

Homily for Christmas, 2009

Robert Folgum, who wrote the book "*All I really needed to know I learned in Kindergarten*", described an experience he had with his five year old daughter. At this particular time he was asking his children to share the responsibilities of making family lunches for school and work.

This particular week it was his daughters turn to help. When he went to get his lunch one morning, there was another paper bag beside it. The bag was folded, duct taped and stapled. When he asked what it was, his daughter told him it was something special for him but he couldn't open it until he got to work.

When noon came he took out his lunch and remembered that other bag. He took it out and opened it up. Inside were a couple of pencil stubs, some plastic dinosaurs, some old erasers, a couple of foil wrapped Hershey kisses, some marbles and various other odds and ends. He was charmed by these little gifts and when lunch was over he swept everything into the trash can with the rest of the litter from his lunch. He didn't think anything more of it.

When he got home his daughter met him at the door excitedly and asked for the bag back. He told her he left it at work, but took the time to ask her about the bag full of stuff. The little girl told him that those were her most valued treasures in the world and that she'd loaned them to him for the day so that he could enjoy them too. But she needed them back.

Suddenly he realized what a mistake he had made and quietly slipped back to the office to try to intercept the garbage before the maintenance people threw it out. He got there just in time and was able to retrieve the little things and put them back in the bag.

He had misjudged these little items. There was nothing in the bag that he thought he needed. He was charmed by his daughters little tokens, but as far as he could tell the things were cute, but really just junk.

*When he took the time to listen to his daughters story, these gifts represented something, it turns out, he needed a great deal. They were signs of her deep love for him. She shared with him her very heart and soul. **The trinkets were simply the out-ward sign of her willingness to trust him with her most precious things, and her desire to give her dad the most that she could give him.***

He says that he still has that bag full of stuff. He can't throw it away, even though his daughter is now an adult. Simple as they are, they hold a great significance. This, he said, was an example of standing up to his waist in the river and dying of thirst.

Robert Fulgum called that experience a conversion. He had to set aside his sophisticated sense of value to see a more profound and a more beautiful reality.

Just because we don't think we need something, doesn't mean we don't. Just because we don't see value in a thing doesn't mean it has no value.

Often, we too, miss the point. We are the ones standing up to our waist in the river and dying of thirst.

For many people, Christmas is primarily for the Children; the baby Jesus, the shepherds and angels, the stable with animals and the wise men's journey. But Christmas is not a time primarily for children; it is a celebration which has most value for adults. Sometimes we have to set aside our sophisticated sense of what is valuable to see the more profound and beautiful reality.

We have to be willing to see beyond the baby in the manger, past the plaster crib scene, the straw and the colored lights. What happens on this religious feast is much like what happened to Robert Folgum. These are signs of a deeper truth and a more awesome reality that we often miss.

They are the out-ward signs of God's willingness to trust us with his most precious things, and his desire to give us the most that he can give us.

The things we celebrate this night/ day are an invitation to share life and communion with God. We need what he gives us; forgiveness, dignity and purpose. But we have to recognize our need.

The Lord asks us to reconsider what is valuable. Not toys, cars, houses, or money. What is most valuable, what gives real satisfaction, is His love and His forgiveness. These are what

heals fractured lives. These are the gifts that bring wholeness. That is why they are so valuable.

I found Robert Folgums story so interesting because I often hear people say they get bored with religion, but they miss the point. The purpose of religion is not to entertain, but to invite. People sometimes look at the incidentals, and missing the point, they may say “What does a grown man need with a plastic dinosaur, or what good are a couple of pencil stubs?”.

I hear people say they don't need religion, but they frantically search for meaning and substance in their lives. I meet people who don't feel they need the life of the Church, but they, lack peace, are unhappy and despair of the emptiness in their lives. *They are standing up to their waist in the river and dying of thirst.*

I know that it is hard not to see the weakness of the Church. But Christ came to us as a weak baby to show that we need to look deeper. Religion can seem to be only surface and ordinary, but Christ continues to be present to us in the ordinary and the common. He dignifies the common forms of bread and wine, not by accident but for the purpose of teaching us that our sense of what is valuable or not is not always correct.

As we celebrate this Eucharist, as we continue with this Feast of Christ's birth, I invite you to look with a new perspective. Challenge yourself to see beyond the ordinary. Try to see the value of God's love for you cloaked in these rites that

are common. Drink deeply of the love that God invites you to receive and let the gift of that love soak into your soul and fill you with the realization that here, tonight, you have truly come home.

The Lord speaks to you this evening/day and tells you that He understands where you hurt, where you need forgiveness and healing. He invites you to partake in His peace. The God of all creation accepted the cold dirty manger, as His place of birth, because the real treasure was the love and care which He engendered in Mary and Joseph. Let that love fill your empty spots. We are standing up to our waists in the river of salvation, there is no need to thirst for meaning, value and satisfaction; you will find it here all around you.