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WOE TO THOSE WHO ENACT UNJUST STATUTES AND WHO WRITE OPPRESSIVE DECREES, THUS DEPRIVING THE NEEDY OF JUDGMENT AND ROBBING MY PEOPLE'S POOR OF THEIR RIGHTS... (IS. 10:1-2)

The only news these days seems to be bad news. We Americans are in the third year of an illegal war.** Our leaders have demonstrated profoundly their disinterest in the sufferings of the poor and abandoned, not only through the shenanigans of post-Hurricane Katrina, but in the recent passing of a Senate Bill which slashes over \$70 billion from funding for poverty programs for our most destitute brothers and sisters so that the richest 1% of us can have \$70 billion *more* tax cuts. (This is not to mention the debacle of Medicare prescription coverage, which only enriches pharmaceutical companies with tax money and is guaranteed to cause the deaths of elderly, sick, and disabled people because they simply cannot pay for even 5% of their medicine.)

Throughout the scriptures it is the same old story: Rich people get richer and more powerful, and use contemporary sociopolitical institutions to get more of the same, all the while discounting the needs of the poor as they (the poor) are burdened with the necessary taxation and labor to support the wealthy and privileged.

The *status quo* would remain until God would send a prophet or two to straighten the powerful folks out. **Sins were counted as inhospitality, usury, greed, and abrogation of the common good**, not the sexual ones which many religious leaders today so excoriate. The prophets were called unpatriotic and worse – Jeremiah almost was executed for his prophetic witness.

By the time Jesus was born, the Jewish people were at a real crossroads. The Middle East always has been the center of conflict, hegemony, and greed, and an uneasy *Pax Romana* maintained a violent government throughout the region. Insurgents, called Zealots, roamed the land (Jesus Himself received the punishment of Zealots: torture, then a horrible death upon the Cross).

Joseph and Mary, in fact, were forced into homelessness when Rome demanded that "all the world" should be taxed and all breadwinners were compelled to register in their home towns. The burden of sustaining a prosperous government always has fallen more on the shoulders of average people minding their own business than on the shoulders of the rich.

A favorite bumper sticker reads, **WE ARE SPIRITUAL BEINGS HAVING A HUMAN EXPERIENCE, NOT HUMAN BEINGS HAVING A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**. This Holy Season reminds me more and more that we live in Biblical Time, not earthly time, for God's ways are not our ways. God did not start a war or annihilate the Romans who so oppressed His People. He did not show His glory through riches, or through principalities and powers.

Instead, God showed us *His* way to truth and glory. And herein lies the mystery of Christmas, of God With Us, for He came to us as a tiny baby born under some really messy and difficult circumstances. One would think that an omnipotent God would do better.

Well, God does not think. And if we believe our baptismal vows, we need not contemplate Him in human terms, for we are citizens of a new heaven and a new earth and we have entered into a relationship with Him that transcends all material and temporal things.

It seems as if we people have forgotten that.

Oh, it is hard to be a Christian in this Culture of Death! We claim to be Pro-Life, but we support politicians who would cynically curtail abortion and enact legislation as if life ends at birth. We pray for our young people in battle but do not pray for our enemies as Jesus commanded us. And we tolerate Congress's discussion of torture, and budget cuts to the poor!

These are not God's ways. They are human ways, fraught with the terror of unknowing, of fear, of greed and dishonesty. God's ways are incarnate in Baby Jesus, a baby like so many babies in the world today: with a young mother who got pregnant before her marriage, with homeless parents who in America today would have to wait on a housing list for years and would be cut from food stamps so the Donald Trumps of America could have more billions of dollars in tax cuts; the child of an older father who, living here today, would have even less access to medical care and medicine.

God's ways were fulfilled by a stranger who gave the Family a barn in a cave for shelter for that was all he had; by dirty and uncouth shepherds who welcomed him; and by "illegal" pagans from afar who gave Him gifts. **That first Christmas, God's ways were those of hospitality and friendship, of generosity, acceptance, and simplicity**, which speak volumes about what is important on this human journey, about what we must do as spiritual beings. The Holy Family never wanted for love, or shelter, or life -- all because strangers shared what they had.

And when He grew up, Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law, not to destroy it. What, asked the morally righteous and prominent people of the day, is the Highest Law? And He replied, "It is this: To love the Lord Your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself." Not a word about sex, drugs, or rock and roll.

May you and yours have a blessed Christmas in God's time and may God's peace reign on earth. -- Lynn G-S

****The Bible as well as international law and Roman Catholic teachings on Just War enjoin nations from declaring unilateral and unprovoked war on other nations. and were the considerations on which Pope John Paul's based his opposition to the war in Iraq.**