



FAITH: A FRESH TAKE



August 14, 2014



LIZ QUIRIN

FIESTA: Young people dance at a fiesta at St. Stephen in Caseyville after a Dec. 12 liturgy celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. A small statue of Our Lady rests on a stage behind the dancers where people stop to see it.

Peace Starts with You

“Let there be peace on earth
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me

Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be
With God as our Father
Brothers all are we
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow
To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me

(Repeat the two verses above.)
Sung by The Angel Choir (written by: Jill Jackson, 1955)
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If you go to midnight Mass this Christmas, you will hear the joyful news that “a child is born to us, a son is given to us ... they name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.”

Indeed, Christmas comes back to us so that we can remember that the “prince of peace,” Jesus the Lord, is given to us. But what do these ancient words mean? In the midst of a world so torn by violence, war and suffering, where is the reign of this prince of peace?

To help us reflect on what we celebrate on Christmas, I have chosen Jill Jackson’s hymn, “Let There Be Peace on Earth.” The song was originally written more than 50 years ago. Jackson (along with husband Sy Miller) wrote it during a difficult time in her life.

I have chosen for this column a recent recording of it by the children’s musician group, The Angel Choir. It is impossible to hear this version and not think about the world these children encounter.

Our world has poorly understood the teachings of the prince of peace. Indeed, the reign of the prince of peace cannot be found in power over others but in a willingness to honor the dignity of each person regardless of cultural identity, social status or religion.

So, how can we do this, that is, show such a willingness to follow the prince

of peace? While there are many ways, I turn to what this song promotes. We must be willing to “take each moment and live each moment with peace eternally.” To do this, we must start where we are, making sure our actions and attitudes manifest this “solemn vow” to live in ways that promote peace.

Keeping this “vow” requires that we refuse to judge any person. This is difficult. When you don’t like someone, or don’t agree with his or her perspective or behavior, or if he or she has hurt you in some way, being peaceful is difficult.

Peace never means denying how you feel or repeatedly allowing another person to hurt you. But you can choose to show compassion toward them, not judgment. You need to be more forgiving than you ever thought. Again, you don’t have to deny your feelings, but forgiveness means that you refuse to live in ongoing hurt and anger. Let go of anger and focus on peace. Ask God to help you move from hurt and anger toward forgiveness and its gift of healing.

All of this does not mean that all conflict must be avoided. Conflict is inevitable. God made us individuals with different preferences and values. This sometimes leads to conflict with others. Accept that reality and know that many views of a situation are possible. Building peace when there’s conflict means looking for a resolution based on fairness and respect; it means identifying a middle. Is it hard work? Absolutely, but following Jesus is demanding.

Being a follower of Christ means rejecting any solution based on violence. Peace cannot be established through coercion or intimidation. Rigorous dialogue and a persistent and patient effort toward peace honor the holiness that God has placed in each of us. Violence never accomplishes this. We must turn to God in prayer and ask for his guidance as we seek peace.

Where is the reign of the prince of peace this Christmas? It begins in one place: your heart.

— Charlie Martin

Charlie Martin writes a column explaining the lyrics to popular songs. He includes the lyrics with his commentary. This is a Catholic News Service column.

The Holiday Halt

It’s no secret that when parenting, your life seems like a whirlwind ride on a roller coaster every single day.



From the time a parent becomes a parent, every single moment seems to revolve around these cute little beings who look to us for comfort, hugs, nourishment and life lessons.

As children develop into bigger beings who begin to think for themselves, exhibit their independence and test the waters of defiance, time never stands still. The clock is running and parents still find themselves riding the roller coaster from dawn to dusk.

Parenting is a gift, though. It’s an exhilarating ride, and it is one that keeps us so busy thinking about our children that it is easy to lose who we are and what we need. There never is a time to take a break from parenting, nor would I ever want that break, but in the midst of the holiday season, it’s important to take what I call a Holiday Halt.

A Holiday Halt doesn’t by any means refer to neglecting parenting responsibilities. Instead, it is a time set aside to really think about my personal goals, my parenting goals, and my needs to become a better person and parent. It’s a time to reflect on how I can give back to others, how I can improve my own abilities and how I can renew my faith and my devotion to the community.

This year, my mom was an integral part of my Holiday Halt. After the holidays last year, she asked each of her kids to think about ways they could give back to others over the course of the next year. Although it is common to give more to charity or think about others during the holidays, my mom prompted my sisters and me to think about how we could provide charity all year long. She asked each of us to save our change throughout the year and then choose a charity to donate by the time the Christmas holiday rolled around.

I thought long and hard throughout

the year about this challenge. I do actively donate my time, my belongings and money to organizations, but I wanted this challenge to mean something more. I wanted it to be something that would influence me and my children.

It wasn’t until November when the answer was revealed to me. My daughter is an active member of her high school dance team and throughout the past few years, it’s been a struggle to keep up with the expenses. With a mandatory \$1,100 to fundraise and approximately \$900 in personal expenses, I know the challenge of finding the time and funds to make this opportunity possible for her.

As much as it may be a struggle for me, I learned just how much of a struggle it has been for other parents. One dancer in particular was at risk of losing her spot on the team because she couldn’t meet the financial obligations. I thought about the joy this experience brings to my daughter, the bond she has with her team and the positive effects of involvement in her school and community as part of the dance team. I couldn’t bear the thought of another child losing this opportunity, especially when she needed the team as much as the team needed her.

So, during my Holiday Halt, my mom and I both made the decision to provide financial support so this teammate could still be a part of an activity that was near and dear to her heart. Although I would have loved to donate more of my time as an act of faith, I realized that this donation touched the lives of a family that meant much more than I ever knew.

To me, taking the time to put someone else’s needs above our own is what the season is all about. In fact, it’s something I hope to do all year long because no matter how much I may struggle – emotionally, financially or socially – my suffering is never more important than anyone else’s.

— Shannon Philpott

Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at www.shannonphilpott.com.



CNS/PAUL HARING

Pope Francis passes a birthday card with cartoon characters as he arrives to lead his general audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican Dec. 17, the pope’s 78th birthday.

Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different perspective

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We want to give young adults something to “chew on,” to think about

when they’re looking for something more than an on-line horoscope or the latest star news.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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