

Reflections from Fr. Dennis Gallagher, Provincial of the Assumptionists North American Province



Some of you of a certain age may remember Peggy Lee, the songstress who belted out “Fever,” but also a rather sad song, entitled “Is that all there is?” In that second song, she relates a series of experiences in her life – watching her house burn down as a child, her first visit to the circus, and her first falling in love – and after each one she concludes, “Is that all there is, my friend, is that all there is?” If so, she says, “let’s keep on dancing and bring out the booze.” It’s a song of disenchantment, of world-weariness. The world always comes up short in delivering the goods. It always leaves us wanting more. In the face of life’s failure to satisfy our heart’s desire, we’re left with bringing out the booze.

Christmas is God’s answer to Peggy Lee. To the disenchantment and world-weariness enshrined in that ballad, God gives us enchantment and a world freshly re-made, re-created. The cycle of disillusionment is broken. And it happens in the most improbable way. God comes to us as an infant in an inhospitable world. He is recognized by those who have not lost their

capacity for enchantment, the shepherds watching after their flocks at night. For these watchful ones, like the three wise men of the epiphany, the possibility of something new, of something that breathes life into our tired old world, has stayed alive in their hearts.

What about us? Can the enchantment of a Christmas morning work its way into our hearts, so that its transforming power can have a more lasting effect? That's really the question. Even if it gets obscured by resigning ourselves to just making it through the day, we all have, deep within us, a desire for peace, and a peace that this world cannot give. Isn't that what brings us here to hope and to pray, and yes, to celebrate?

To celebrate a God who does not leave us to our own devices, but who leaps over the distance separating us to share our human life. God with us. Emmanuel. Christmas is especially affecting for those who are burdened down, the lost, the lonely, those who feel themselves cast aside. But there are different kinds of burdens, and it's good for us to admit that our material well-being and our cultural sophistication can also be a burden that inhibits us from opening our hearts in awe and wonder at the goodness of God.

Let us pray for a greater simplicity and genuine humility, for the capacity to be enchanted by a God who has loved us so much.

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