



Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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Christmas: Celebrating the Body of Christ

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on DECEMBER 23, 2013.

A little girl woke up in the middle of the night, terrified of the dark. She was sure there was a monster in her room, so she ran into her parents' bedroom. Her mother calmed her down and eventually led her back to her own bedroom. She put a small light on, tucked the little girl in, and said, "Don't be afraid. You're not alone. God is here with you." The little girl replied, "I know *God* is here, but I need someone with *skin*!"

Christmas is the feast that celebrates "God's skin," that is, the great mystery of the Incarnation. On this day we celebrate the fact that the almighty Creator who fashioned the billions upon billions of stars, who breathed life and intelligence into beings, became a human being on planet earth. In his book, *The WOW Factor: Bringing the Catholic Faith to Life*, Fr. William O'Malley, SJ, puts it this way (rather bluntly): "...this limitless God freely constrained himself to the limits of the human....Being Christian means accepting that this overwhelming celestial Personage once had dirty diapers someone else had to change."

The Gospel of John says, "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn. 1:14). Literally it means God "pitched his tent among us." I love that image! But at Christmas we are not celebrating merely the birth of Jesus' body in Bethlehem. We are celebrating the body of Jesus present in *today's* world as well. For the Church teaches that the phrase "Body of Christ" has three meanings: 1) the physical body of Christ that walked our earth 2,000 years ago, 2) the Eucharist, and 3) the body of believers. That third phrase means we are Christ's body today. His presence in the world is largely dependent upon us. What a responsibility that is!



About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality— the everyday kind of spirituality that includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.



Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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Recently Pope Francis was asked what Christmas meant to him. He said, "Christmas is an encounter with Jesus. It means contemplating the visit of God to his people." The Pope added, at Christmas God tells us two things: "Have hope and go forward, (for) I am a Father who caresses you." He said, we must "extend a loving caress to others."

Extending that loving caress is Christmas' greatest challenge for us. For it entails taking on Jesus' values, his priorities, his way of looking at things. When Pope Francis was named *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year," Elisabeth Tentley, writer for *The Washington Post* wrote this about the Pope: "Without Jesus, there is no Pope Francis." Can the same be said about me? Without Jesus, there is no _____. (Fill in the blank with your name.) Tentley continued: "If Francis' embrace of the disabled, his focus on the poor, his mercy for the sinner sound vaguely familiar, that's because you've heard them before. From that Jesus guy."

At Christmas, then, let us kneel at the manger, yes. Let us pray, wonder, adore, and give thanks. But then let us get up. Let us get up and go forward... be... and do!

GO to those who need our attention...our time...our help...our concern...our financial assistance...our unique gifts...our joy...

BE compassionate...forgiving...hopeful...patient...understanding...

DO whatever is in our power to make this world a little better simply because we are in it...

I wish each one of you a very Merry Christmas! I am holding you all in my special prayer!



What gifts of time, attention, and joy are you giving to others this Christmas?

What gifts of time, attention, and joy have you received from others this Christmas?

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Suzanne Sayer December 23, 2013 at 9:08 am



Thank you for a beautiful Christmas message! May you have a peaceful, blessed, joyous Christmas.

REPLY

Dorothy Janofsky December 23, 2013 at 10:22 am



Thank you, Sister Melanie. Your message is from the heart and I truly appreciate it. God bless yo with a Happy Christmas!

REPLY

Mary Schneider December 23, 2013 at 11:20 am



A very Blessed, Happy and Holy Christmas to you, Sr. Melannie. Thank you for keeping my heart and mind open to our Savior.

REPLY

Elaine Neri December 23, 2013 at 12:44 pm



Have a blessed, beautiful and reflective celebration of all that is Christmas! Thank you for sharing your thoughts and prayers with all whom you “contact” and “touch” through your ministry. May the Lord continue to enrich and bless your talents in the weeks and months ahead.

REPLY

Betty Nagel December 23, 2013 at 12:58 pm



Oh, Melannie - How beautiful! This is a message I will share with my friends and family. May God continue to bless you through your amazing gift with words. Merry Christmas with much love and many blessings!

REPLY

Larry Cummins December 23, 2013 at 2:37 pm



Dear Melannie,

Thank you for the gentle reminder to Go, Be and Do. Christmas is always associated with presents, but not necessarily presence. I find that both are important not only at this time of year, but all year long. Perhaps the best present any of us can give to another is His presence through our presence.

May you and your family be blessed this Christmas with His Peace, love and Joy.

Deacon Larry Cummins

REPLY

Peggy Svoboda December 23, 2013 at 3:30 pm



Have a Blessed, Peaceful and Merry Christmas! Thanks for the beautiful reminder that we need to "go, be and do" our faith.

REPLY

Maryann December 23, 2013 at 5:58 pm



Thank you, Sr. Melanie, for a beautiful and inspiring message. I wish you much joy this Christmas season and in the New Year ahead. "Have hope and go forward!" What wonderful, strength-filled advice!

All the best,
Maryann Mraz

REPLY

Kathleen Magiera December 24, 2013 at 11:17 am



What a beautiful message Sr. Melanie! I always try to be present to my family during Christmas. Time together seems to be more and more important to all of us. God bless.

Kathleen

REPLY

SHIRL December 26, 2013 at 3:29 pm



As a member of the Social Justice Committee at my church, we fed the hungry with meals or collection of food. We collected hats and gloves for the homeless but I never felt that our efforts were really appreciated by the "church" until Pope Francis was elected and he started preaching on the very acts of charity that our group does. Now I feel that we have someone on our side who gets it.

REPLY

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