



Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

A CHRISTMAS LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

Dear Parishioners,

When I was growing up, my city had all the excitement leading up to Christmas Day and through the season. Christmas was a twelve-day celebration. Stores remained closed until after New Year's Day (only a brief opening of a market or two to help with food necessities). Families stayed in their own homes on Christmas Day and visits were in the days following.

Nostalgia doesn't help us as we look to celebrate Christmas in this time and place. The commercial world now decides when the marketing of Christmas begins and ends. When it appears that Christmas is over, our faith says it is just beginning. How do we keep Jesus from having a stamp saying "Made in the Holy Land"? And how do we celebrate the birthday of Jesus as we should?

Take a look again at the Holy Family. Joseph was a simple man who was confused by what was happening. He had to put his own plans aside and follow the directions he received in a dream. He was poor and afraid; yet, somehow courageous. Mary was not a fancy young woman in blue; she was a poor peasant girl from a backward town who put her life's plans aside. She didn't panic, she trusted in God and accepted her destiny, in mystery. Then we have Jesus who has been trivialized in images that belie the fact that He chose to be born poor and rejected, even in His infancy. His introduction to life was in the cave shelter of animals.

So how are we to "enter" this year's experience of Christmas? When I read some of Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry, one in particular, *Joseph's Suspicion*, sums up the very human aspect of our response:

*The angel spoke and patiently tried to
convince the man, who met him with clenched fists:
Can you not see that in her every way
she is as cool as God's first morning mist?*

*And yet the man looked at him glowering with
suspicion, murmuring: what has brought about her change?
But then the angel cried in anger: Carpenter!
Do you not yet perceive the hand of God's own doing?*

*Because you handle wood and know your trade,
do you in arrogance call Him to task
who from the self-same wood you handle now
can make green leaves appear and swelling buds?*

*He understood. And as he raised his eyes,
now full of fear, to meet the angel's face,
he was gone. Slowly Joseph removed his cap.
Then he began to sing his song of praise.*

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CHRISTMASTIME STEWARDSHIP

To Be a Christ-Bearer

It is not uncommon to give gifts during Advent and Christmas, but it is never enough just to leave it at that. True, Jesus gave *Himself* to us at the first Christmas. And, as always, we should strive to imitate Him by giving of *ourselves* in some way as we celebrate the anniversary of His birth. But there is a way to give even more than just ourselves – by giving the gift of Christ to others. The seasons of Advent and Christmas are perfect opportunities to share the love and message of Jesus with others in a beautiful way.

Of course, giving of ourselves in imitation of Jesus is a beautiful thing. But it is just as important to remember that, as human beings, we bear the likeness of God. As Christians, Jesus Himself inhabits our very souls. As Catholics, our Lord literally dwells within us when we receive Him in the Eucharist. Based upon this logic, we do so much more than imitate Jesus when we selflessly give of ourselves to others. Indeed, just as Mary carried Christ in her womb when she visited her cousin, Elizabeth, that first Advent, and just as she brought Him in her arms to Simeon as a newborn child that first Christmas season, we can also literally bring Jesus Christ to the world.

What a profound task Our Lord has laid out for us this season! As He grew in Mary's

womb during that first Advent, Jesus could only go where Mary chose to take Him. Of course, He couldn't do anything – He couldn't even speak. Mary became His hands and feet, and even His voice. Mary could have stayed at home during her pregnancy, resting and preparing for life with a newborn, as most mothers do. But instead, the Blessed Mother helped her Son begin His mission by bringing Him to her cousin, Elizabeth. Today, in much the same way, Christ invites us to share Him with the rest of the world. He chooses to make His presence known through us. And so, as the spiritual writer Caryll Houselander beautifully states, "We must carry Jesus in our hearts wherever He wants us to go, and there are many places to which He may *never* go unless we take Him to them."

How do we bring Jesus to those in our parish and community? There are many ways. We might visit with a sick parishioner over the holidays, providing fellowship and support in their time of need. We may consider serving at a local soup kitchen or food bank, and doing our part to make sure that the hungry are fed. We can sing Christmas carols for our neighbors, bringing true joy and love to their homes. Perhaps we could help a tired friend clean her house, making her life a little bit easier during this busy season.

Or we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. We might even try going to work with a cheery disposition, or donating money so that a starving child in a poor country can have something to eat. These are just a few examples of how we can practice stewardship.

We may sometimes feel as if our efforts are in vain – especially when it is hard to see the effects of our evangelization. This temptation is particularly strong when we offer our treasure as a gift to God. The positive effects of monetary gifts aren't always as visible as gifts of time or talent. But when we give of our treasure, the love of Jesus can travel to places we could never go. While our gift may not directly affect someone in a positive way, it very well may enable someone else to do it for us. Sometimes God doesn't just ask *us* to be His hands and feet, but to enable *someone else* to be them, as well.

Advent and Christmas give us the opportunity to reflect on Jesus' call to live as stewards and disciples of His Word. God has put us in a particular place, given us a certain amount of time, asked us to perform particular tasks, and to selflessly share a portion of our gifts. This is all for a singular purpose – to bring His Son into the world, and make Christ's presence just as real as when He first became man more than 2,000 years ago.



ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PROJECT PROVIDES TO THOSE IN NEED *Throughout the Community*

Each December, American Martyrs holds an annual Christmas Project to collect supplies and nonperishable food items for families in our local community. Through generous



Former Project Assistant Jacquie Nason and Christmas Project Coordinator Cathy Goodhue in 2011

donations from parishioners, American Martyrs is able to provide much-needed supplies and food for the holidays to a great number of families.

On the weekend of December 13 and 14, Cathy Goodhue, our Christmas Project Coordinator, and her team of helpers will accept donated items beginning at the 5 p.m. Mass on Saturday through 12 noon on Sunday. Parishioners will be able to drop off donated items in O'Donnell Hall. Currently, Cathy is looking for volunteers to come on Sunday to wrap gifts and create care packages, as well as for people with cars to transport the care packages to the local families who will ultimately receive them.

"We invite parishioners to

come as a family and wrap the gifts on Sunday, and we make care packages using the donated supplies and canned goods," Cathy says. "One of the Girl Scout troops wraps apple boxes that they get from the local grocery stores, and we use those boxes to provide several days of nonperishable foods for each family. Then we have volunteers who drive these care packages to these local families that afternoon."

Although Cathy coordinates the project, she wouldn't be able to do it without the help of countless parishioners and other groups and ministries from American Martyrs who volunteer their time and give donations.

"It's a totally crazy day on the Sunday, with all of the donations, wrapping, creating care packages, etc.," Cathy says. "We try to get the different ministries involved, so sometimes a group will ask all of their members to bring donations. The young moms Group may bring items that are appropriate for toddlers. We get the Confirmation class to bring gifts for teenagers, and they get service hours for helping. Some of the moms groups also help with the wrapping and getting their folks to make donations. There are a lot of people involved. We couldn't do it without everybody's help!"

Along with creating and delivering care packages to local families in need, the Christmas Project supports the Downtown

Women's Shelter by collecting and donating industrial-sized canned goods, personal items, gently used clothing items, and other supplies. Volunteers deliver 8 to 12 carloads of food items to St. Lawrence of Brindisi, and extra supplies are used to fulfill leftover orders for the Family to Family project. Donated stuffed animals are given to the Arcadia Fire Department, and supplies are sent to St. Anne's home for unwed mothers.

The Christmas Project at American Martyrs is an amazing event that helps so many in need throughout the community. This project would not be possible without the help of parishioners and their families, so please consider helping any way you can. For a list of acceptable items for donation, please look for a flyer in the bulletin at Mass on Sundays, or head to the parish website at www.americanmartyrs.org. For more information, please contact the parish office at 310-545-5651.



Current Christmas Project Coordinator Cathy Goodhue, previous Coordinator Marian Folger, and Project Assistant Jacquie Nason in 2009

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

COMMUNAL RITE OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE (With Individual Confession)

Monday, December 15, 7:30PM

Tuesday, December 16	7:00 – 7:15AM	Saturday, December 20	8:30 – 9:00AM AND
Wednesday, December 17	5:30 – 6:00PM		4:00 – 4:30PM
Thursday, December 18	7:00 – 7:30AM	Tuesday, December 23	7:00 – 7:30AM
		<i>No Confessions On Christmas Eve</i>	

CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

CHRISTMAS EVE, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

THE CHURCH	MUSIC
4:00PM	5:00PM Sunday Choir <i>(There will be a Livestream of the 4:00pm Mass in St. Kateri)</i>
6:00PM	5:00PM Choir
8:00PM	Dcn. Derek Brown (Cantor/Guitar)
Midnight	Sean Mahon (5PM Sat. Choir)
	<i>Christmas Carols begin at 11:30PM</i>

O'DONNELL	MUSIC
4:00PM	Bill Svarda (Cantor/Piano)

CHRISTMAS DAY, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

THE CHURCH	MUSIC
7:30AM	Daniel Wargo (Cantor/Piano)
9:30AM	9:30AM Choir
11:30AM	11:30AM Choir
1:00PM	Sean Mahon
	No 5:00PM Mass on Christmas Day

DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26 - 8:00AM

NEW YEAR'S EVE, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31 - 8:00AM AND 5:00PM

NEW YEAR'S DAY, THURSDAY, JANUARY 1 - 8:00AM AND 5:00PM



A CHRISTMAS LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR *(continued from front cover)*

For me this poem, *Joseph's Suspicion*, puts flesh and blood around the Christmas scene. Are we not all in some ways like Joseph? We struggle as we deal with our role in the life of Jesus, the Word made flesh. We too have to protect Him and give Him shelter. We too have to hear the "innkeepers" of our day say "no" to Him. We too have to be united with Mary in her relationship to Him, which led her to say, "Do whatever He tells you." We too must believe He is still ready to turn the water of our fears and doubts into the wine of new faith, hope and love. My prayer is that all of us may see Him with new eyes during this beautiful Christmas season. I pray for each one of you and ask God to give you a truly Happy Christmas and all of God's blessings in the New Year ahead. Bring a friend to Church and share the blessings of our faith.

God bless you,

Handwritten signature of Fr. John Barry in cursive.

Rev. Msgr. John F. Barry, P.A.
Pastor

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