The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

We are fast approaching the Christmas Holiday season, dubbed in the USA as "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year". Adverts in the media are already featuring the Christmas theme.

Indeed, it is the most wonderful time of the year for many people. Many children are putting the shine on their good behavior, knowing that it could be the difference between getting a "great" Christmas present and "an ok" one. The poor, homeless, and not so fortunate can look forward to an extra burst of generosity from society at large, during this season. Spouses are eagerly waiting to see the quality and level of love from the other. For some, this will be determined by the number of carats in the ring, pendant or jewelry, or the brand of car that will appear in the garage with a lovely red bow tied on the hood or the top of the car. Even workers are hoping that the company, or the boss, will be generous with their Christmas bonuses. Of course all businesses are looking to cash in on the millions, if not billions, of dollars that will be spent by those who can and those who cannot afford the pressure to spend, spend, spend!!

In the mad rush towards readiness for this frenzy of giving and spending, it is perhaps worthwhile for each person to stop and review what is motivating their generosity and acts of good deeds during this time of the year, especially.

No doubt, many of acts of kindness will bring happiness or relief to the beneficiaries. But would they also convey or evoke Love?

Everyone knows that "money can't buy me love". Even the unspoiled child knows that gifts showered on him or her is not the same as the Love felt from a warm hug. The unfortunate that is helped can see the warmth and sympathy or absence in the eyes and body language of the giver. So too can friends, colleagues and spouses sense the genuineness of the person behind the gift. Even tyrants know that they can never command loyalty by their acts of terror or reward to their henchmen.

Love can only be given, shared or experienced when an act of kindness is motivated by genuine sympathy, understanding, respect, support, encouragement, or trust, and of course the desire to bring true joy to the beneficiary. Anything short of this is empty giving that does not nourish the Spirit of the giver or the recipient. Of course such empty giving can and does offer temporal benefits. Perhaps a feeling of wellbeing or to assuage the conscience of the giver, and temporary relief for the receiver. But it seldom leads to deeper change in the being that can occur when a person truly shares in the joy or misfortune of a fellow human being. This is the form of sharing that is inherent in and motivated by true Love. It is also the spiritual bread that Jesus meant when we read in John 6:51…

> "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever….."

Jesus being the embodiment of all of the principles of love. This quote tells us that anyone who is able to imbibe (eat) of these principles is really partaking of the living bread. And with this spiritual nourishment the partaker will get to know peace and happiness, which we all crave and somehow recognize as life's ultimate goal, and somehow also sense as the real meaning of being alive.

Thus, a constant and sustained living on this bread of life will guarantee continuous enjoyment and experiencing of peace and happiness (everlasting life).

It is noteworthy that most, if not everyone, feel that their lives are a work-in-progress. That there is still an ultimate goal yet to be reached, even if this goal cannot be clearly articulated. But generally, the picture of this goal is imbued with peace, happiness and final satisfaction that will lead us to the enjoyment of life in its uninterrupted fullest.

Could this misunderstood craving be what the spiritual food is meant to satisfy? A craving that becomes enhanced during festivals that remind us of our spiritual nature, and which leads us to bursts of attempted acts of Love?

There is also a passive side to acts of love which we sometimes fail to give adequate attention. Such acts involve voluntary ***giving up.*** That is giving up of attitudes and aspects of our nature that are detrimental to peaceful co-existence. These include such personal attributes and indulgences as prejudice, hatred, intolerance, impatience, pettiness, avarice, etc. There is no debate that such traits can only work to prevent the true manifestation of active love or to negatively counter its effect or longevity, especially on those occasions when we try to perform true acts of love.

Another point for consideration is that no individual can eat food for another person's nourishment. Each must eat their own food for themselves. The same holds true for spiritual nourishment. Thus all that Jesus could do for us was to offer us spiritual bread in his words. It is up to each one who craves that nourishment to pick it and imbibe it for themselves. Any changes that come about from partaking of the spiritual bread can also occur at the individual level.

This fact gives a totally different meaning to that given to the angel's announcement of peace and goodwill to all men, when Jesus was born 2000 years ago.

Imagine, if each believer recognized that the spiritual bread that brings about change can only be eaten by each person, for themselves, in order to gain spiritual nourishment, within, from the principles of love. Thus is contrary to the wish and prayer, even today, for a miraculous manifestation of peace or goodwill among men on earth. Perhaps more people will then realize that the key to making this the most wonderful time of the year is really an individual goal. That is, only the individual can make this the most wonderful time of the year for themselves. Of course, the manifestation of love within the individual will have a beneficial effect on their environment because it will spread true joy in the sense that the angels hoped when they declared "Joy to the World".

