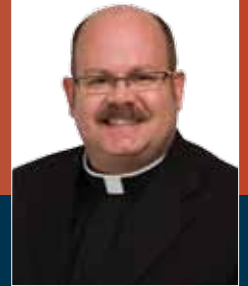


Alter Christus (Another Christ)



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There is no doubt that Christmas is a marvelous feast for eyes, ears and heart. However, to genuinely connect to the true spirit of Christmas in the midst of all the commercialization can be like navigating a mine field. My journey to an authentic celebration of Christmas has been aided by my admiration for St. Nicholas, the fourth century bishop of Myra. The generous personage so much a part of our modern celebration, namely Santa Claus, is the evolution and Americanization of the traditional Dutch Sinter Klaas or Saint Nicholas, whose feast is celebrated on Dec. 6.

Sometime during my childhood, I had the opportunity in a religious education class to research the life of St. Nicholas. Though not much is known about him, the legends seem to point to a deep concern for the people in his care as bishop, which led him to secretly provide for their needs in the face of hardship. Over time what I learned through this assignment led to a personal devotion to the true spirit of St. Nicholas' life and later to collecting St. Nicholas figurines/decorations for my Christmas tree.

Throughout his life and ministry, St. Nicholas, like all priests, put on Christ. He was called by God to guide, protect and father the flock entrusted to his care. Through his preaching, shepherding and prayer, he tried to mirror for his people the greatest mysteries of God. This can all be summed up by simply saying that he, like all priests, stands among us as an "Alter Christus!" Yes, St. Nicholas and all priests are traditionally referred to as "Another Christ." Though each priest is only an imperfect copy of the original and infinitely perfect Jesus, they are called to serve as a clear image of the Lord and Savior sent to us as the only Way, Truth and Life.

Saints like Nicholas of Myra help each of us see a priestly life lived in such a way that Christ shines through human words and actions. The focus of each priest is not on himself, but rather on the Christ they are ordained and consecrated to image and proclaim.

Although I may not walk around each day, or even during the Christmas season, with a large bag filled with "loot" to share with my brothers and sisters, I am called to share what I do possess ... my time, my talent and myself. These may, at times, be only meager offerings, but sharing from these gifts becomes my means of being a gift to and for others – being Christ to and for others.

With legends and saints like Nicholas, with evergreen and timeless carols, with fantasy and imagination, with ancient and scripturally rooted customs, Christmas becomes a wonderful opportunity for us to celebrate the gift Christ is to each of us. This festive season also becomes an opportunity for us to remember, with incredible joy, that Christ has not left us orphans. He has given us shepherds after His own heart and in His image in the priests He has called to serve His church and at His altar.

Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids
online vocational resources:

Priestly vocations

dioceseofgrandrapids.org/vocation/welcome.htm

Religious orders

dioceseofgrandrapids.org/clergy/religiousorders.htm

