

On the corner “Being genuine”

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Apart from a slight “dusting” of snow once every decade or so, it has never really snowed where I live. There are no snow shovels in the garage, no chains for the car, no big snow boots or ear muffs. The external temperature goes below freezing once a decade for about 45 minutes in the middle of the night. Yet, I see lighted glistening icicles hanging from snowless eaves, brilliant and beautiful imitations of weather systems where uncovered skin brings pain and breathing is harsh and visible.

Tall evergreens spring from hardwood floors, bedecked with garlands of green amidst baubles and inedible berries.

A cutting from a parasitic shrub with thick, plastic, green leaves and small white flowers hangs beneath the rafters and door jambs to legitimize an ancient custom of stealing kisses from unsuspecting yet inviting maidens.

And around the hearth, no smell of burning pine or birch or walnut fills the room; the gas log—all but ignored—sputters its heatless “warmth” as fake fires burn clay logs and shed their own unmistakable odor. Loud voices indicate that people seem bent on celebration but are often twisted in their effort to remember the reason why.

We seem surrounded by that which is ungentle, false, unreal. I wonder, do my surroundings cause me to be less than authentic in my relationship with God? I doubt it because I don’t let it. There are many items on many lists that demand my attention. If God wants to be involved as I address them, he will be. Otherwise, I use what he has given me to meet the demands of my daily existence.

Are there some aspects of my worship that might be termed hypocritical? Hmm. No, I don’t believe so. My worship—even in community—is personal not perfect. What my worship community provides me is a collection of others with whom I can relate and communicate caring.

Have I grown accustomed to believing that the minor sacrifices I make actually please God? Probably. I guess the biggest sacrifice is time. I’m not even sure it’s a sacrifice. It’s a choice and it feels good to me.



Have we ignored too long the reality that the sacrifice God truly wants is a broken and contrite heart?

I don't know the answers to these questions, but I do know I need to ask them of myself and resist the temptation to impose them on others. I need to say with David that I know:

Going through the motions doesn't

please you, a flawless performance is

nothing to you. I

learned God-worship

when my pride was shattered.

Heart-shattered lives

ready for love don't

for a moment

escape God's notice

(Psalm 51:16–17,MSG).

I know what is required of me in my personal relationship with God. There is always the implication that the word “others” is somehow involved—that my relationship with him is genuine as I reach out to other humans who walk beside me in the affairs of life. It demands that I am fair and just with those around me, that I have compassion for those who are troubled and that I avoid keeping score about how much I've done.

Additionally, relationships require connection. God wants me to stay in touch with him—to assure him of my faith, and that I am choosing his path through life—to seek his never-ending grace—to talk with him about daily concerns—to thank him for standing beside me in daily challenges—to ask him to help me and those I love to achieve what he has placed before us. I think his suggestion that we “pray without ceasing” simply means that we have many quiet conversations with him through the day.

As I finish my formal two-way conversation, I feel at peace.

Outside, on the street, Christmas carols sung by youthful voices and played on instruments of brass with distinctive sounds can mean only a Salvation Army group. People in the room smile at one another and file together quickly toward the door—now open as songs of hope and peace and joy and love radiate through the house. And with the music, the mood changes and spirits sense a new spirit. Christ is there.

His goodwill permeates our hearts and minds as we open ourselves to the true spirit of Christmas. Listen—the carol presents its message of an inn’s closed doors and offers a personal promise of room in our hearts for him who came to save the world.

Even the icicles seem brighter—the tree more beautiful—the mistletoe more ceremonial—the gas log more attractive.

Yes, Virginia, the Army has an important role at Christmas. We’re the people who remind all why we celebrate.

It’s about the only time all year long that we send messages to people from a street corner.