

Merry Christmas!

December 19, 2018

In last year's letter I was struggling with my new position as Jesuit mission and identity officer for the law school. At the end of the year I was moved upstairs to the faculty floor, where I am more centered on my work. Now three or four veteran teachers drop in on me regularly, and so I begin to be accepted as an integral member of the school.

My big event, in planning for the past year, will be the Jan. 25 faculty convocation in which the deans of our other four west coast Jesuit law schools will tell our faculty what being in a Jesuit university has meant for their schools. At the end of this convocation I hope to know what my agenda will be for the next two years. (You can start praying for the success of that convocation now!)

My joy at work is conditioned by my horror at what America and our world has become. Today's headline declares there were in the U. S. more killings from guns in the past year than in any previous year since 1968. That violence has crept into our political discourse, no longer civil and no longer productive. Behind it all is our country's commitment to individual rights, without any concern for a common good, a vision which we have managed to spread abroad. And our Church labors through its own sort of violence.

St. Paul tells his Philippian community to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say Rejoice!" Some years later he wrote, "...all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and...we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:22-23). Jesus is present in us through the Spirit, but he is unformed in all of us. We are pregnant with Jesus, as He was present to Mary while still in her womb. He is our joy, but St. Paul makes us aware that we must labor for the coming of the Kingdom as Jesus himself did. His triumph is not only ultimate, it takes place bit by bit in all our dealings and lives. And so our Christmas joy at the birth of Jesus gives reality and power to our advent groaning for the rest of the year.

At Christmas we remember that God's becoming part of our history is a permanent thing---he is still present through His Holy Spirit and in the Body and Blood we receive in the Eucharist. He is present in our triumphs, but we turn to him more in our distress. Our hope in Jesus' way to peace grows as our human ability to achieve it grows dimmer. If we turn to him we will have the ability to rejoice in the turmoil of our world and Church. A realistic joy makes our Christmas merry.

Fr. John