

CHRISTMAS DAY, 2020

NO! WAIT! YOU CAN HAVE MY ROOM!

Some say that Christmas is for children. I think so, too, but only because children can lead us into the deeper meaning of the Feast. Seven-year-old Bobby came running into the house yelling, *"Mommy I'm gonna be an actor!"* Gasping for breath, he went on: *"My teacher wants me to be the innkeeper."* Seeing Bobby's excitement, his mother said: *"How wonderful! I'm happy to hear my little Bobby is going to be an actor. What's the play?"* *"It's about Jesus being born at Christmas,"* he hurriedly added. *"I'm gonna be the innkeeper."* His mother asked him, *"Do you have any words to say as the innkeeper?"* *"It's easy Mommy, really easy,"* he responded, sitting at the kitchen table. *"I just tell Mary and Joseph when they come that there's no room at this inn for them."* Pausing for a minute, he added, *"And then they go away."*



During the following weeks, Bobby practiced his lines religiously. *"There's no room at this inn for you,"* he said repeatedly. Bobby was anxious that he might forget them or forget where he was to stand on stage. He wanted to get everything exactly right. After all, this was his debut as an actor, and everybody would be watching him. The big day arrived. It was a week before

Christmas. The Christmas trees were all lighted in the school and around town. Christmas carols were heard everywhere people went. Bobby's parents, other parents, relatives, friends and all the students from the entire elementary school were in the auditorium waiting for the play to start.

The curtain went up, and the show began. Everything was going smoothly; Mary and Joseph were searching frantically, looking for a place to stay. No place was found for them. Bobby's big moment was approaching. He watched Mary and Joseph as they struggled walking across the stage toward his inn. They looked tired. Joseph was holding on to Mary as they walked toward Bobby. With an exhausted look on her face, Mary peered into Bobby's eyes as Joseph asked: *"Is there any room at your inn for us? My wife, Mary, is about to have our first child. We are excited, but Mary is so tired; she can barely stand."* Bobby kept staring at Mary. And then, taking a deep breath, Bobby said his line: *"No, there's no room at this inn for you."* Saddened, Joseph turned, putting his arm around Mary's shoulders. Slowly they walked away, followed by the gaze of the little Innkeeper.



Bobby is suddenly swept up in the story; his heart is filled with compassion. Realizing the impact of his

words, he started to whimper. After a few moments, he began to cry. Running after Mary and Joseph, he startled himself, the couple and the entire audience by yelling, *“Wait! Please come back. You can have my room.”* Reaching Joseph and Mary, Bobby hugged them. Spontaneously the audience stood up and applauded. It wasn’t the ending everyone expected, but it certainly was one everybody seemed to want.

What Bobby did is exactly what God the Father hoped for when he sent his son to be born on that first Christmas morn. He wanted his son to be an inviting presence. The Father wanted Jesus to be accepted, embraced and loved exactly the way Bobby did when he heard the reality of his words. When face to face with God’s love, everyone loves back. By his coming into the world – by Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection -- God wrote a different sort of ending for our lives — just as Bobby did.



The Christmas gospel invites us to become part of the story, and even to re-write the story in our own time and place – which for us these past ten months has been a time and place infected by a virus, appalled by social and racial injustice, shredded by political animosity, weakened by financial insecurity and upended by the awareness of our human frailty.

What little Bobby did was truly inspiring. The Spirit moved him to step outside the part he was playing, the role the teacher assigned him, and to let his heart be touched, to be who he really was. Not an innkeeper who had to follow hotel policy, but a fellow human being who saw a need and had to respond to it – even giving up his own room to do so. Bobby broke the story open and turned tragedy into victory. Could the grace of God and this celebration of Christmas give us the opportunity to re-write our story? Could the disaster that has befallen us and our world become something other than a source of frustration and a cause for sadness or despair?



The coming of Christ at Christmas assures us that no matter how severe the darkness of the outer world is, it cannot overcome the inner and transcendent light. Of course we want to have a harmonious Christmas, where the inner and outer world is in sync. But that’s not what we always get, and certainly not what we’re getting this year. Christmas arrives to find health precarious for many; jobs, careers and vocations under stress; finances dipping badly; children struggling with school; and our country and our world in upheaval. How can we celebrate Christmas in situations like

these? Aren't the negative circumstances too much for us? Do they not call the shots, either tentatively supporting us or conspiring to break us?

The Christmas answer is: *"Give them their due, but not your soul."* Little Bobby says we can change the ending. When the outer world is darkness, Christmas encourages us to rest in the inner world of light and bring that light to the outer world of darkness. The coming of Christ at Bethlehem engenders in us a 'gentle defiance' toward the tribulations of the world. Gentle defiance is neither negative nor angry. It just manages to find a greater love by which to be held and energized. This capacity for defiance and changing the ending of a dark story that our faith provides may be the only Christmas gift worth unwrapping today. May that gift be yours now and always.



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