

Weston

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL | FRIDAY | DECEMBER 19, 2003

Community News

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL •

Clergy REASONS TO REJOICE

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When I taught at a local Catholic high school, I had a colleague, a religious Brother, who each year visited his brother and sister-in-law up North for Christmas.

One year, he was complaining about how religiously and spiritually cold the experience was since his brother and Jewish sister-in-law are uncommitted and do not practice their respective faith traditions. His



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the season.”

niece and nephew had no clue that there was any religious significance to the Christmas holiday at all. In Brother Joe's words, “They didn't know ‘the reason for

I suggested that he recognize that he and his family had different reasons for the season. He was celebrating the birth of Jesus and they were celebrating the winter solstice. Could he enjoy his family and their celebrations while keeping a spiritual holiday in his heart and participating in the local holiday worship? He did, and they had a much better time of it.

Is there a real reason for the season? Humans have been celebrating this change of seasons for millennia. The ancient Romans' reason for the season was to celebrate the rebirth of the *sol invictus*, the “unconquered sun.” Fifth-century Roman Christians, as the Empire was transitioning from a pagan society to a Christian one, established their annual celebration of the birth of Jesus, the “sun of justice,” thus hoping to steal the fire from the pagans. (One could argue that the pagans have restolen their feast!)

Most human beings need little reason for the season to cut loose a bit or a lot, party and enjoy life, especially in the coldness and dreariness of a northern winter. Rather than make an argument for which reason for the season is the original, the best or the most right, I would like to make some suggestions for those for whom the birth of Jesus is the reason for the season.

Perhaps those with different reasons for the season might find some wisdom and insight.

First, celebrate simply. We don't need to jam pack every minute of these six weeks with as many activities as possible.

We don't need to compete for the best decorated house in the neighborhood, the brightest lights or the jingliest bells!

Second, celebrate soberly. Rather than fill ourselves with food, drink and inane party conversation, fill hearts and souls with a deeper relationship with God (remember our reason for the season!) and a deeper relationship with family. Look for moments of real conversation with those whom you love.

Third, practice that most blessed of human virtues — generosity! Open your wallets, your day planners and your lives to the needs of those around you. If Christmas is about the gift of God's son that we have received, then respond with generosity.

Finally, be quiet enough to pay attention to the natural beauty that surrounds us, the primordial gift of the creator. Take time to walk and appreciate a Florida winter, the beauty of a sunset, the night sky, the phases of the moon. Come to know what the Psalmist meant when he sang “the heavens declare the glory of God.”

May we receive from God in this holiday season warmer hearts, brighter lives and closer ties with each other!

The Rev. Paul E. Edwards is pastor of St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in Weston. To listen to Father Paul's inspirational homilies, please visit our web site at www.st-katharinedrexel.org