
Advent 1 2009

This week when I went into the video store I noticed something odd and out of place – there in the Christmas section were movies such as a *Christmas Carol* with Alistair Simms and Jimmy Steward in *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Frosty the Snowman* but there, also, was the movie *Diehard* with Bruce Willis.

You know the movie? It's about a bunch of German terrorists who attack a high rise tower and take lots of hostages and it's a shoot 'em up and bombs and explosions. You know how you have chick flicks? This is a guy movie. It's what men do to relax - but it didn't belong in the Christmas Section.

I took it to the girl behind the counter "I think this is in the wrong section" I said to her and handed her the movie. "No" she said. You see, it's in the Christmas section." When she saw my confusion she said "It's because the terrorists attack the building during a Christmas Party so you see it is a Christmas movie!

That made me shake my head a bit. Fortunately, there was another customer who thought it was a bit much as well. All of this struck me as some rather confused Christmas values. How could an action flick about terrorists merit being put in the same section as movies about the Christ Child?

My confusion isn't helped either by the stores having Boxing Day sales when we're not even in December and the *Sears Wish Book* that arrives in August. My confusion is not helped by the fact that last year on December 13th a store began it's 12 Days of Christmas shopping countdown – completely misunderstanding that the 12 Days of Christmas are December 24th until January 6th which is the Christmas Season.

Well, for what it's worth, we're confusing everyone today because today – as far as the church is concerned – is New Year's Day. It is the first day of Advent when we begin a whole new cycle of readings from the scripture and were you to be in church every day for three years you would have heard the most important sections of the Bible. But it is more than just the turning of the

calendar – the lighting of the Advent candles that remind us that we live both in sacred and secular time, and it is the beginning of the preparation we do to get ready for Christmas Day – and unlike everyone else who is getting ready for Christmas by getting more and more hyped up and more and more excited it is a time for us to be a little more serious and go inside ourselves.

Advent is an opportunity for us to be really clear about our values – even if everyone else seems confused in theirs. The point of Advent is to create a space in our busy worlds - which get even busier at Christmas - so that we reflect upon just who is this Jesus that we celebrate on Christmas Day and what does he mean to us? and how well do we honour him by the things we say and do?

While everyone else may be kicking back with shortbread and eggnog Advent isn't a time to check out but instead is a time to sort out the values we have and to evaluate just how well our lives are reflecting the claim that we are followers of the child born in Bethlehem.

Advent is like house keeping. House keeping means often getting dirty, finding messes under the messes and having to throw out a whole bunch of junk. It means opening up that dreaded guest room door – you know that room it's like the junk drawer in the kitchen where everything gets chucked...all those things which you are not quite sure what it is but you feel anxious about throwing it out just in case...things like: the warranty from the washing machine, the plastic back off something, I have three playing cards in my junk drawer and I hope the rest will show up.

And if you don't have junk drawer you have the guest room...the junk room, where your husband's fishing pole goes in, and his golf clubs and your wife's three hundred balls of wool - until when a guest comes to stay you show him the room and say open at your own risk...suddenly there's not room for a guest!

And at Advent we look in the soul and see all the things that need to be thrown out – things that come between you and your lord...perhaps anger that's rotting a hole inside you, perhaps

insecurities, perhaps addictions, perhaps...you name it, it's there in the human soul.

Keeping house in the soul means that we have to be brave and deal with the messes – and sometimes that means being really brave and going to seek spiritual direction from a wise person or going to a therapist or a counselor.

But space has to be made because a guest is coming... Christ is coming and wants to live in the heart –if there is room. Thomas Merton put it this way “The greatest need of our time is to clean out the enormous mass of mental and emotional rubbish that clutters our minds...without which we cannot begin to see.”

Advent is here. It is here - now create a guest room in your heart for the Christ to dwell within and we do not say when he comes “there is no room in the inn.”