

## **Ethics and Leadership**

### **This Feast Has Meaning**

**By  
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Celebrate everything! Praise it all! Of course Christmas is too commercial in the U.S., so tone it down. Or at least reflect that a good part of the Christian world and perhaps a majority of the Catholic world won't keep Christmas with a meal even as filling as your dinner last night at the caf.

At my parish, Filipino immigrants began a custom thirteen years ago that was native to their homeland. It is called Missa de Gallo (Mass of the Rooster). This is a series of masses at dawn (5:30 am) from December 16 until the 24<sup>th</sup>. That will focus you on the religious dimensions of the holiday. For the first eleven years I never missed a mass. Last year I wearied, so this year I will begin a new string.

But I almost forgot to tell you that after mass, about 6:00 am, we have a fiesta. Chicken soup, shrimp and ginger soup, rice, noodles. And don't forget Letty's home-brewed ginger root tea. Woo Hoo!

So what's the Franciscan point here? Well, aside from the fact that the Little Poor Man said that on the Feast of the Incarnation the walls themselves should eat meat, our new version of an old custom reminds us that this most religious of holidays is a celebration of all things that bring peace and good. And those things are fleshly!

Francis believed in the goodness of God's created world. That his Savior chose to become part of that creation only increased its value to him. He wanted everyone not only to know God's goodness in creation, but to experience it. So to celebrate Christmas in

1223, he decided to recreate this redemptive moment. That's right – St. Francis of Assisi designed the first scene at the manger, the Christmas Creche, and to make it both more realistic and more spiritual, he did so with live animals and people.

So important to Franciscan tradition is the emphasis on creation that medieval theologians argued that God would have become incarnate even if humanity had not sinned in the Garden of Eden.

There is an ethic to Christmas. Embrace all gifts of God's Creation, including the least of these. Francis loved the celebration and he loved the poor. So eat hearty, but remember those who will not because they cannot.

My favorite rock'n'roll Christmas song? "Father Christmas" by the Kinks:

*Have yourself a merry little Christmas,  
Have yourself a good time,  
But remember the kids who have nothing  
When you're drinking down your wine.*

Postscript: I would be remiss if I did not mention John Lennon's "And So This Is Christmas," especially the refrain sung in the background, "War is over if you want it." I hope the radio plays it frequently this season.

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