

The Twelve Days of Christmas!

December 25, 2005

Fr. Aidan McAleenan

(Fr. Aidan's homilies tend to be very interactive. On Christmas day he had 12 large banners each representing the "The Twelve Days of Christmas." At the beginning of the homily he volunteered 12 members of the assembly/congregation to hold the banners. During the homily at the appointed time each of the persons carrying the banners went to a pre-assigned position in the Church.)

"Merry Christmas to you all!" The assembly replied. (Then Fr. Aidan greeted everyone in the Irish Language and asked all present to greet us in their language of their ancestors.....and so the people shouted out Merry Christmas...in every language from German to Hawaiian.)

"We all know the reason for the season and it is?" Assembly reply in muted tone "Jesus"

Oh come on beautiful people of God! "What is the reason for the season?" (At that point the people with the banners at the front of the altar turned their banners around...written on the back was "Jesus" in large print). The answer from the assembly this time was a loud and booming "Jesus"!

In a deep sense we understand what brings us here. We are compelled in faith, hope and love. We are compelled by happy and sad memories, by family, friends and loved ones. The fact is we are here and we are here to celebrate "Emanuel" God with us. We understand something greater is going on than the glitter and gift giving!

As a child I remember as a seven year old preparing with my parents and siblings...Santa's snack was cookies and Irish whiskey. My dad said the Whiskey was to keep Santa warm. I remember distinctly hearing the bells on Santa's sledge and him making noise coming down the chimney.One friend of mine told me she remembers lying in bed on Christmas Eve...and convinced that Santa had been and gone...she slipped downstairs in the early hours of Christmas morning...only to find that Santa had made a mistake with her order. So she set to correct the problem with her three sisters piles of presents...the next morning Olga, only six years old joyously attacked her very full pile of gifts from Santa...all the family wondered at how good Santa had been to her.

Christmas evokes many many emotions. My grandmother, who was a very loving woman, would always say "I do not like Christmas." I never understood that as a child. How could

anyone not like Christmas I would ask myself. But as one matures through life and experience loss of loved ones one comes to understand her statement. Hence the mixture of emotions.

Most of all Christmas calls us to faith and the expression of faith. And this is where the "Twelve Days of Christmas" come in. (Father Aidan then went on to give an explanation of the 12 days. SEE BELOW. The 12 persons holding the banners went to their assigned locations. Then each section starting off with number one "A Partridge in a Pear Tree" would rise sing loudly. Each of the 12 were sung, going back down from Twelve Drummers Drumming...to a Partridge in a Pear tree. Church aerobics in full action. On "Five Golden Rings" the entire assembly stood! Everyone, bar none, got into the spirit of the hymn and the aerobic actions.

One parishioner from the 7 a.m Mass said "Father I have been coming to Mass for 70 years and this was the most joyful Mass I have ever been to".

The Origin of the Twelve Days of Christmas

You're all familiar with the Christmas song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas" I think. To most it's a delightful nonsense rhyme set to music. But it had a quite serious purpose when it was written. It is a good deal more than just a repetitious melody with pretty phrases and a list of strange gifts. Catholics in England during the period 1558 to 1829, when Parliament finally emancipated Catholics in England, were prohibited from ANY practice of their faith by law - private OR public. It was a crime to BE a Catholic.

"The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written in England as one of the "catechism songs" to help young Catholics learn the tenets of their faith - a memory aid, when to be caught with anything in *writing* indicating adherence to the Catholic faith could not only get you imprisoned, it could get you hanged, or shortened by a head - or hanged, drawn and quartered, a rather peculiar and ghastly punishment I'm not aware was ever practiced anywhere else. The songs gifts are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith. The "true love" mentioned in the song doesn't refer to an earthly suitor, it refers to God Himself. The "me" who receives the presents refers to every baptized person. The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge which feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings, much in memory of the expression of Christ's sadness over the fate of Jerusalem: "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have sheltered thee under my wings, as a hen does her chicks, but thou wouldst not have it so..."

The other symbols mean the following:

2 Turtle Doves = The Old and New Testaments

3 French Hens = Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues

4 Calling Birds = the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists

5 Golden Rings = The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch", which gives

the history of man's fall from grace

6 Geese A-laying = the six days of creation

7 Swans A-swimming = the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments

8 Maids A-milking = the eight beatitudes

9 Ladies Dancing = the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit

10 Lords A-leaping = the ten commandments

11 Pipers Piping = the eleven faithful apostles

12 Drummers Drumming = the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

On behalf of the pastoral team, Fr. Brian Joyce and the whole Community of Christ the King...Merry Christmas Everyone!