

The Salve of Life

DECEMBER 2018

We all wait for the sights and sounds of the season with bated breath: the colorful bows, the spiced drinks, the twinkling trees, the warm crackle of a house full of family members laughing after months of being apart. The Christmas season truly does make us feel like our “troubles will be miles away.” The magic of the holidays tends to be so captivating, in fact, that we get distracted from the true gift that it brings... the coming of a Savior, whose humble birth invites all to him with awe and wonder.

1. *Read Luke 14:12-24. Describe the excuses the dinner guests made when declining the invitation to a banquet. What are some similar excuses we make today when we decline “invitations” to opportunities that would strengthen our faith?*

2. *What might be the benefit of having fellowship around the table with those who are different from us? What might be the purpose of feeding (or helping, or loving) those who cannot repay us?*

It is crucial for us to remember that any beauty the Christmas season invokes within us is but a glimmer of the true beauty of Emmanuel — God with us. Heaven is here on earth, and it is our Christian call to live in such a way that brings “peace on earth, good will towards mankind.” Like Jesus Christ, may we too be a healing salve for all who are hurt, a balm of peace for all who are weary.

3. *Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24. What aspect of the Christmas season brings you the most peace? From where do you think that peace stems? What do you think it looks like to truly “live in peace with each other”? Explain.*

4. *Describe a time when someone’s hospitality lifted your spirits. What are some concrete ways you can “encourage the fainthearted” during this time of year?*

In closing, reflect on the words of St. Gregory of Narek from his Book of Lamentations:

“*Now, I pray you, compassionate Lord, grant me, broken in heart and spirit, the salve of life from heaven on high. Come sweetly to me, ill with sin. Pardon my debts, in your omnipotence. And for my part, the truth and trustworthiness of these words lie in this: You, creator of all, dwell in the saints. And in the true words of Paul, as we sow, so shall we reap. And, the infirm of sight can not bear the glare of sun. But you, doer of good, who created everything from nothing, look kindly upon those who truly have believed in you, deeming this enough for salvation. You who are not limited by law, but prevail over it, breaking loose from its legalism. For all us sinners in our bewilderment, you remain the only condition for the good news. To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, glory and power forever. Amen. (Prayer 53E)*

“See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.”

