

Despite our being a secular society we still refer to “the spirit of Christmas”, of how great it is and how nice it would be if it lasted the whole year. Yet, this is the time of year when many people, especially those with mental health problems, feel very dis-spirited. Before we begin to talk about the spirit of Christmas I feel we need to talk about the spirituality of Christmas. The way we prepare ourselves for Christmas as spiritual beings.

During the Christmastide rush while trying to take care of other’s needs we often forget about our own needs. I feel it is precisely the mad rush to do everything someone else has said is important for us to do, while ignoring our own self-preparation, that causes so many of us just to “go through” Christmas and end up feeling empty.

Spirituality, like anything worthwhile demands something from us, well in advance. It requires preparation. It requires self-discipline and concentration. It means becoming more proficient at the whole I want to be. It means becoming more skilful in the art of living.

We spend too much time longing for Christmas past which we have made rosier than they were, when our spiritual need is just the opposite, namely to live in and with and for the present. Despite what Dylan Thomas wrote, all Christmases are not alike, not if something is really happening in and amongst us.

What I am suggesting is, that a spirituality of Christmas involves a closer and deeper attention to the feelings exchanged between us and amongst us. They can be the smallest, yet most deeply felt, exchanges between one person and another.

A spirituality of Christmas needs to begin with attention to the details of life in order to see what is truly life-giving. We have too much of Christmas “en masse”- that leaves the gift department of stores looking like a war zone. I believe we should make of our Christmas something special, something personal, something lovingly prepared and lovingly given.

There is no Christmas spirit in general. There is only the spirit that makes such exchanges no matter how small a gifting of one another. Everything worthwhile is wrapped up in that proposal. The giving of one another: It is like a package the contents of which are hidden from us until we unwrap it and live out its hidden meaning. That we are given the gift of life and only in love can we accomplish the giving of ourselves to others.

What does it mean to us when we receive such a gift? Let it signal a breakthrough to a different way of interacting with the world. For such a gift of love enables us to return it not only to the one who gave it to us but to other as well for a long time after. May every day be such a Christmas Day, starting now.