

Christmas, 1985

Signs of love

One of the most widespread customs at Christmas time is the practice of giving gifts. Just about everybody does it, although they may not all do it on Christmas Day. The Dutch, for instance, exchange presents on December 6, the feast of Saint Nicholas, and others do the same on the Feast of the Epiphany.

I suspect that many of us have fallen into the habit of giving gifts, whether at Christmas or any other time, without really thinking about what it is we are doing or why we are doing it. So I'd like to reflect just a bit on this custom that has become so much a part of our lives — so much so that it would not seem like Christmas if we didn't do it.

When we give gifts, it seems to me we are saying to others that we value them, that they are important to us and that we want to share with them something that is our own. It's like saying, "This is a sign of my esteem for you. This means that I love you and I want you to be a part of my life."

In some ways this is very much what we celebrate at Christmas time. In the birth of Jesus, God gave all of us a gift whose value is infinite. He gave us what was most precious to Himself and that was the gift of His own Son. In giving us so marvelous a gift He was doing what all of us should do when we give gifts: He was letting us know how much He loved us.

In a world where there seems to be so little love, where there is so much suffering, so much sorrow, so much injustice, we need to think and to pray about the kind of love God showed us when He gave us His Son. We need to think about what we will give in return. We don't have to look very far to find out what that will be. We only have to listen to what God told us through His Son: "Love one another as I have loved you."

When we give gifts this Christmas, let's think about what we are really saying, and in return for what He has given us, let's give God the gift of our love for one another.

God bless you all and may your Christmas and the New Year be happy and full of love.

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