

This Christmas, rediscover silence and God

I have shared this story before. This year, it is worth repeating.

It was Christmas Eve, and this particular family was too poor to even have a Christmas tree. Then there was a knock at the door. A man was going door to door selling Christmas trees. The lady told the man that she had no money. He asked her how much she had, and she responded that she had a quarter. The man gave her the tree for 25 cents.

I was an infant at the time. That woman was my mother. And my sister, Helen, said that it was the most beautiful tree she had ever seen. An angel had indeed shown up that Christmas.

Christmas reminds us of the best in all of us. God didn't enter the world, and then leave again. God entered the world to show us God in flesh and blood, and then God sent his Spirit so that God could always be present in us, in our flesh and blood. We are not just spectators at Christmas, watching what happened long ago. We are more like Mary giving birth to God in the way we live and love.

This past year has been unlike any I can remember: fires and floods, tornadoes and terrorist attacks, senseless murders and tragic drug addictions. As the Christmas carol goes: "We need a little Christmas, right this very minute!"

And so Christmas does come again. Into the chaos and carnage of life, suddenly "All is calm. All is bright."

As a teenager I remember walking to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Essex on Christmas evening. The pageantry of Midnight Mass, and the hustle and bustle of all the people going to church Christmas morning, were all over. The church doors were open in those days. I would enter the dark church and walk up the aisle to where the Christmas scene was. I found great peace in those moments. My family was poor, so I felt comforted that Jesus was poor also. I figured that God could understand what I was going through.

We need to rediscover silence. We need to appreciate the quiet. And in the stillness we can see God at work in our world. In the midst of all the tragedies and fires and floods and crimes, there were always other people trying to help. There were people trying to make life better. In those people I see the presence of Christ.

There was an old theological term called: "anonymous Christians." It referred to people acting in Christ-like ways without ever even thinking of themselves as Christians. Perhaps we might expand that term today, and refer to them as God-anonymous people - people who act like God who may not even profess a belief in God.

We are all created in the image and likeness of God. At Christmas we get to celebrate God made man in the fullness of time. May we one day be able to celebrate the God who lives in us and through us all the time.