

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It's over! After all the weeks of preparation, anticipation, and excitement, it's over! Some people, I hope none of you, have already fallen into what the psychiatrists call "Christmas slump". Time to break out the Prozac!

Of course, there is the normal let-down after a great celebration, which I hope Christmas was for all of you. But, we approach now the dark gloom of Winter months and are tempted to fall back into the same-old, same-old drudgery of our lives. The magic of Christmas is over.

This reminds me of an old Rabbinic story about a man who left the village of his birth, and set out to find the city of his dreams, where all was bright and perfect. After a day's walk he lay down to rest the night in a forest. Before going to sleep he removed his shoes and placed them carefully in the path, pointing them in the direction of his journey toward the magical city.

As he slept, an angel came along and turned his shoes around so that they pointed in the direction of the village he had left behind. The next morning, when the traveler awoke, he put on his shoes and headed down the path in the direction his shoes pointed. He walked all day and at dusk saw the city of his dreams in the distance. It looked strangely familiar and much smaller than he had imagined it would be. As he entered the village, so the story goes, he discovered a street very much like his own, knocked on the door of a house exactly like the one he had left, and was warmly received by his family inside—his family, of course. With that the man lived happily ever after in the magical city of his dreams.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph went on with their lives following that first Christmas, and so shall we. They faced life's many challenges, but they did it with love and with faith in god. Theirs wasn't an easy life, but they knew God was with them, just as God is with us. That is the Good News that Jesus came to proclaim in His Very Being—He is Emmanuel, God with us.

On this Holy Family Sunday, at a time of great challenge to legitimate authority that has seen most recently the horrible assassination of two police officers in New York City, it is good to reflect on these words from the Prophet: "God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons (and daughters)". Only in homes, families, indeed, in churches, towns, cities, and nations as well, that abide by this teaching is Paul's admonition possible: "Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another..."

This is the joy that must continue in us coming out of our celebration of Christmas.

But, Parents, you too must do your part, giving your children room to grow, without overpowering them with your worries and fears. Recently, a teenager, feeling overwhelmed by his Mother's constant worry and his Dad's trying to be everywhere and do everything to protect him from difficulties and making mistakes, shared with me this letter he wrote to his parents, asking my opinion whether or not it was disrespectful: (You be the judge)

Dear Mom and Dad, I am sure you remember how you used to tell me stories when I was young and was afraid and insecure. Well I've noticed that you are often worried about what might become of me when you're not there to help. If it's alright, I'd like to remind you of one of the stories we read together when I was little.

It's the story of the rooster who got up before dawn every day to sit on the roof of the farmhouse and crow so that the sun would come up. Because that's what he really believed; that it was his job to make the sun come up. He was always afraid that if he didn't crow, everything would go wrong. He kept worrying: "What would happen if I got sick, or even died?"

"How would the crops grow, and the children wake up in time for school, and the frost melt, and the flowers blossom if I weren't there to make the sun rise? The world would become cold and dark; all the grass and the trees would die and the people too eventually..."

Then, one evening, Rooster attended a party and overslept the next morning. The other animals realized that he was not there to make the sun come up and were just about to panic when they saw a glimmer of light on the horizon...It was the sun rising without the Rooster! Rooster was miserable when he found out that he had nothing to do with the sun's rising every morning. And embarrassed!

But he was also extremely relieved. "What a weight off my shoulders", he thought, "that I don't have to make the sun come up! Yet, every morning, there it is! There must be Someone Else taking care of all this".

Mom, Dad, I know you love me, and you light up my life, but it really isn't your job to "make the sun rise for me." I know that you know that Someone Else is taking care of me.

That was a lesson that Mary and Joseph had to learn. And it's a lesson that all parents must learn, if indeed theirs are to be Holy Families too.

May the joy of this Christmas fill you with the sublime awareness that indeed you have arrived in your magical city in your own home in your own holy family where "love is the bond of perfection and the peace of Christ controls your hearts."