



AVERTING THE LETDOWN AFTER CHRISTMAS – AND CELEBRATING WITH IMPACT ALL YEAR

Two days after Christmas, a radio show discussed how there is often a feeling of letdown after Christmas. And come to think of it, it sure seems as if the spirit of Christmas fades even before New Year's Day.

Why does this happen? Beyond the influence of all the XMAS hubbub, perhaps the letdown and fading of the Christmas spirit come from society's heightened focus on receiving gifts vs. society, and Christians in particular, adopting a more holistic, more fervent focus about Christmas and life overall. A focus that encourages us to not only receive the many GIFTS God has given us, but also to reciprocate to God for all His loving GIFTS, and to reGIFT the GIFT of Jesus' selfless love and all the other GIFTS we've been given, in order to transform the lives of others and to TRANSFORM the world. This TRANSFORMative gratitude and GIVING-giving all year long would bring incredible JOY to us and to others we encounter.

GIFT & TRANSFORMATION – TWO FAITH PILLARS THAT CAN EXTEND CHRISTMAS ALL YEAR

Our ministry, Global Institute For Transformation (GIFT), has highlighted two faith pillars -- 1) GIFT; and 2) TRANSFORMATION -- as foundational life-given concepts worth embracing.

What's involved is humbly receiving all God's incredible GIFTS; reciprocating back to God for all the wonderful GIFTS we've received from Him by allowing Him to TRANSFORM us to live and love more like Christ; and re-GIFTING from the GIFTS we've received to help others in need -- spiritually and materially -- to TRANSFORM their lives and TRANSFORM the world.

The points below articulate how contemplating and living out these two faith pillars could enable us to keep the spirit of Christmas alive throughout the year; to live life more joyfully every day; and to make much more fruitful use of our life and our many GIFTS.

1) GIFT:

Humbly receiving, reflecting upon and appreciating everything and everyone that God has freely given us as a GIFT -- including and especially Jesus, His Son, and His selfless, sacrificial and atoning love that can enable us to live with God for all eternity.

2) TRANSFORMATION:

Reciprocating to God for all His GIFTS by drawing closer to Him and allowing Him to TRANSFORM and renew our minds, so that we will know, approve and live-out God's perfect and pleasing will, and so that we'll offer ourselves as a living sacrifice back to God in holy and pleasing worship to Him (Romans 12:2; 1). And allowing the Holy Spirit to TRANSFORM us to become the face of Christ to the world (2 Corinthians 3:18), living and loving more like Jesus, our selfless Creator and Savior. Ultimately REGIFTING the GIFTS we received to TRANSFORM the lives of others in need and to TRANSFORM our world.

In particular, this entails letting the Holy Spirit TRANSFORM us so we can make our lives a GIFT of self to God and to others -- just like Jesus.

Focusing On GIFT And TRANSFORMATION Is Consistent With Encyclicals And Teachings:

Lumen Fidei:

“Faith is God’s free GIFT... Faith consists in the willingness to let ourselves be constantly transformed and renewed by God’s call. Christian faith is thus faith in a perfect love, in its decisive power, in its ability to TRANSFORM the world... Jesus offered his own life for all, even for his enemies, to TRANSFORM their hearts.”

Gaudete Et Exsultate:

“We need to acknowledge jubilantly that our life is essentially a GIFT... Only on the basis of God’s GIFT, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation. God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be TRANSFORMED...”

Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation – Christus Vivit – of the Holy Father Francis

“What does it mean to live the years of our youth in the TRANSFORMING light of the Gospel? We need to raise this question, because youth, more than a source of pride, is a GIFT of God: To be young is a grace, a blessing. It is a GIFT that we can squander meaninglessly, or receive with gratitude and live to the full... Our world is filled with beauty! How can we look down upon God’s many GIFTS?... take a moment to experience fully and with gratitude every one of life’s little GIFTS. ... living the present to the full, spending our energies on good things, cultivating fraternity, following Jesus and making the most of life’s little joys as GIFTS of God’s love... rejoicing in the GIFTS the Creator gives us each day... life is a GIFT... Christian service represents a unique opportunity for growth and openness to God’s GIFTS of faith and charity. The Lord calls us to share in his work of creation and to contribute to the common good by using the GIFTS we have received... ‘

These Pillars Conform To Insights And Admonitions In Laudato Si.

An article leading up to Laudato Si shared related insights from the document: ***“Creation is God’s GIFT intended for all people, and all should be protectors of God’s GIFTS as a way of saying thank you to God. All should show gratitude for this ‘priceless GIFT.’”*** [1AnticipatingFrancisEncyclical.pdf \(mu.edu\)](http://www.usccb.org/upload/1AnticipatingFrancisEncyclical.pdf).

And Laudato Si specifically referenced the interrelationship between GIFT and TRANSFORMATION.

...We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a GIFT from God to be lived to the full. Jesus taught us this attitude when he invited us to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, or when seeing the rich young man and knowing his restlessness, “he looked at him with love.”

The destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a GIFT which must be defended from various forms of debasement... Accordingly, our human ability to TRANSFORM reality must proceed in line with God’s original GIFT of all that is.

A focus on the need to live transformative-ly is also consistent with the USCCB Document On The Laity which notes, ***“All of the baptized are called to work toward the transformation of the world... All of the faithful are called in various ways to share in the Church’s mission of announcing the reign of God and transforming the world in the light of Christ.”*** <http://www.usccb.org/upload/co-workers-vineyard-lay-ecclesial-ministry-2005.pdf> (pgs. 8; 20)

The Following Visual Provides Multiple Scripture References That Acknowledge The Many GIFTS From God And Our Need To TRANSFORM.

REFLECTING ON TWO FAITH PILLARS – GIFT AND TRANSFORMATION	
By Appreciating The Many Gifts Of God, We'll Want To Allow The Holy Spirit To Transform Our Lives So We'll Live And Love More Like Christ, And To Work Through Us To Transform The Hearts, Lives, And Communities Of Our Brothers And Sisters In Christ	
Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. James 1:17	"If you knew the Gift of God... he would have given you living water...welling up to eternal life." John 4:10
For it is by grace you have been saved...It is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8-10	Thanks be to God for His indescribable Gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15
The wages of sin is death, But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23	Repent and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ... and you will receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38
Do not neglect your gift... Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them. 1 Timothy 4:14-15	We have different gifts... Let us use them in proportion to our faith. Romans 12:6
Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. 1 Peter 4:10	Fan into flame the Gift of God. 2 Timothy 1:6
In Him you have been enriched in every way... Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift... 1 Corinthians 1:5-7	I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Ephesians 3:7
But eagerly desire the greater gifts... the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 12:31, 13:13	Try to excel in gifts that build up the church. 1 Corinthians 14:12
If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Matthew 7:11	"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." 2 Corinthians 9:9
Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. Rom 12: 2	All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:18

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Here's A Prayer Of Requests To God For GIFTS That Can Help Us Live More Fervently All Year Long:

A Prayer For Fervor

(All Year Long – Not Just During Christmas)

O Lord,
give us
a mind that is
humble, quiet, peaceable,
patient and charitable,
and a taste of your Holy Spirit
in all our thoughts, words and deeds.

O Lord, give us a lively faith, a firm hope,
a fervent charity, a love of you.

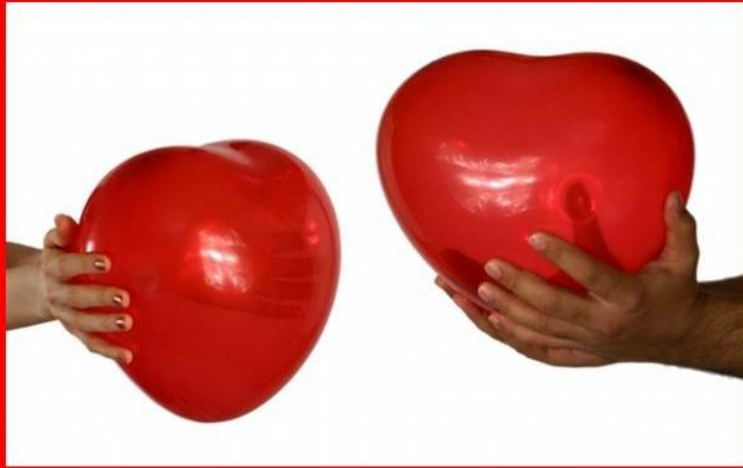
Take from us all lukewarmness
in meditation and all dullness in prayer.
Give us fervor and delight in thinking of you,
your grace, and your tender compassion toward us.

Give us, good Lord,
the grace to work for
the things we pray for.

--St Thomas More, 1478-1535

Here's A Message About Living In Consideration Of All The GIFTS We've Received:

LIFE'S KEY PREMISE: EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE IS A GIFT! True Joy Comes From Living A Life Of Continual GIFT Exchanges...



Reciprocating Back To God, Our Father, For His Wonderful GIFTS To Us
And Exchanging Heartfelt GIFTS With All Our Brothers And Sisters



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"Let us not reject this gift of God which is the one family of his children. Encountering and welcoming everyone, solidarity... these are what make our society truly human... Be servers of communion and of the culture of encounter! What must guide us is the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed," exclaimed Pope Francis, World Youth Day, 2013.

**Life...
And Everything And Everyone In It...
Are Incredible Gifts From Our loving God!
Life Will Be Most Joyful When We Engage In
Continual, Faithful & Caring Gift Exchanges.**



We've all been given so very much -- oh, so many gifts: life itself; all the food, water, oxygen, sunlight and resources we need for survival; family and friends; our brothers and sisters around the world; work; play; love; happiness; God's real presence in our lives to love, comfort and guide us; and the hope of life eternal with God, too.

To be truly joyful, we should reflect on all our gifts and seek a continually transforming heart. A heart that reflects appreciatively on God our Father, our gifts, and our brothers and sisters next door and across the globe -- and a heart that reciprocates with meaningful gift exchanges.

