

Gift Giving

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One of the wonderful things about special occasions is the memories they bring; memories from the corners of our minds; recalling all the semi-forgotten experiences and expressions. Memories are a special and unique gift from God. I can always remember a special saying my father constantly repeated. “George, always remember, there’s nothing worse on land or sea, than an educated dunce.” When I was growing up I always liked to quote that saying because it gave me a good excuse when my grades weren’t up to par. I didn’t want to be an educated dunce. As an adult I came to realize the full concept of what he was talking about. Recently my young grandson asked me a question about God. I gave him an answer, and he said, “Gee, Grandpa, you know everything.” At first I felt pretty good, but later I thought about what my father said and I felt a bit foolish.

Gift giving on special occasions is about gratitude and expectations. While shopping recently I came across a nice little box full of children’s books. I thought that this would make a great “for no reason” gift when the grandchildren were looking for something to do. The occasion came all too soon. So I said to my granddaughter, “I have a special surprise for you for being so good.” As I gave her the box wrapped up like a present, she lit up with great excitement and began to squeal, “What is it? What is it?” She could hardly contain herself as she unwrapped it. As she opened the box her facial expression changed and a great disappointment fell over her. I was surprised by the loss of enthusiasm and quickly asked, “Is anything wrong?” No she said dejectedly. Then I said, “Why are you so sad?” She said, “I was hoping it was a beanie baby.”

I was expecting something more positive, like a “thank you.” Expectations sometimes can turn out to be a killer. We should

receive gifts on their own merit, without comparing them to other expectations; especially when they are given for no other reason than to say “I love you all the time, not just on special occasions.” The more I thought about it, the more I said to myself, “how many times have I done the same thing?” More than I care to admit.

My children still ask me, “What do you want for your birthday?” I keep telling them, “Something from your heart not your purse!” I suppose this is hard for them. It’s easier for them to buy something they like and think that you would like it also. Usually the size is wrong or the style is not me. There was one gift that I did take action on. My face did fall with shock when I opened the gift. There to my chagrin was a pair of silk Mickey Mouse printed undershorts. I asked, “Is this how you really see me?” The reply was, “I thought they were great!” These are definitely not me. The next day they went back to the store.

I began to realize that I was acting the same way as my granddaughter. I thought about being gracious when getting a gift; even if it’s not something I want. My thoughts went back to the special gift that Jesus provided to the multitude with the loaves and fish. [Mat.16:32-38] Jesus not only gave them the gift of food to nourish their bodies, but He also gave them the gift of the Good News of salvation to nourish their souls as well. The gift of food was past just their need, but was given to their fullness and beyond. The leftovers were more than they could consume. Can we not make the connection between this miracle and the miracle of the Eucharist that we receive every Sunday? Can we not think of all the other “for no reason” gifts that God the Father gives us, gifts that we can’t yet understand? What is our reaction to His goodness? How do our expectations receive them? Our heavenly Father gives us so many gifts that we tend to become selective and even ungrateful. We are like little children who have the wrong expectations.

How often do we throw these gifts of His love back in His face or barely acknowledge His generosity. We want our beanie babies now! Sometimes we use our selectivity of His gifts as a bargaining tool to get the goodies we want. We should look at the gifts we get and appreciate the love and thoughtfulness they represent as the real gift; not the utilitarian value of the gift. Let's keep the Mickey Mouse shorts; who knows, someday they just might be in style. To receive a gift with eloquence is by its very nature to give a gift of joy to the giver in return.

Let us recognize the real blessings in our lives: the gift of God's love for us which He shows in many ways. Most of the time His love is reflected in someone really loving us. It may not be in the way we were expecting. There is no greater gift than being loved by those we love. Love is not a short term gift, nor is it a "for no reason" gift, but it is the ultimate joy of life. Let us search every corner of our minds and soul and recall the goodness of God in the gift of the Eucharist; and in the gift of love of the family experiences which form the corners of our mind that have so long been forgotten. Love is the memories for our children to cherish as they grow older. This gift of love becomes their legacy.