

As always, it's good to see everyone today. So is everyone done shopping for Christmas? It's a big day, one in which many people expect many gifts, lots of food and Hallmark running annoying Christmas movies 24 hours per day from October through February. In the midst of all of this, sometimes people forget that it's not their birthday, that it's the celebration of the birth of Christ and that maybe we should consider what gift we are giving Christ for His birthday. So what do you think are some things that Christ would like to receive?

So if we are looking at Christmas as what it is, the birth of Christ, and Advent as what it is, reflecting on and preparing for the second coming of Christ, then we should look at the readings today as a wonderful idea on what we can give Christ for his birthday. The first reading from Isaiah talks about preparing the way of the Lord, the second reading from 2 Peter discusses being found without spot or blemish and the Gospel reading from Mark speaks about John the Baptist, quite possibly the ultimate disciple quoting the first reading and encouraging others to prepare the way of the Lord. Taking into consideration these readings, I think we can narrow down our Christmas/birthday list for Jesus...we can give him a better version of ourselves.

I'll give you a little background to my thinking and if you think I'm completely off, then we can talk about buying Jesus more traditional gifts. However, I ask that you hear me out. Mark's writing are interesting in that even though it is the shortest of the Gospels, it really delves into Jesus as a servant, revealing who he is by what he does – leading by example. He wrote it to encourage not only Christians in Rome, but also those worldwide. One of the overriding themes of the Gospel of Mark is discipleship and when he speaks of discipleship he speaks of not only learning from Jesus, but also developing a personal relationship with him. Overall, Mark leaves it up to the reader to carry out the gospel message so I think that a good gift may be to continue to prepare ourselves in a manner that helps us carry out the gospel message not only in what we say, but in what we do.

The best part of this gift is that it's taking what God has given us, our very lives, and doing what we can to maximize that gift. If we think about it as adults, there is nothing we want more than to see our children take what we have taught them, implement those lessons and succeed beyond our expectations. It's no different with God, who loves us enough to give us free will but still desires all that is best for us. So what are some things that we can do to give this gift to Jesus, what is it that we need to work on?

First off, let's work on our heart; as you've heard me say before...it's all about love. Find that part of our heart that is most betraying what it is that Jesus teaches us. Is there a particular person or thing that your heart has hardened over in the past? If so, seek out forgiveness from that person and forgive yourself for your mistakes and transgressions. Nothing else matters if we don't care for and offer a clean heart to God. We can be the greatest Theologian in history, know more trivia of God than anyone and fast repeatedly and live in poverty for a lifetime; but if our heart is not turned towards God, everything we do will fall short.

We don't have to have a perfect heart before moving onto other ways we can improve our gift to Jesus. After turning our heart to God, we can open our mind to His teachings. We will have ourselves in a better position to hear and understand the readings of our faith and what they teach us. It also enables us to be able to better defend our faith and be the kind of disciple that we should be for our Lord.

Last, let's come together and support each other as we spread the word of God. We are called to be disciples, announcing the good news of the Lord. Even sharing the news with one person that you haven't before is a step and a wonderful gift for Christ's birthday...but I know you'll do more. The best part of preparing our lives as a gift to Jesus is that we benefit from it also. It's a gift we can give every day and He will never tire of receiving it.

So we continue to work toward this gift to Jesus. We continue to work on our hearts and minds and help others to do the same. If we do this consistently, we can not only celebrate the wonderful time that is the Christmas season, we can also remember what the season is truly about and be able to say to our Lord...Happy Birthday, I have a gift you're gonna' love.

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