

FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

Experience God's joy

What will I give God for Christmas?

In my last column I suggested that a good Advent question would be, "What do I need for Christmas?" This week's question — what will I give God for Christmas? — is its corollary.

We spend a great deal of time each year deciding what to buy loved ones for Christmas, and while it is easy to decide on the right gift for some, when it comes to others we may be faced with a challenge.

What do they want? What do they need? Which gift will fit each personality, which gift will express the bond we feel? Which gift will please our family, our friends?

To the one who has everything, or to the one who has little but asks for nothing, what do we give?

Most of us have experienced disappointment at gifts received, not received and altogether forgotten. Perhaps we were not given the gift we had hoped for. Perhaps we knew by the look on the face of the one receiving our gift that we had fallen short. Expectations — ours and theirs — can spoil everything.

It is entirely possible that Jesus' friends, especially those closest to him, gave him gifts — or at least wanted to. They probably discussed among them-



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selves what would please him, what he needed, what he should have, what they wanted him to have.

The true center

I'll bet he rolled his eyes and smiled. And I'll bet he received every gift with gratitude. As with us, their motives were perhaps mixed

— the Gospels don't shy from exposing the divided hearts of the disciples — but even in their lack of understanding they still wanted to please their Lord, and he understood.

In our gift-giving, we often focus too much on expectations and reciproc-

ity and not enough on the depth of the love from which it springs. Our occasional disappointment both in what we receive

and what we perceive in the faces of those to whom we have given speaks volumes about what lies beneath.

To an extent, all of us must admit, it's all about "me." As embarrassing as such realization might be, it should not surprise us, nor should it make us sad. We can simply roll our eyes — at ourselves — then give and receive each gift with gratitude.

Discipleship will always be about making myself less the center of things

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and making Christ the true center. That means I will continually be getting out of the way to let him in. I will continually be giving back to him the throne where my feelings and expectations have stolen center stage.

A question naturally arises. Does Christ want to be the center of our lives out of a kind of divine pride, a need to receive adulation and attention? Does he think so little of us that he wants us to remain on the sidelines as mere spectators to his wonders?

Two small coins

To the contrary, he desires us at the center with him, in him and for him. With all his Heart he wants us to experience the joy that comes to those who give themselves to him, just as he gave himself for us. He knows well the sadness and infuriating frustration that awaits those who reject him.

So what do we give to the One who has everything and is everything, the One who is the center and goal, the One who meets every expectation?

Jesus gave us more than a hint one day in the Temple as he and his disciples watched folks putting contributions in the coffers.

"When he looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, 'I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.'" (Lk 21:1-4)

The point here is not about amounts but about the depth, intention and quality of the gift. After all, God who

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You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain's Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.

has everything does not need our gifts.

The poor widow had little. The little she had was her everything, but she gave it all: In offering "her whole livelihood," she held nothing back from God. We will never match the quantity of the gift God has given us in his Son, but we can respond to the gift in kind by giving ourselves to him, entirely.

What will I give God for Christmas? How about something I have refused to give him until now.