The foregoing ideas and thesis are not altogether new. Some may even see them as the usual sermon we hear fairly regular at Church, Mosques, or at pep rallies. So a very legitimate question is why then have they not taken hold in society?

The simple answer is twofold.

The first is a lack of total conviction by those who would like to believe in the principles of love and fair play. How can one hope to survive by showing love to those who hate you, or tolerance to those who are

only looking for ways to kill you, or to "do you in". We look around, and all we find is that the majority of humans appear to only want to "get a leg up over the other", rather than to support or help where there is no gain. Not especially if this act can only be done at one's expense. Truth be told, most, if not all, suffer from this syndrome of "I before others". No honest person needs look beyond themselves to find confirmation of this statement. Therefore no supporting evidence is needed here.

The second is that the few who may, every now and then, feel the inner urge to change or do something about the situation soon become discouraged as they encounter the fierce opposition of some, or the overwhelming lack of desire for change by the majority. In fact it is the latter that has the most devastating effect in eroding confidence in an individual's initial urge to change. But this happens only because the individual is looking for support from others to bolster him or her, and therefore may not be entirely committed to travelling along the path of change by and for themselves! This is especially true when the individual gives up only after encountering a few initial obstacles.

Perhaps those who want to bring about true change need to remind themselves again about Matthew 13:33

> *"He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like **yeast** that a woman took and mixed into 50 pounds of flour until it spread through all of it."*

Going by this parable, each believer needs to see him/herself as that grain of yeast that is mixed into 50 pounds of flour (the general population). Each grain can and has to penetrate the much more numerous grains of flour to cause them to rise.

We are living witnesses to the powerful effect of "minority influencers" in society today. These individuals or groups can the found along the entire gamut of social changes, be it fashion, social and business thinking, philosophy, as well as in shaping morals and other attitudes. A review of the rise of these individuals or groups shows that they too sometimes started with views that were seen as on the fringes of society, views that many perceived as positions of little or no consequence. But by virtue of their conviction, passion and steadfastness, they were able to sway the majority onto their way of thinking.

However, even In this, one will observe that the successful minority influencers are those that appear to have the greater good of society at heart. The fanatical and bigoted may gain temporary control of the majority, but they sooner or later lose this influence, as history shows again and again. Thus Jesus did not mean the latter in his imagery of being yeast, i.e. a successful minority influencers. Of course one needs also to clarify that not all that we deem as for the greater good of society may indeed be beneficial in the long run for society. Therefore even the yeast effect can also be put to negative use. And one needs to be very mindful of this fact as we advocate causes.

It is possible that some readers of this article may already have the passion of the minority influencer. In the context of this article hopefully all that it should now take is for such persons to gain that level of conviction and to live out with same fire and zeal the Life prescribed by Jesus. A path that will lead to the desired life of peace and good will to all men regardless of the material cost, and how others may perceive us.

The one who wishes to embark upon this, granted, difficult path can draw assurance from nature's law that "birds of a feather flock together" . At first it may, and most likely will, be difficult, especially if one is not already surrounded by like-minded people. However this law of nature assures that when there is deep sincerity, passion and zeal for a goal, one will, if they allow themselves, be invariably led to people who have a similar passion.

Perhaps an explanation is necessary for the use of the words "*if they allow ourselves*".

Many of us for sentimental reasons remain, voluntarily, among people who are clearly detrimental to our yearnings. Whether we are aware or not, the environment and influences to which we open ourselves affect us. And then we wonder why it is we take one step forward and two steps backwards. Just as it is next to impossible to light a fire in the rain so is it difficult to ignite a spark under the wrong influences.

Another important point regarding one's environment is that one who is not yet strong in their conviction is better off working on first strengthening it, before trying to convince others in their environment. People who could just as easily convince them of the opposite.

But in a homogenous and supportive association, one will find the support that one needs. A support that creates a flame out of the aggregation of supporting sparks. A flame whose individual or aggregate influence can no longer be ignored by the majority, and which in time may also encourage many to reflect and want to change themselves.

It is the hope that all such seekers will enter this Christmas season in this awareness, consciousness and ardent desire that can bring about change. And that this recognition will make this truly the most wonderful time of this year for them. In time, and by having the yeast like effect to which Jesus himself alluded, one can then in greater confidence participate as one of the minority influencers who will gradually work to raise the consciousness of the world to the benefits of the active and passive practice of the love inherent in Jesus' message. A practice that will make it possible for this period to indeed become this most wonderful time in the year for them and the majority they would have been able influence.

In closing, it is important to mention that Love does not mean being austere. Indeed true love is manifest in the joy for and of life. And it is in this spirit that we wish everyone a Merry Christmas.