs.

Thanks to local government autonomy, Mandaluyong decides to turn a crucial "round-about" or their Municipal Rotunda into one gigantic tiangge. So all the poor people who have to cross over from Makati or Pasig simply had to grin and bear it. The Ortigas business center had its own tiangge and for this, they chose to close down a street on a weekend. In Manila, there is now an uproar of missing traffic aides, which also happened in other barangays all over Metro Manila because they were holding their Christmas party.

Of course instead of trying to work out an agreement with private

villages to cooperate and open their gates during the Christmas rush our government officials did nothing of the sort because most of them now live in those very same villages and they don't want to compromise their security of their popularity.

So instead of having a Merry Christmas, most of us are still trying to decide if this "holiday season" is worth the bother. If it takes you four times longer just to get out of your barangay, why would you even bother with buying gifts or attending Christmas parties?

The only good thing that may come out of all this harassment is we could make a list of things that need to be addressed after the holidays. For instance a law that would empower the MMDA, DILG or the Local Mayor to open up certain streets in exclusive villages during periods of seasonal traffic congestions.

As a result of the holiday congestions, maybe someone can investigate what system is in place to control local governments from undertaking activities that violate laws on traffic and public safety such as converting side walks into commercial stalls thereby forcing pedestrians and automobiles to mix it up on the road.

During the holidays, many people were also reminded of the unfinished mission of *Kumpanyero* Senator Rene Cayetano who was working on the regulation if not removal of parking fees at Malls. Perhaps, Pia and Peter Cayetano should try driving and parking their cars in the "independent" parking lots in Makati where you pay as much as P200 for 12-hour parking.

Perhaps, all government officials should try driving around the country or Metro Manila on their own from time to time. This way they would have a better feel of reality and how local government autonomy has quietly converted Metro Manila into "political hamlets" where barangay captains and tanods make money as *kotong cops-kuno*.

Yes we have been turned into political hamlets where City Mayors or City Councils pick out numbers from the clouds and declare them as this year's tax rates on your real estate property. If you don't believe it, go ask Mayor Fred Lim who now has to deal with the legal mess and tax refunds ordered by the courts because the

previous administration assumed they had absolute authority.

Thanks to the political kingpins of these hamlets, many of the public roads and side walks have been handed over to tricycle associations and jeepney associations and bus companies for use as their dedicated parking area which of course earn millions of pesos annually for Mayors and their traffic operations officers.

These are just some of the things we will have to address in the coming year. The question is will you as an affected citizen simply shrug your shoulders and give up or are you willing to organize a phone brigade, a text brigade to call attention to these anomalies?

I remember an interesting incident that happened many years ago while we were on our way to catch a flight out of the country. Coming out of Villamor air base towards the NAIA, we found ourselves in the longest traffic jam.

For more than half an hour we sat patiently in the car, assuming there was an accident, or maybe several flights might be arriving, or the traffic lights might not be working. Eventually we found ourselves going nowhere and about to miss our flight.

I decided to get out of the car and walk to wherever or whatever was causing the traffic, to determine another course of action. I walked several hundred meters down the road and found the cause of the huge traffic jam.

A jeepney had been left sideways and occupied one and a half lanes of the two-lane road to the airport. I had no idea if it was stalled or abandoned but I decided to get a few guys to help me push the jeepney off the road.

Out of nowhere, the driver shows up and asked what I was doing with his vehicle. To avoid an argument I simply asked him if he wanted to explain to all the drivers in the cars behind us why he caused a two-kilometer traffic jam and caused people to miss their flights? He quickly got the point and cleared the road apologetically.

So after the holidays, you have a choice sit it out and suffer in ignorance or find out what the problem is and do something about it? (*Philstar.com*)



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