

Homily for Christmas

Christmas is about giving. And Christmas is about gifts. So allow me to tell you a story about giving and about a gift...a small and insignificant gift.

The gift was from a 5th Grade boy named Eddie. It was a gift that he gave his teacher, Mrs. Thompson. Now the boy had experienced some tough breaks. His mom had died when he was in the 4th Grade. His father became increasingly distant. Eddie had performed poorly at school. His classmates often made fun of him and Mrs. Thompson seemed to have no problem giving him a great many Fs and telling him that he was destined to fail.

But back to the gift. On the last day of school before Christmas the students all brought in their gifts for Mrs. Thompson. Eddie's was a strange looking package, wrapped in brown paper and sealed with masking tape. When Mrs. Thompson opened it, she found an old rhinestone bracelet with several stones missing and a half bottle of perfume. The other students laughed. But Mrs. Thompson, with great sensitivity, dutifully put on the bracelet and sprayed a bit of perfume on herself. It silenced the laughing students and made Eddie very proud.

At the end of the day Eddie stayed after class and told his teacher “That was Mom’s favorite bracelet and you smell just like her.” Mrs. Thompson was so moved that when they resumed class in January she made it a point to make a difference in Eddie’s life. She tutored him and gave him a feeling of worth and increased his self-esteem ten-fold. In June Eddie was practically a different student.

The father moved out of state and so it was many years before Mrs. Thompson heard from Eddie. Eventually she got a letter from Eddie telling her that he had graduated from high school second in his class and that she was his best friend. Four years later another letter announced that he was valedictorian of his college class and that he was entering medical school.

Finally she received a letter years later informing her that he was now a doctor and that he was getting married. Eddie invited Mrs. Thompson to “sit where my mother and father would sit because they’re both dead and you’re all I’ve got”. In 1958 Eddie, who was Dr. Edward Tatum, won the Nobel Prize for bio-chemistry.

The gift that Eddie gave Mrs. Thompson was small. The gift that Mrs. Thompson gave Eddie was, in many ways, equally small....a few extra minutes after class, a modicum of attention that he so desperately needed. But isn’t that what Christmas is really all about?

Isn't this what the real miracle of Christmas is all about...that God is seen in the wonder of both the ordinary and the small. The miracle of God is that God can make much of nothing and something of almost anything. A little town becomes the focus of the world's best hope; the power and presence of God is wrapped in a little baby. The test of God's power is not in God's capacity to move mountains and outmaneuver the phenomena of nature but to make much of little and miracles that dispel the darkness and allow us to see the great light of God's unending love for all of us.

May we who celebrate God's gift to us at Christmas be willing to share that same gift with each other in the small and simple gifts of time, attention and love.