

Cities Turning Heartless on the Homeless

New ordinances curbing panhandling, sleeping on the streets pass across U.S.



QUOTE of the YEAR:

"CONSIDER ME PROVOKED WHEN I SEE AMERICANS WITHOUT PROPER FOOD OR MEDICAL TREATMENT!" -George Bush on the hostages in Iraq

DEAR FRIENDS:

I JUST LIT SEVERAL CANDLES AND WATCHED THE CLOCK WIND PAST ANOTHER DAY. IT'S QUIET HERE TONIGHT. THE OTHER STAFF AND GUESTS ARE ALREADY IN BED, BUNDLED UP AGAINST A MOST UN-CALIFORNIA-LIKE COLD FRONT. I SHOULD BE THERE TOO, BUT I AM "WIRED" TONIGHT, ENERGIZED FROM A WEEKEND OF ADVENT PREACHING AT A PARISH NEARBY. MY HEAD IS SWIMMING, NOT WITH VISIONS OF SUGAR PLUMS, BUT RATHER WITH THE IMAGE OF AN UNLETTERED, TEENAGE GIRL FROM NAZARETH SAYING "LET IT BE!" TO THE ANGEL GABRIEL. NATURALLY I'M REMEMBERING LENNON'S & MCCARTNEY'S MUSICAL HOMILY:

WHEN I FIND MYSELF IN TIMES OF TROUBLE
MOTHER MARY COMES TO ME
WHISPERING WORDS OF WISDOM: "LET IT BE!"

AND IN MY HOUR OF DARKNESS
THERE IS STILL A LIGHT THAT SHINES ON ME,
SHINE UNTIL TOMORROW: "LET IT BE!"

FROM THE DINING ROOM TABLE AT ANDRE HOUSE, VERY EARLY ON CHRISTMAS EVE, I SEND YOU MY FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE.
I ONLY WISH THEY WERE AS PROFOUND AS MARY'S!

SOMEONE SAID ONCE THAT WE CAN SPEND SO MUCH TIME HATING WHAT IS EVIL THAT WE FAIL TO NOTICE WHAT IS GOOD -- AND THERE IS MUCH THAT IS GOOD! SO LET ME BALANCE THE NASTY CARTOON ABOVE, AND THE DISTURBING HEADLINE AS WELL, WITH A WONDERFUL MEMORY FROM THE YEAR ABOUT TO END.

(OVER)

ON AUGUST 9TH I WAS AWAKENED BY AN EARLY MORNING PHONE CALL FROM A PRIEST FRIEND AT THE PARISH HOLY CROSS STAFFS IN HAYWARD. HE SAID ONE OF THEIR PARISHIONERS HAD GIVEN BIRTH PREMATURELY DURING THE NIGHT AND THAT THE BABY, WHO'D ONLY BEEN IN THE WOMB SIX MONTHS, HAD BEEN RUSHED TO CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, A FEW BLOCKS FROM HERE. THE PARENTS HOPED A PRIEST COULD BAPTIZE THEIR CHILD SINCE THE DOCTORS HAD SAID HE ONLY HAD A FIFTY/FIFTY CHANCE OF SURVIVAL. I SAID I'D BE HAPPY TO DO SO AND HURRIED TO DRESS AND GO TO THE HOSPITAL. WHEN I ARRIVED THE BABY'S FATHER WAS ALREADY THERE. HE WAITED WHILE I "SCRUBBED" AND PUT ON A HOSPITAL GOWN. WE WENT INTO THE INTENSIVE CARE NURSERY TOGETHER AND HEADED TOWARDS HIS SON'S BED. I WAS IMMEDIATELY STRUCK, MOVED, OVERWHELMED BY A TANGIBLE AURA OF LOVE AND TENDERNESS AND REVERENCE THAT WAS POWERFUL IN THAT ROOM. IN EVERY DIRECTION WERE DOCTORS AND NURSES HOVERING OVER TINY, FRAGILE INFANTS, WORKING TO SAVE THEIR LIVES AND BRING THEM HEALTH! WHEN WE REACHED LITTLE IMMANUEL'S BED I WAS STARTLED BY JUST HOW SMALL AND VULNERABLE HE SEEMED. I HAD NEVER SEEN SUCH A TINY HUMAN BEING (HE WEIGHED ONE POUND AT BIRTH!) HIS FATHER WAS A SIMPLE AND PIOUS YOUNG, MEXICAN WHO SEEMED QUITE RELIEVED BY MY PRESENCE. YET HE RESISTED WHEN I INSISTED THAT HE HELP ME BAPTIZE HIS SON. NEVERTHELESS, TOGETHER WE DIPPED OUR INDEX FINGERS IN THE BLESSED WATER I'D BROUGHT AND WE REACHED UNDER THE COVER OF THE INCUBATOR AND TRACED THE SIGN OF THE CROSS ON THAT SMALL FOREHEAD. TEARS WERE ROLLING DOWN THE FATHER'S CHEEKS AND DOWN MINE AS WELL. I WAS DEEPLY MOVED BY THE TENDERNESS OF THAT MOMENT!

WHEN I GOT BACK TO ANDRE HOUSE THE PHONE WAS RINGING. IT WAS THE FATHER OF ONE OF OUR HOUSE GUESTS, CALLING TO WISH HIS SON A HAPPY THIRTY-FOURTH BIRTHDAY. DAN WASN'T HOME YET FROM WORKING THE NIGHT SHIFT AT HIS JOB, SO I ASKED HIS FATHER TO CALL AGAIN DURING DINNER THAT NIGHT WHEN WE'D BE CELEBRATING THE OCCASION. HE TOLD ME HOW ESTRANGED HE AND HIS SON HAD BECOME. I TOLD HIM I WAS ALREADY AWARE OF THAT AND AGAIN URGED HIM TO CALL AT DINNERTIME. HE DID THAT. WHEN I TOLD DAN THAT HIS FATHER WAS ON THE PHONE, HE RESPONDED WITH OBSCENITIES AND REFUSED TO SPEAK TO HIM. I TOLD HIS FATHER THAT HE COULDN'T COME TO THE PHONE BUT HIS FATHER KNEW WHAT WAS GOING ON. I BEGGED HIM TO CALL AGAIN IN TEN MINUTES. THEN I PLEADED WITH DAN TO TALK WITH HIM, REMINDING HIM OF A RECENT CONVERSATION IN WHICH HE'D SAID HOW MUCH HE WISHED THE TWO OF THEM COULD BE ON GOOD TERMS AGAIN. WHEN THE PHONE RANG AGAIN DAN ANSWERED IT AND RETURNED TO THE TABLE SAYING THAT HIS FATHER WOULD BE STOPPING BY. A HALF HOUR LATER HE ARRIVED AND THE TWO WENT INTO DAN'S ROOM TO TALK. AFTER ANOTHER HALF HOUR THEY EMERGED AND AS THEY WERE SAYING GOODBYE AT THE FRONT DOOR, THEY EMBRACED EACH OTHER FOR A LONG MOMENT, WITH TEARS.

I KNOW THAT I CAN BE A ROMANTIC FOOL AND SOMETIMES SLOPPILY SENTIMENTAL, BUT I FELT EXTRAORDINARILY PRIVILEGED TO HAVE WITNESSED SUCH TENDERNESS BETWEEN TWO FATHERS AND TWO SONS AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF THE SAME DAY! IT SEEMED AS THOUGH SOME ANGEL OF MERCY HAD BEEN SENT TO MAKE SURE THAT I WAS TOUCHED ONCE AGAIN BY THAT LIFE WHICH IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. AS ST. JOHN REMINDED (AND ENCOURAGED) US LONG AGO, THAT LIGHT STILL SHINES IN THE WORLD'S DARKNESS AND THE DARKNESS HAS NEVER MANAGED TO PUT IT OUT! THERE IS MUCH THAT IS DARK IN THE WORLD THIS SEASON, BUT THERE IS MUCH THAT IS THE STUFF OF LIGHT AS WELL. LET US CLING TO THAT LIGHT AND WARMTH IN THE YEAR ABOUT TO BEGIN!

MY LOVE AND PRAYERS FOR YOU,

PLEASE FORGIVE THE LACK
OF A PERSONALIZED GREETING.

WHEN THE MESSIAH COMES FOR THE SECOND TIME, THEN YOU'LL HAVE A
HANDWRITTEN MESSAGE. IN THE MEANTIME I RELY ON YOUR UNDERSTANDING!

Jitz