

Catholic Review Column: The Cure for the Post-Christmas Blues

Next week is Christmas.

Many, by now, have put up the tree, decorated the house inside and out, purchased most of the gifts on their list, mailed their Christmas greetings and have been to or will attend Christmas parties and open houses. All of this we do in preparation for and anticipation of the coming of that wonderful day that falls each year on Dec. 25.

Once Christmas comes and goes, however, many are often left with an empty, anti-climactic feeling that is made all the worse when the decorations come down, the parties end, the credit card bills arrive, our clothes fit a little snugger, and we struggle just to get out of bed in the morning. Many people experience the post-Christmas “blues.” In fact, I recall one parishioner some years ago telling me, “I feel so down in January that I almost wish Christmas never came.”

Christmas is not the problem, I’d argue. It’s how we celebrate Christmas that leads to our emptiness each January.

To be clear, I’m not suggesting we skip the Christmas parties, gifts, trees, lights and mistletoe, all of which are hallmarks of Christmas celebrations. What I would suggest, however, is that we try celebrating Christmas a little differently this year. In this alternative way of celebrating, we may still shop, give gifts, go to parties, decorate, visit friends and family, as well as eat and drink good things in moderation – but with this one critical, life-changing difference: we will let ourselves see in the face of the newborn Savior an invitation to begin afresh, to take stock of what is really most important in our lives, especially our relationship with God, with loved ones, with friends, and even enemies.

We will give ourselves permission to hear Joseph and Mary knocking at the door of our hearts; and instead of telling them there is no room in the inn, we will decide to open wide our hearts to Jesus and make him our welcome guest, not just at Christmas, but all the time, in good days, bad days and routine days. We will let

ourselves listen to the announcement of the angels of the birth of Christ, and realize that that announcement is meant for us, personally. "He loves me and he gave himself for me!" St. Paul exclaimed.

"The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane," Pope Francis says in "The Joy of the Gospel."

Living life on a higher plane means experiencing at long last in our daily lives the profound truth that we are loved by God, deeply and personally loved, so much so that God's son became a child, a helpless baby, so that his love would not be far off but accessible to you and to me. Living life on a higher plane means that right now, in whatever situation we find ourselves - whether we are well along the road to holiness or hesitating to enter it, whether we are part of the church or are feeling alienated from it, living a good life or snared in some sin we wish we would have never heard of - we can this Christmas know and believe that God really does love us.

Let yourself be loved by God and love God in return. Let the Holy Spirit take you to the heart of the Gospel. Once we have fallen in love with God, we will find our lasting joy and satisfaction in letting his love shape our daily lives. Then, after Christmas is over we might find ourselves, as Blessed John Henry Newman said, "more humble, more holy, more affectionate, more resigned, more happy, more full of God."

May you and yours have a blessed Christmas filled with lasting joy!