

I have been accused, at times, of being somewhat pedantic in my letters to you. I will apologize now as this letter will join the others in tone and content. The holidays, in particular the holy days, usually bring me to a pensive place, filled with memories and emotions that I cannot avoid as I write to you, attempting to share what is meaningful to me and what I hope has meaning for you...

Christmas evokes so many thoughts, feelings and memories in all of us. For me, the memory that stands out so prominently this year is of a young choirboy who loved to sing at Midnight Mass. The pageantry, the procession, and living nativity that usually framed the Mass all contributed a context to Christmas that pervaded the celebration and gift giving to follow. That choirboy's soprano voice (yes, I once had such a voice!) featured prominently and gave him the sense of being one of the angels announcing the Birth of Our Lord. High up in the choir loft, that boy joined the other angels as they looked on the scene below. Emotions ran high in that boy as the Gospel announced the birth of He who is the promise of our salvation. Those angelic moments will remain part of that choirboy's memories and will forever color his experience of Christmas.

Choirboys grow up, life goes on, and the role of the angel seems but a distant memory. Today, as I sit here at my computer, I have to think, "What is my place in the Nativity now?" The soprano voice is long gone. The Latin verses of "Adeste Fideles" are a foggy memory to him at best. His place has changed. What is my place as witness to the Nativity this Christmas? The answer came from my former life as an English teacher and from an interesting source.

In Medieval literature, there is a group of plays that were written to help the uneducated understand the miracles and mysteries of our faith. In that former life, the choirboy then English teacher taught one of those mystery plays, "The Second Shepherd's Play." It was always a hit with my students as these plays were punctuated by a lightness and comic elements to make the more serious elements more palatable to the audience.

The very serious point of this play is that these shepherds who live in a world that has treated them cruelly and who have succumbed to and have added to the injustices of the world are brought into the Nativity. There, as they become a coarse and rustic Magi offering the Christ Child their meager gifts, they are transformed forever.

My voice is not the only reason that I no longer qualify as an angel at the Birth of Our Lord. Like the shepherds, I am often too caught up in the busy work of life. Like them, I often forget the vision that inspired that choirboy long ago. However, there is still a place for me near that manger. It is as a shepherd, trying to understand all that is given to us in the Birth of the Christ Child. My gifts won't compare to gold, frankincense and myrrh as they come from one who cannot claim the wisdom and single-minded persistence of those wise men, but from one who is among the sheep and who longs to understand all that is promised by in the birth of He who became one of us, who struggled with humanity as we do, and whose complete submission to His Father's will taught us the path to salvation.

It's been a long time since I've attended Midnight Mass. I think it's time to do so again. I won't be in the choir loft -- fortunately for everyone else. I will be in the pews, looking on with awe as those shepherds did, putting aside my daily concerns, and attempting to understand the promise that is the Birth of Our Lord. Christ's birth was not for the angels, but for the shepherds and for all of us. Perhaps my place witnessing the Nativity is more realistic now. Perhaps I will be changed as those poor shepherds were, long ago. It's my time to listen to those angels in the choir loft, to look on that Nativity, and be amazed by the promise of salvation contained within that manger.

I wish all of you a Blessed and Merry Christmas.

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Principal