A survival kit for Christmas

By Father Joseph Breighner

So what do you want for Christmas? What are you planning on getting someone else for Christmas? I'm writing this article the evening of Thanksgiving Day – some stores are even open today. The mad rush for Christmas shopping officially starts tomorrow. I say this without any self-righteous judgment. For years I would show up at various family gatherings with bags of presents. Today I mostly just bring love. It's all we need, and what we are all looking for.

However, if you would like to buy something special along those lines, allow me to share a gift I was given for Thanksgiving. It's called a "Daily Survival Kit." I'll quote their list and scriptural references. The commentary is my own.

Toothpick – To remind you to pick out the good qualities in others. Matthew 7:1

In life, we find what we look for. If we look for what's wrong,we find plenty of wrong. If we look for what's right, we find plenty of what's right. When we hold any negative judgment against anyone else, that negativity lives inside us. Look for the good. Allow the good energy to live inside us.

Rubber Band – to remind you to be flexible; things may not always work out the way you want, but it will work out. Romans 8:28

Our egos want to control everything. However, when we can let go and let God, we surrender literally to our Higher Power. We surrender our humanity to divinity. All things do work together for the good for those who love God.

Bandaid – to remind you to heal hurt feelings – yours or someone else's. Colossians 3:12-14.

Judgment and criticism just keeps hurt alive, in the other person and in ourselves.

Let go of the need to “get even” and instead just love. As Martin Luther King said: “Revenge makes us even. Forgiveness makes us better.”

Chewing Gum – to remind you to stick with it and you can accomplish anything. Philippians 4:13.

When we’re feeling low – depressed, sad, lonely, overwhelmed, etc. – it’s easy to give in and give up. Those are the times not to drop out, but to step up -to move up into the energy of courageousness. I’ve felt many low feelings many times in life. What I’ve learned from life, however, is that love is the only feeling that matters. God’s love is always there. We have to look up, not down.

Candy Hugs and Kisses – to remind you that everyone needs a kiss or a hug every day. 1John4:7.

A picture that I carry with me to most of my talks and parish missions shows Jesus in the clouds hugging someone. In the background is the outline of God the Father’s face. The Spirit is imaged as a dove. We need to allow ourselves daily to feel the arms of God’s love surrounding us.

Note Pad and Pencil – to remind you to list your blessings every day. Ephesians 1.

At the end of each day I am mostly faithful to writing down good things that happened to me that day. My sister, Helen, and brother-in-law, Mike, have a habit of sitting together to share with each other things that made them feel good during the day. We need to acknowledge our good feelings. Unfortunately, we can tend to pay more attention to the negative things in life.

Eraser – to remind you that everyone makes mistakes and its okay. Genesis 50: 15-20.

My working definition of Original Sin is that it is “that which makes it impossible to always make the right choice.” Compassion is a wonderful word. We need to learn to accept God’s forgiveness, to forgive others, and to forgive ourselves. Sometimes we forget to forgive ourselves.

Tea Bags – to remind you to relax daily. 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

I don’t relax easily. I often feel hard-wired for anxiety. Why else would I be working alone in my room Thanksgiving Night? But I’m consciously allowing myself to take at least fleeting moments to reflect. I allow myself, at my best, to just be. “Be still and know that I am God.” That’s one of my favorite scriptural quotes. When I am still, I know the presence of God. My mind can be loud, noisy, and demanding. God is always loving, healing, bringing joy and giving peace. In the silence, I know that.

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