



Happy Monday!

On this date, December 22, in 1882, Edward H. Johnson, an associate of Thomas Edison, created the first string of electric Christmas tree lights, hand-wiring 80 red, white, and blue bulbs around a tree in his New York City home. This pivotal moment initiated the tradition of electric lighting as a Christmas decoration .

During this time of year, it is dark when I go for my morning walk. Each day I am greeted and inspired by beautiful and creative light displays along my route. Christmas lights are often the first decorations to go up and the last to come down around the holiday season. But have you ever wondered how Christmas lights came to be the global standard they are today?

In the 1500s, candles attached to evergreen tree branches symbolized hope and warmth throughout Germany. The tradition spread. Today, electric lights signify general holiday cheer and celebration. Decorating fosters togetherness, hospitality, and shared joy with neighbors, creating feelings of nostalgia, warmth, and a universal wish for brightness and peace.

Catholic teaching views Christmas lights as beautiful signs and symbols of Jesus, the "Light of the World". We are reminded that the Holy Family experienced homelessness, oppression and poverty, mirroring the experience of so many today. Charity and justice are not optional but are core expressions of our love for God. This love requires concrete action such as sharing our resources, reaching out to the lonely, and prioritizing the vulnerable.

In the first official document of his papacy, "Dilexi te" (I Have Loved You), Pope Leo XIV placed the poor at the heart of the Catholic Church's teaching, calling his brother bishops around the world to take on the mantle of social justice in defense of the most vulnerable in society. "The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking," Leo wrote in the document. "She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome".

Pope Leo adopts Francis' approach to charity and justice, based on the need to "welcome, protect, promote and integrate all those living in existential peripheries." The Church, the two popes have argued, has always recognized the marginalized as the "living presence of the Lord," who will one day question the faithful about how they treated the stranger and those most vulnerable.

Throughout 2025, as part of each week's Musing, I utilized this forum to try to educate and to motivate- those who sacrifice their precious time to read the article -in matters of charity and justice. My faith, my lived experience, relentlessly motivates me to strive to do all that I can to promote human acts of kindness, compassion, generosity, respect and love. For me, it is very personal.

However, understanding that my personal emotions and sensitivities most certainly are not the “end all, be all” of credible guidance for modeling Jesus’ social ministry, I have also shared scripture and Catholic Social Teaching about the focus for the particular “Date in History”. And I continue to encourage readers to consider the services and resources of our diocese’s Catholic Charities organization as an easily accessible, and highly effective and successful, way to live out our obligation to “do for the least of these” what we would do for Christ himself. There is no reason for anyone to question how they can help those in need in a meaningful way... just call (209) 444-5900 and you will be helped and learn how to help others.

Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that “our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.”. In the final few days left in 2025, as we celebrate the birth of Christ with family and friends...may we not become so busy that we stop battling the principalities, powers, world rulers of this present darkness, and the evil spirits in the heavens and continue to do what we can to share light and hope with those still suffering in the darkness.

Blessings...and a tiny bit early...Merry Christmas!

Deacon Mike