

CHILDREN'S/FAMILY MASS CHRISTMAS EVE

He Smiled at Me

I'm thinking of a beautiful Christmas song. A woman named Katherine Kenicott Davis wrote the song 70 years ago. It's been sung by more than 220 people including: Von Trapp family singers (Sound of Music). Bing Crosby and David Bowie sang it together and so did Buster Rhymes and Justin Bieber. Even Veggie tales has it on a Christmas CD. Can the kids guess the song?

The little drummer boy. Let's sing and then talk about the song – one stanza at a time – and while singing keep time like this (tap your heart to the beat of the song with your palm).

Come they told me pa rump a pum, pum

Our new born king to see pa rumpa pum, pum

Our finest gifts we bring pa rumpa pum, pum

*To lay before the king pa rumpa pum, pum; rumpa pum, pum;
rumpa pum, pum.*

So to honor him pa rumpa pum, pum when we come.

What do you think the drummer boy is trying to tell us in the song? Jesus comes to us, we should come to Jesus. At Christmas we think about Jesus, but since Jesus is with us all the time, can we come to Jesus, be with Jesus more. When we see something beautiful in nature and think of how great god is, we are blessing Jesus with our minds and hearts; when we are with someone we love doing our favorite thing and think that Jesus is smiling or when we gather here on Sundays or other special times with others who have Jesus living inside them. That's what it means to come, come and honor him.

Let's continue the song (tap your heart to the beat of the song with your palm):

Baby Jesus, pa rumpa pum, pum

I am a poor boy too pa rumpa pum, pum.

I have no gift to bring pa rumpa pum, pum

That's fit to give our king pa rumpa pum, pum; rumpa pum, pum; rumpa pum, pum.

Shall I play for you pa rumpa pum, pum

On my drum?

The little drummer boy could see that the baby Jesus was born in a stable where only poor people would be. He was like Jesus in that way, but he is also trying to remind us that no matter how much we have in our toy boxes or houses or garages, we still need Jesus to bless us with what matters most to god – a heart filled with love.

And out of that kind of love, god gives us all gifts that he wants us to share with others. The little drummer boy's gift was playing the drum. In that way he was rich because he could fill the world with love through the beat of his drum and his heart. He wondered if Jesus would like them both.

Let's finish the song (tap your heart to the beat of the song with your palm):

Mary nodded, pa rumpa pum, pum.

The ox and lamb kept time, pa rumpa pum, pum.

I played my drum for him pa rumpa pum, pum;

I played my best for him, pa rumpa pum, pum; rumpa pum, pum; rumpa pum, pum.

Then he smiled at me pa rumpa pum, pum;

Me and my drum.

The little drummer boy didn't just want to play for Jesus, but to give his very best work – to put his whole mind, and heart, and spirit into his gift. All of us are asked to do the same thing with our gifts: from the heart; with love. Then, the most beautiful, joyful thing will happen to us. God smiles at us and it can be Christmas day any day of our lives. Right here (tap heart).

Epiphany

The “So What” Effect

I was travelling on business this week and picked up the Tuesday USA today. A full half page - article titled “God, Religion, Atheism – So What?” Caught my eye. It has been a twenty year trend in a continuing survey that more and more of Americans check none to the question of religious affiliation. In fact, that number was 8% in 1990 and rose to 15% by 2008.

More disturbing even than that is the growing category of people who couldn't care less. Beyond not associating with a specific religious tradition, this group is characterized by spiritual apathy and simply shrug off god, religion, atheism, heaven or the value in searching for meaning and purpose. There is no apparent spiritual curiosity. 46% of Americans never wonder about an afterlife. 44% spend no

time seeking eternal wisdom and truth. The study of evolutionary and neuro psychology lead one man to say “we might as well be cars. That, to me, makes more sense than believing in what you can’t see.” Another man, whose mother was a devout Hindu and father a staunch atheist said, “I was saturated with both views. There may be unanswerable questions that could be cool or fascinating. Speculating on them is a fun parlor game, but they don’t have any meaning on my life.” The Reverend Ema Drouillard specializes in non denominational marriage ceremonies where in 2001 30% of her clients refused any hint of religion in their ceremony. Today, 80% of her clients choose her “carefully God free ceremony – pledging faith only in each other. She says they are either just focused on the party or have no language for the spiritual, so they just leave it out.

This article made me sad and concerned. Are we all vulnerable to the erosion or burial of what we’ve always believed was an in-born desire to search for meaning, for purpose, for the source of our being? Do we have so much

and perceive our need so little that a place for God in our minds and hearts is shrinking? Is the constant barrage of messages about God being the crutch of the simple and the folly of the unenlightened getting to us? Are the disillusionments we've experienced in our civil, religious, and cultural leaders, and through the insanity of world events connected with religion and god causing us to weary of our spiritual journeys?

If a Reverend willingly performs 80% of her marriage ceremonies without a whiff of God, how strong is the light of god shining through all of us so that we continue to pursue a life of purpose and meaning that provides the "so what" group with an example of the paths from meaningless existence to eternal sources of light.

On a cold African morning three palm fruit farmers were warming themselves by the fireside. Soon two of them were engaged in a heated debate comparing their religions to decide which one was the true religion. Okoro, the oldest

among them, sat quietly listening to the debate. Suddenly the two turned to him and asked, “decide for us, Okoro. Which religion is the right one?” Okoro rubbed his white beard and said thoughtfully, “well, you know there are three ways to get from here to the oil mill. You can go right over the hill. That is shorter but it is a steep climb. You can go around the hill on the right side. That is not too far, but the road is rough and full of potholes. Or you can go around the hill on the left side. That is the longest way, but it is also the way of least obstacles.” He paused and then added, “but you know, when you get there, the mill man doesn’t ask you how you came. All he asks is, “man, how good is your fruit?”

The journey of the Maji took them over each type of road and provides a glimpse into our journey on the same roads of life that are in store for the Christ child all the way to the empty tomb.

The long road can make us tired and weary and cause us to lose our desire to finish the journey. Having so much and

needing so little can cause us to stop. Stop growing and wanting the desire of our being. Best to make the long journey with Jesus and others who share your pilgrim spirit.

There are times when we must continue the journey on the rough and potholed road – not allowing the supposed wise to divert the supposed fools from our destination. Best to be strengthened by the stories of Jesus and others who also travelled the rough road.

Our journeys will invariably require us to climb the hill and suffer the knockdowns of those who appear to be leading when really they are protecting the spot on their discontinued journey, like Herod. Best to be carried on the shoulders of Jesus, like his cross and helped by others to the top and over the hill.

It seems to me that the so what's have stopped their journey before it began – perhaps because of bad directions or because they experienced the difficulties of each road before knowing the value of the journey, or because the power of this world buried their life's desire deep within them.

I pray that we will recommit to our journeys, become strengthened to travel each road with strength, fully aware of God's power within us, and that we will be open to epiphanies - encounters with God – that will inspire us, like the magi, to return home by another way – picking up some “So What's” along the road.