

Dear Friends,

A couple of weeks ago I was on my way to Iowa and stopped for a quick lunch at a diner near one of my previous parishes. The waitress had just brought my reuben and fries when old Elmer Snodgrass, a long time parishioner and fan of yours truly plopped down opposite me.

“It’s been a long time Father, how ya doin these days?” Elmer has always been one of those outgoing types. He’s a farmer from out in rural Carroll County, his wife died about 14 years ago. And while he has a friendly enough demeanor, there’s always been a subtle touch of the cynic in him. He thinks he’s quite the theologian because he’s always been so close to nature; tilling the soil, planting the seeds, caring for the crops, waiting for the harvest and all.

“So, Elmer, you got all your Christmas shopping done yet?” I asked. “As I recall you have quite a crew of grandchildren, even a few great grandchildren now. I can remember baptizing one of them when I was here back in ’98. What was her name? Rebecca?”

“No, Father, she was born in ’92. You baptized little Rachel. She’s still my favorite. She’s is almost 10 now. She thinks she’s really something because she can run the computer and I can’t even turn the darn thing on.”

“But to get back to your question, no, I quit Christmas shopping. Can’t stand it! I went to the Farm and Fleet a couple weeks ago to find a new plunger for the clogged pipes and all I could see was row after row of toys, computer games, Christmas trees, decorations, and I just have to tell ya Father, the smell of tires and the sound of Christmas music just don’t seem to mix. I’m tired of Christmas already. I just wish it was over.”

Elmer was quiet for a few moments as I slowly nibbled on some fries, and he became a little nostalgic.

“I still remember my first Christmas with Beulah back in ‘46. I was just home from the war, and was getting back on my feet. I was in debt up to my eyeballs with the farm, Beulah was pregnant with Roger (he’s Rachel’s grampa), and we didn’t have any idea of how we were gonna do Christmas presents. Now I’m not all that fussy about gifts, the ones I get, or the ones I give. But it was our first time to celebrate Christmas together. My present for her was the biggest load of wood I could cut for the stove. Her present was a quilt she made from scraps of old rags for our bed. It was the warmest, coziest Christmas we ever had.”

As I swallowed the last bite of my reuben I thought I saw the beginning of a tear form in his eyes. But he told me he’s got the Macular Degeneration” and had just been to see Doc McCoy, so emotionally he was just fine.

But driving along the country roads in early December going to my parents’ house, I thought about what old Elmer said about Christmas now in comparison to that first Christmas 62 years ago when he and Beulah were poor newlyweds living off the rich soil. How their lives seemed to mirror the Holy Family 2000 years ago. They didn’t know what they were doing, or how they would survive; they were engulfed in a life of poverty and danger, a life that would transform the world with the salvation Christ came to bring.

During these final weeks of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas maybe we need to examine how our own lives mirror that of the Holy Family. We too are called to bring the light of Christ into the world in the ways we show our generosity, our joy and our delight as we celebrate the birthday of Jesus. My prayer is that this Christmas will be the warmest, coziest one of all for you and your family.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel

