

St. Lucy Parish Pastor's Note



One of the harder memories I have from my service in the Marine Corps was the after Christmas return of fellow Marines when you have been on duty during this festive time. As a young man those first Christmases away from family, community and tradition often felt empty. Hearing the stories of friends talking about the joy of family, their sharing of gifts and the blessings of being together was not easy to hear. One of the only familiar things I had in Beaufort, South Carolina was Christmas Mass. I can still remember quite distinctly that first Christmas in 1979, I had just recently been assigned to the Marine Corps Air Station and being new was at the bottom of the ladder. Going to Midnight Mass that Christmas was a true blessing as the celebration brought into focus the reality that we are not alone.

I tell this short story not to lament the loss of Christmas with family because it was the first but not the last time I have been away for Christmas but rather the reality of our universal call to holiness and how we discover this through community and tradition that we often don't even realize we have until it is needed. But it must be a tradition that has been practiced and ingrained in our imagination through time and love. This is where family, the domestic Church as St. John Paul II called it, becomes vitally important for the practice and handing on of the Faith.

I doubt that I would have shown up at the base chapel that first Christmas night if I hadn't done so for my entire life. I did have options...there was bed...there were a few parties with drinks and food that I could have attended...there was the invitation to attend other Christian services but for me the only place I could go was to where I had practiced and formed my early conscience...that was Mass. Let me also make it clear, the Mass was not the only reason I remained in the faith and practiced the faith (very poorly for the four years of service where I showed up when I thought I needed to but certainly not every Sunday) rather it was also the home that was filled with prayer, God and love. We were not a perfect family, Dad had a temper and Mom was often frazzled from the nine children. There was the reality of a large family where the phrase, "you always had someone to play with....and you always had someone to fight with" was true and practiced often.

In reflecting back it was faith both in the service of love in the family and the receiving of love in the Eucharist that were entangled in such a way that one could not be separated from the other. Pope Benedict XVI explains it better that I can in the Encyclical "Deus Caritas Est: God is Love" where he writes, "Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. The saints—consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta—constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbor from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others. Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a "commandment" imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is "divine" because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends

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our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).” (#18)
Let us pray for the growth of true love and faith in all families during this Christmas time.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and God bless

Fr. Mark