

By now the rush of Christmas shopping is over-the turkey has been eaten-including the leftovers and even the traditional homemade soup. The Christmas baskets were all delivered to those in need. The presents have all been put away and the decorations have been in the basement for another year and we can all breathe a collective sigh of relief. Santa was his normal generous self and we can all put our feet up and relax for now.

Shortly after Christmas, I was just about to sit at my computer when I was interrupted by a phone call. It was a friend calling to tell me that her neighbor's daughter has been involved in a fatal boating accident. Unfortunately fatalities like this happen all too often but it was a comment made by the father that touched me the deepest. He said that this past Christmas was the first time in sixteen years that their daughter had been able to come home for Christmas and how very much they enjoyed having the family together but he had no idea that it would be for the very last time.

Would he have changed anything if he had known? Would his daughter or any other member of the family done anything different? What about our own family? How would we behave if we knew that this was a person's last day on this earth? .Perhaps we would even cancel all our other activities so that we could spend as much time as possible with them. We might cook them their favorite meal or sit down and pray with them. If, God forbid, we had a quarrel with them, we would try and settle our differences with them. We would tell them how much we loved them and how much we are going to miss them. We might not reveal to them that we knew what was going to happen but we would be gentle, compassionate and loving in the way we responded to them. Not only would we be compassionate to our loved ones but we would also show that same kindness and compassion to a neighbor or even a stranger if we knew that they were about to die.

But why should this day be any different? Why should our behavior change because we knew about an imminent death? The truth of the matter is that it shouldn't be any different-we should treat all those we meet every day with love, kindness and compassion. God asks us to love one another in the same way that He loves each and every one of us. He asks only that we try and respond to someone the way He would respond. This is quite the challenge for us humans. To take the time to be present to another person sometimes requires a great sacrifice on our part but it is a sacrifice that can be very spiritually rewarding. The daily demands on all of us are great but we must always be alert to the needs of others and respond in the best way we can.

Christmas , I know you will agree, is the time of year when we most expect people to be kind and giving and loving. How many times have we said. "Children, don't fight-it's Christmas" or "I spent too much money on presents but it's Christmas" or "I have to be with my family today-it's Christmas" or "I want to go to church today-it's Christmas" or "let's help a needy family-it's Christmas"? Most of us make a special effort to give, love and share because it's Christmas. I like to think we do this in honor of His birthday but

that is not always the case. Sometimes we do this because Christmas is when we are expected to be kind and loving and generous.

However, what is important is that we are caring and loving and giving not only at Christmas but every day all year. Wouldn't this world of ours be a much better place if we all acted as if every day was Christmas day or if everyone treated one another as if it was going to be their last day on earth? We know that this is the way that He wants us to act but we know that we are human and sometimes we fail to love in the way He taught us.

When we encounter someone we must always remember that we are encountering Christ for He lives in each and every one of us and we will not fail to love if we can remember to respond to the person in the same way we would respond to Christ. Then Christmas would not just come once a year. Then people would respond with love and kindness every day.

If we have faith in Him, He will send us the Holy Spirit to help us to love and to be an example of love to one another. We must remember that the Spirit moves in all of us, if we only listen. This past week, I was blessed to see an example of the movement of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sometimes moves where and when we least expect it and this time it was within the corporate world.

At my office, we traditionally "adopt" a family each Christmas and, although our group is small, they are very generous. The family that was adopted this year was a family that we serve in my conference. Each week, we have a staff meeting where business matters are discussed but we also deal with social issues as well. At the close of the meeting, I was telling the staff how very grateful the family was and how much joy we brought to them on Christmas day. They were all pleased to hear this but our boss spoke up and asked-" but how do they manage the rest of the year? Does anybody wonder if they are hungry in July?". He then made the suggestion that at each staff meeting we "pass the hat" and develop a fund that we can access whenever we become aware that there is a need. This was agreed upon by all present and was started that day. To date we have the grand total of \$21.19 but I know that this will grow each week. This is how we can be an example of love to one another. It's so gratifying to find this expression of love and caring in the corporate world. I know that not all of us have the financial resources to do this kind of thing but all of us can give of our time, our friendship, our support and our presence. Let us all try to behave toward one another as if each day was Christmas day or someone's last day. The hymn says - they'll know we are Christians by our love. Let's hope they will know us by our works and our example as well. May God bless each and every one of us and give us the courage and the strength to love as He wants us to love.

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