

Christmas
12.25.25

The last time I had a chicken fight with my older brother was when I was nine years old. He was eleven. For the uninitiated, chicken fights involve hoisting a younger, lighter brother on your shoulders. The two brothers on the top push and shove. The two brothers on the bottom bump into each other...until one group tumbles to the ground. (At this point and time, I'd like to offer a disclaimer. PLEASE DO NOT do this at home; or at least don't do this INSIDE the house.)

The final chicken fight in my short-lived chicken fighting career ended when my younger brother and I were on the losing end of the battle. I lost my balance. My younger brother and I went crashing into a table. On that table was a glass box. I'd seen that glass box countless times on the table where it rested but never really paid any attention to it. Of course, that glass box fell onto the floor and broke into a hundred pieces.

Hearing the commotion, my mother raced into the room. She noticed her shame-faced boys on the floor and then caught sight of the shards of glass all around us. As we quickly learned that glass box was no ordinary knickknack. The top of the box was engraved with just a few sentences. Those sentences were part of my dad's marriage proposal to my mom which he had spoken to her about twenty years before. My dad gave it to my mom as a wedding gift. Yup, it was probably my Mom's most beloved possession.

To say my mom got mad at that moment is an understatement. I never saw her so angry or heard her shout so loudly...EVER. She sent my older brother and me to our room. (Rightfully, the younger ones weren't held culpable at all.) When we got to our room, my older brother looked worried...REALLY worried. Now my older brother never worried about or was ever afraid of anything. But this time he was extremely worried and afraid. His reaction made me nervous...REALLY nervous. This was bad!

A few hours later we were allowed to come downstairs. My mom didn't talk with my brother and me for the rest of the day. We apologized profusely and said we would replace the case. No response.

The next day, my mom said she forgave us. She said we didn't have to replace the box. I think I remember hearing something like "a replacement just wouldn't be the same." And then something miraculous happened. She was her regular self again – available to us, doing mom things for us, and treating us like that episode had never, ever happened. She simply continued to love us – despite what my older brother and I had done. In these many years that have passed since that fateful day, it is apparent that at that moment and beyond, my mom decided to live like Christ. She was practicing what she often professed, despite the serious disappointment, grief, and anger she felt.

When we think of Christ being born at Christmas, many will focus on the fact that he came to save us from our sins. Some might argue and even say that Christ was, "paying the price for our sins." This "atonement" theology, which technically might be true, misses the mark somewhat in giving the full picture of

why Christ was born. While Christ came to save us from our sin, while he gives us a share in his eternal life by virtue of his own life, death, and resurrection, the birth of Christ shows us first and foremost the transformative power of love.

As Jesus was condemned to death, while he carried his cross, and during his crucifixion, Jesus never fought back. He never sought revenge on those who unjustly condemned and crucified him. He just kept loving. Jesus lovingly gazed upon Pilate in the hope of helping him to experience what is true, the Truth that Christ himself embodied. Christ was compassionate and empathetic to his mother and the women he met along the way as he carried his cross to Calvary. He made a blanket statement of forgiveness to the whole crowd who stood before him, who mocked him, and who spat on him. He said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Christ pronounced words of forgiveness and offered the promise of eternal life to the repentant thief who hung on the cross next to him. He made sure his mother and the beloved disciple were taken care of – symbolic of his concern for the universal Church as well as a command to the members of the Church to take care of one another.

In addition to the love of Christ changing the heart of the thief who hung on the cross next to him, his witness of love changed the heart of the centurion who stood at the foot of the cross and realized when looking upon the crucified Christ that, “surely, this is the Son of God.”

The Word became flesh, Jesus was born among us to remind us that he understands the pains and pitfalls which we experience in

life. Fully human and fully divine, Christ knows the pain that comes from our humanity and was born among us to share with us his divine love which has the power to transform everything – even those sins and offenses which seem unforgivable.

The circumstances of his birth depict that the love of Christ transforms the worst of situations. If they had a choice, Mary and Joseph would have stayed in Nazareth and enjoyed the support of family and friends as Mary gave birth to Jesus. Instead, they traveled to a rather unremarkable town named Bethlehem. If they had a choice, that birth would have taken place in the comfort of an inn or the security of someone's home. Instead the King of Kings was born in a stable – a cave that housed sheep, goats and work animals like oxen and mules. If they had a choice, they would have had the nicest of blankets to wrap around their newborn baby. But all that Mary and Joseph had to keep the child warm were a few strips of tattered cloth – swaddling clothes. Those tattered cloths would have to do. And they were good enough for the Messiah, the Son of God.

In all these things, God takes a difficult situation and brings peace to the tension; he takes what's ordinary and raises it to the level of extraordinary. Yes, Christ pays the price for our sins, but he does so with the currency of love. Tonight (today) we reconnect with the origin of all love and the incarnation of that love among us. In fact, we reconnect with that love every time we pray, every time we gather on Sunday for Mass, every time we serve someone among us, every time we forgive from the heart. We attempt to reconnect with the Christ again, and again, and again because we don't quite get it yet. We keep coming

back to Mass Sunday after Sunday and we pray each morning and at night because we have not yet quite integrated that love and its accompanying light into our hearts and lives. But as we do, the love and light of Christ begins to burn more intensely and brightly in us.

The author Brian McLaren beautifully describes how we can enter more deeply into the love of Christ and bask in his light – not just at Christmas, but always. “It flows not from taking, but giving, not from fear but from faith, not from conflict but from reconciliation, not from domination but from service” (Richard Rohr’s Meditations, Week Fifty-Two: Christ in All Things, 12/24/25).

By myself, I cannot correct and reconstruct what I might have broken, ruined, and destroyed because of my sin. But as I allow the transformative life and love of Christ into my heart and share that with others (even those I don’t like or those I consider enemies) that love has the power to transform hearts – the hearts of others, but more importantly, my own weak and tepid heart.

Light of the newborn Christ, illuminate me. Love of the child placed in the manger, feed and transform me into your image and likeness. Christ who was crucified, free me from sin. Christ risen from the dead, empower me to love others as you love me. May what we receive from Christ this Christmas be the gift we generously give to all, today and every day.

Amen? Amen! Merry Christmas!