



Winter 2023

To the many who have cared,

Often when praying of late, the phrase, “Thy kingdom come thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” has entered my thoughts, unbeckoned but not unwelcome. At first, I observed the occurrence with curiosity, and nothing more. But as it persisted on a regular basis, I ultimately decided to stop mid-prayer and speak aloud the words that had come to me, before resuming my intentional prayers wherever I had left off.

People of Christian background will immediately recognize the source of these words, the seminal and often recited *Lord’s Prayer*, the prayer that Jesus recited to His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray. I have long consented with the widely held belief that this brief devotion, just several verses in length, possesses all of the essential elements to be considered when reaching out to God in prayer.

The practice of stopping mid-prayer to recite the second verse of the *Lord’s Prayer*, or *Our Father*, soon became a comfortable part of my morning prayer ritual. I embraced it and found that the uttering of the words, “Thy kingdom come thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” not only calmed me, but also helped me to better focus on my additional prayers, once I returned to them.

With time, the verse began to penetrate my thoughts throughout the day, most often when I was out in the world, running personal errands and fulfilling my responsibilities on behalf of Only A Child. I began to speak the words aloud, if softly when in the company of others, and came to think of them as a personal mantra; a reminder that I could have no greater ambition than to live a life which seeks to fulfill God’s wish that heaven be manifest on earth by way of His creation.

Those of you who have received these letters for a time may recall that I sometimes wrestle with the tendency to give priority to the cultural practices of the Christmas holiday, often at the expense of the religious. The push to replace the time-honored greeting of ‘Merry Christmas’ with ‘Happy Holidays’ serves as the latest example of giving greater recognition to the secular holiday.

A convincing argument can be made that, in an ever more diverse society, the need to be inclusive should be acknowledged and respected. I accept and embrace the belief that people of varied ethnic, cultural and religious beginnings should strive to live in harmony. Common ground can be found. While recently searching for the definition of a civilized society, I came upon the following, “What is the foundation of all civilization?” The answer, “The foundation of all civilizations and societies is the ability of humans to collaborate with one another.” Well said. It seems to me, however, that the promotion of inclusivity need not demand that all traces of the holiest elements of what remains for many, a holiday of great distinction, be removed from the public consciousness. The simple act of acknowledging and respecting the right of all to worship as they see fit - or not - would, I believe, prove to be an equal if not more effective way to promote tolerance first, then inclusivity, by degree.

One could also make the case that Christmas is one of several holidays during the season which commences at Thanksgiving and concludes on New Year's Day. Thanksgiving now holds a prominent place in the hearts of many, and understandably so. It's intention remains pure, it's activities largely untouched by the excesses of an overly materialistic society. Yet despite the gross commercialization of Christmas, it continues to be the single most revered day of the year for much of the Christian population, earning it I believe, the distinction of having its own specific acknowledgement, as does Thanksgiving.

It is arguable that, with the advances of present day technology and the instant world-wide communication resulting from it, U.S. influence in Guatemala has never been greater. Last year, I began to notice that the same push to replace 'Merry Christmas' with 'Happy Holidays' had taken hold in the public sector, this in a country where nearly 90% of the population identifies as being Christian.

At roughly the same time, I noticed a significant change in the programming of the English language radio station which I occasionally listen to in Guatemala. It is the kind of station which presents an exclusively Christmas music format come mid-November. For as far back as I can remember, the station played an nearly equal mix of Christmas carols and popular Christmas fare. I enjoyed it. Beginning last year, however, the carols ceased to be offered. I soon tired of listening to, what seemed to be, endless versions of 'Santa Baby' and 'All I want for Christmas is you,' and, several days in to the Christmas season, tuned out.

While briefly visiting my native New England in November, I learned that a movement had taken hold to return the 'Merry Christmas' greeting to its previously prominent place in the seasonal consciousness. I imagine that not everyone will be pleased with this development, but I for one, was heartened by the news.

Encouraged, I decided to revisit the English language radio station, curious to see what they were offering this year. To my surprise and delight, traditional Christian Christmas carols had once again been given a significant place in the December rotation. Once again, I was heartened by the development.

It seems safe to say that many people have been offended by the vulgarization of Christmas. But as it is a consequence of an excessive focus on the commercial and popular aspects of the day, what sense does it make to further disregard its Christian origin and all that it represents: the sacred; the divine; the eternal; the story of God entering humanity in the form of a poor and vulnerable infant; the hope and promise of a restored and holy humanity by way of the birth of Jesus?

Many have long been puzzled by the fleeting nature of Christmas *spirit*, left to wonder how it is possible that all of the goodwill generated during the month of December so quickly vanishes, come the New Year. I readily recognize that the cultural Christmas traditions and celebrations generate their own particular brand of joy, good will and even peace. As such, I will continue to enjoy them. They too, however, are rooted in the Eternal origins of the day, the Source of all that remains holy and right with the season. Separate the cultural from the divine and what is left is the temporary and the ephemeral. Perhaps this explains why the lovelier aspects of a largely cultural Christmas so quickly fade from memory once Christmas day is behind us.

A quick walk down the main street of my home town quickly confirms that ours is a multi-cultural society. The simple act of living in my home town requires that one regularly interact with people who come from various political, cultural and religious backgrounds. Although I always make a concerted effort to be kind to strangers when our paths cross, I try in earnest to show added warmth to those who are not only new to Waltham Massachusetts, but quite possibly, new to our country, as well. The goal is to make them feel comfortable in their new home, to show them that long time residents welcome them to the community. Having lived in Guatemala for nearly 30 years, I understand how isolating and lonely it can be to take up residence in a foreign land.

*"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

Largely working class cities like my home town are, in many ways, on the forefront of a massive world-wide shift from a former model of clearly defined societies and borders, to a new one of blurred cultures and frontiers. Regardless of whether or not one is comfortable with this new paradigm, it appears to be here to stay. Given the significance of the situation, I have given it much thought and concluded that those of us living to witness this historical transformation have been charged with the privilege and responsibility to help insure that this brave new world gets off to the best possible start. We are the pioneers.

What troubles me most about the 'Happy Holidays' campaign is the concern that it is as much motivated by the desire to remove a prominent Christian holy day from all aspects of public life, as it is by the wish to promote inclusivity. I sincerely hope that time will prove me wrong.

It has been nearly 20 years since I last spent a Christmas in the U.S. I've little understanding of how the season and the day look and sound and feel back home at present. May it remain the time of year when the love of God is more readily manifest; the place where God's kingdom comes and finds a home away from home; the season when God and humanity find common ground and merge to become one.

Thank you for seeing us through another year, our 29<sup>th</sup>! The generosity you have shown our ministry continues to inspire those of us who call it home, and motivate us to be sure that the kindness you have shown us will bear fruit by passing your example on to others.

Merry Christmas. Happy Hanukkah. God bless us everyone.

*George*

George

PS - Our 2023 wish list is a simple one. For some time, at Christmas we have gifted our residents and staff a pair of sneakers and a sweater. The sneakers are purchased at a New Balance factory outlet and can be obtained year round. The sweaters however, are bought in November. As I had not returned home that month since before the pandemic, we have not gifted the sweaters since 2019. Having returned this November, we will renew that tradition this year. The cost is: \$50, for a pair of sneakers / \$25 for a sweater. Please indicate on the donation card if your gift has a wish list intention. Thank you.