

## St. Nicholas Day

Long ago, in the fourth century in what is today the country of Turkey lived a very poor family. The family was so poor in fact that the three daughters were going to be sold into slavery which meant an inevitable life of prostitution.

The bishop of the town, a good man named Nicholas, heard about the plight of the three girls. Late at night, when the town was asleep, he crept through the streets to their home and leaning through the window, threw three gold coins into the room.

The girls had hung their stockings by the chimney so they would be warm and dry in the morning and by chance, so the story goes one coin fell into each of their stockings.

In the morning, the three gold coins were discovered and the family was now wealthy enough to buy their way back out of debt and the children were spared. There are many different variations on this story and it is why on some pawnbroker signs you will see three coins – Nicholas among being patron saint of pawnbrokers and of sailors too but he is also patron saint of children.

Today is Saint Nicholas Day and of course the Bishop who was a real and historical person has become intertwined with the figure of Santa Claus. The story of the kindness of the bishop has become trivialized by our culture and given the status of legend. It has become a quaint story of the legend of the Christmas Stocking.

December 6<sup>th</sup> which is Saint Nicholas Day has lost this association and instead has become eclipsed because it is the day of the Montreal Massacre which has its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary today. For me, the story of St. Nicholas is an important story and it is worth remembering today – it is a story about a man of Christian values who acted in a strong to protect in the name of Jesus Christ who was his master, those who were helpless and unable to protect themselves.

In Jesus' time, children were seen as basically having no value. They did not have any status and in Mark's gospel we have the story of how the children are being brought to Jesus so that he

might bless them. We are told the disciples seem to think Jesus has more important things to do with his time and so they scold the people and try to send them away – now this is one of the few times we see Jesus getting angry.

“When Jesus noticed this, he was angry and said to his disciples, ‘Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” Jesus has high regard for the children. In Matthew’s gospel in chapter 18.10 he tells us that we “take care not to despise any of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven are always in the presence of my Father in heaven.”

What Jesus is in fact saying here was something that would surprise his disciples and his audience. Jesus is speaking of what we call “Guardian Angels”. The angels who are always in the presence of God were in fact the most powerful of the angels. Jesus is saying in effect that the children, the most helpless of people are in fact watched over by the most powerful of heaven’s host.

Jesus in fact stands up for all kinds of people who do not have a great deal of power – he stands up for children, for women, for the sick and for the stranger. Jesus also stood up for us for when we were lost in our sin and estrangement from God he stood up for our cause by going to the cross and by giving his life – and by this act and sacrifice of love he buys us back and redeems us.

In the story of Nicholas, the bishop who is a follower of Jesus takes it upon himself to stand up for the children. Today, we who are the followers of Jesus are called upon to also stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. And so today, I want to begin a little project that I hope to do each year. Many of you have seen this magazine from World Vision. In it are wonderful ways to help poor children by buying them school supplies or by buying their families a goat or cow.

But on page 25, there is a very special way to buy a child out of slavery. The slavery of sexual exploitation. In many places,

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boys and girls are sold into prostitution at very young ages and forced into the global sex trade. So, in the spirit of St. Nicholas in a way that captures once again the kindness that he displayed one night by throwing three gold coins into the home of a poor family, I am inviting you to join with me over the next few weeks by parting with three gold coins – three loonies – and drop them in this Christmas sock.

I have written to churches all up and down the Island inviting them to join with me in what I am calling the St. Nicholas Day Project. I am also inviting the Legion to do so. This Christmas sock will be here all throughout the Christmas season from December 6<sup>th</sup> through to January 6<sup>th</sup> which is the Epiphany.

If \$75 is raised, then one child is helped and given shelter, medical care and counseling and where possible even vocational training. If \$150 is raised then two children are saved. If you can part with a little change we can make a big difference together. Once the coins are collected the proceeds will be sent to World Vision with a specific request that the funds are used to by back children.

It is my hope that this project becomes something many churches do. I am glad to say that I had word that St. George the Martyr will be participating in this project. Today is St. Nicholas Day when we look behind the legend and see a good man who acted in faith and who made a difference.

What will one small act do? Perhaps best to leave the last word to a saying by the Rabbis that “Whoever saves one life saves the entire world.” Please help to save somebody’s world.