Life will be happier if we spend our lives engaged in continual gift exchanges -- receiving the beauty and gifts of God and others, and sharing ourselves and our resources with one another.

And if there are members of God's family who are in need of anything, may they receive all they need through God's loving hands -- His loving Church in action -- us.

Let us be selfless like Jesus and bear much fruit -- engaging in heartfelt gift exchanges.

Let us also let our light shine in the darkness to bring all God's children compassionate, life-transforming love, including a genuine witness of our loving God -- our Father, Creator, Provider, Counselor, Friend and Savior.



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Here's One Way We Could Extend The Spirit Of Christmas And TRANSFORM The World: Model The Magi – Awesome GIFT Givers!

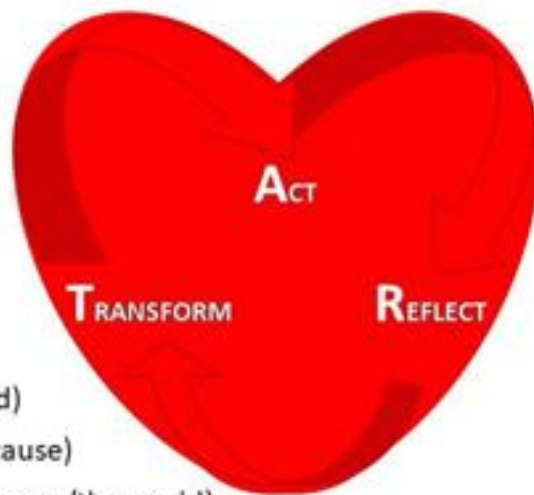
The Magi, or the three kings, set aside their own worldly preoccupations to follow a star so they could visit baby Jesus – the King of Kings -- and pay him honor, documenting the world's greatest GIFT and most TRANSFORMative event. The Magi brought Jesus profoundly thoughtful GIFTS of gold, frankincense and myrrh: Gold was considered a symbol of kings; the perfume frankincense represented divinity; and myrrh was an embalming oil used at death. Perhaps we can view the Magi as a new model of giving thoughtful, TRANSFORMative GIFTS back to Jesus all year-long -- including caring for our brothers and sisters and caring for our world -- even if it involves setting aside our own preoccupations for a while.



Credit: rawpixel.com

One Of These Two Pillars Is Also Consistent With A Key Concept Of Social Justice: “Act (on an issue); Reflect (prayerfully on the root cause): and TRANSFORM (the issue at the root cause).”

The HeART Of Christian Living *(Following In The Footsteps Of Jesus)*



Act (on an issue/need)

Reflect (on the root cause)

Transform (the root cause/the world)

Adapted from <http://www.usccb.org/lent/Walking-in-the-Footsteps-of-Jesus-Act-Reflect-Transform-essay.pdf>

One final thought on a practical way to apply this every day – via purposeful GIFT exchanges and stamping out any indifference we might have to the concerns of others:

What if the encounters we have with others throughout the year become more joyful, selfless and caring -- as if truly re-presenting the face of Christ to the world in loving GIFT exchanges, recognizing and honoring the others involved in the encounters as the GIFTS from God they truly are. Such that each encounter could be “stamped” at the conclusion as a thoughtful **“GIFT Exchanged... JOY Complete”**? With encounters guided By **JOY**: prioritizing **J**esus first; **O**thers next; and **Y**ourself last. It just might TRANSFORM our world.



NOTE: Personally, I've kept this in mind in many encounters, especially during difficult encounters – whether during a phone call with someone in customer service which appears to be going the wrong way; in discussions with someone expressing an opposing view; at a slow-moving check-out counter during the pressures of busyness; and in other stressed encounters. It's helped me to not only keep my cool but also to bring Christ's selfless love into the situation. Frankly, it's a good practice for any interaction, not just the difficult ones, in seeking to know, appreciate, empathize with and love one another. It's a fun practice, too! And it can be truly transformative! GIFT Exchanged – **JOY** Complete!

Yes, Keeping The JOYful Spirit Of Christmas Alive All Year Long Can Truly Be TRANSFORMATIVE – For Those Who Are The GIFT-givers And Those Who Receive The GIFTS.

This more holistic, fervent focus on GIFT and TRANSFORMATION can help tangibly extend the spirit, love and **JOY** of Christmas all year. It could even be rekindled during Valentine's Day, Earth Day, The Season of Creation, Thanksgiving, and other celebratory days. Or it could simply become a daily, **JOY**ful pursuit.

FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US TO LET US KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS CONCEPT OF HARNESSING GIFT AND TRANSFORMATION OR FOR MORE INFORMATION

For further information on tangible ways of leveraging the two faith pillars of GIFT and TRANSFORMATION, contact Tim Maurer, President, Global Institute For Transformation (GIFT), at tim.maurer@gifttransforms.org. Also, please visit www.gifttransforms.org and www.globalinstitutefortransformation.org.