



I once made the mistake of going into the mall just a few days after Christmas. Never in all my life have I seen so many people in one place and they all had their heads down like charging bulls stampeding towards the bargains.

You see, I had forgotten how busy the malls are after Christmas – when I said to my wife Judy in a wide eyed kind of a gee whiz sort of way “Gosh it’s so busy” she looked at me as if I was just off the boat from somewhere and said “What do you expect? It’s Boxing Week sales. Didn’t you know that?”

Well, I guess I did know that because even before Boxing Day the stores were having Boxing Day sales and the sales and the crowds and the push towards New Years has got me reflecting a bit on how fast our culture wants to push us out of Christmas and into the next round of shopping.

I have heard someone say on the 26<sup>th</sup> “Christmas is finished, get over it”. And many are now even taking down Christmas trees and putting away Christmas decorations. And yet, here we are at church reading the Christmas story keeping the crèche up and keeping the church dressed in all its finery. Instead of putting Christmas away the church insists on lingering and marking a full 12 days for Christmas – and only on January 6<sup>th</sup> with the Epiphany do we declare the Christmas season over. We’re in no hurry.

In fact, traditionally, the old church calendar not only celebrates the birth of Jesus but also remembers four other special days which get by and large ignored nowadays and certainly don’t get advertised in the newspapers. Yesterday, on what we call Boxing Day it commemorates the first martyr for Jesus, Stephen who was stoned to death while Saul, who later became Paul looked on.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> , today, is the day to remember the evangelist John who of all the gospel writers had the deepest insight into who Jesus is, and who helped us understand how Jesus was one with the Father. On the 28<sup>th</sup> which is tomorrow , the calendar remembers





the innocent children who were slain by King Herod – which for us is a rather sobering reminder to us of the sort of world that Jesus came to save. And on January 1<sup>st</sup> the church remembers Jesus being dedicated to God in the Temple of Jerusalem.

It is in my opinion rather sad that we do not by and large pay much attention to these four special days because they have important things to say to us who have just celebrated the birth of Jesus – things that we need to take to heart if we are to be his followers.

St. Stephen reminds us that bearing the gospel to the world will not be an easy task – we can expect hostility when we witness to it and that we should not be surprised by that. St. John the Evangelist reminds us that we are to constantly seek through prayer and scripture deeper insights into who Jesus is for us and to enrich our relationship with him. The Holy Innocents remind us that the world is a hurting place and to beware making our faith a private and comfortable refuge from the world – instead we are to use it to transform the world. Lastly, The Dedication of the Lord on January 1<sup>st</sup> reminds us that we too are to personally dedicate ourselves into the service of God.

The Christmas season reminds us that we can live in two types of time - we can choose the secular time of the endless procession of days in which we tear off one calendar page after another without going anywhere really – or we can also live in sacred time in which we remember God at work in the world redeeming it, renewing it and sanctifying it.

I want to suggest that while people around us are busy “putting Christmas back in its box” we resist being squeezed back into “the routine of things”. Roman Catholic priest Edward Hays talks about how we leave the holidays behind and move back into the “hollow days” where we leave behind Christmas and get back to work and business as usual.





We must resist that temptation as best we can and instead live in both secular and sacred time. Developing the practice of saying morning and evening prayers may be helpful in your personal practice in achieving this goal.

Living in sacred time is hard work but it is what we must practice if we are to truly honour the Christ child whose birth we celebrate today.

On this, our last Sunday of the year it is timely we close with a prayer to ask God to bless our coming New Year.

Lord, You who live outside of time and reside in the imperishable moment and who can make holy every moment of our lives should we seek your blessing, we ask your blessing upon this coming new year. Bless us with eyes to see you in each of its 365 days and nights Bless us with new moons and full moons. Bless us with happy seasons and a long life and grant to us, Lord, the new year's gift of a year of love and faithful service to you. Amen.

