



An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun.

"Could it be," asked one of the students, "when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

Another asked, "Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig tree or a peach tree?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

"Then when is it?" the pupils demanded.

"It is when you can look on the face of any man or woman and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night."

December 6, 1999

St. Nicholas Day

Dear Friends:

The story above comes from the Hasidic Jewish tradition, by way of Pax Christi's book of daily meditations. It speaks so eloquently of what we celebrate during these "candle lit seasons" of Chanukah, Advent and Christmas! And the truth of the tale strikes home with special impact in light of recent experience.

A group of faculty and students from the Law School at one of San Francisco's universities recently spent a day with us at St. Anthony's. After they'd finished serving lunch to more than 2,000 people in our Dining Room, they gathered in the conference room for a reflection session. One by one each person shared their impressions and feelings about the day's activities. The last one to speak was a 2nd year student who said, with some emotion, that the setting and the experience were all too familiar. She revealed that 10 years ago she was "very young, very stupid and very addicted" and working the streets of this neighborhood as a prostitute, staying alive by eating here each day. Today this woman is in the top 10% of her class and preparing for a career in the law. (A local firm has already offered her a job, based on her internship this past summer.)

One of the brightest days, for me, this year came in autumn when I was blessed to spend some time with Mairead Corrigan Maguire. This extraordinary woman from Belfast won the Nobel Peace Prize for her struggle to end the sectarian violence and bigotry in Northern Ireland. (When her sister and three children were killed on a street corner, caught in the middle of a police ambush of a teenaged IRA suspect, Mairead, who is Catholic, refused to be swallowed up in revenge and still more violence. Together with a Protestant woman - Betty Williams - she rallied women to demand an end to the hatred and killing. They founded a group called Peace People and planted the seeds that are finally bearing fruit at the end of this bloody century.) When I asked Mairead what special training she had that prepared her to be a peace advocate, she laughed and said, "I was a secretary at the Guinness brewery. But I remembered what I learned from the sisters in school: to love your neighbor as yourself."

There have been other sunny, luminous days this year. Several friends and two of my nieces (Dan's daughter Erin and Marykay's daughter Sara) got married this year. Those weddings brought happy reunions with family and friends and set hearts overflowing with warmth and tenderness. (Both days reminded me, inevitably, of song lyrics: Jacques Brel's conviction that "If we only have love we can melt all the guns and then give the new world to our daughters and sons", and the LES MISERABLES lyricist's belief that "To love another person is to see the face of God!").

Ever since arriving in the Bay Area I have been part of a group at the Newman Center in Berkeley called LOAVES & FISHES. We reach out to our poor and homeless neighbors in a variety of ways. One of these is a monthly dinner party, complete with decorations, entertainment, door prizes and lots of hospitality. At the August dinner each year some friends and I provide the entertainment with a revue of theatre songs we call BROADWAY BABIES (from the Sondheim song in FOLLIES). It gives me a chance to get my fingers in shape each summer and to even attempt a song or two. We may not be great - one colleague reminds us each year to hold on to our day jobs - but we follow Sondheim's instructions for that song mentioned above and sing "*senza vergogna*" - "*without shame*". This August's show included shameless renditions of songs from "There Is Nothing Like A Dame" to "Gee, Office Krupke", with a few subtler items in between.

I treasure my work with the Justice Education & Advocacy team at the St. Anthony Foundation. Wonderful colleagues and a deep sense of solidarity with the poor are part of what makes St. Anthony's a very good place for me to be as we approach the dawning of a new century and millennium. I hope this blessed season finds you at peace and full, still, of dreams for an even better world yet to come!

With love,

