

Along the track

Christmas Cards

Do you miss getting Christmas cards? Do you still send them? Christmas cards seem to be a disappearing custom for all sorts of reasons, not the least the cost of them I suspect and social media offers a quick and efficient alternative.

The story of Christmas is about reaching out, about connecting. Joseph and Mary went back to their ancestral village for the birth of Jesus and, in the brief time they were there, they would have caught up with relatives and friends. The rich and the poor came to visit, the Magi and the Shepherds and the angel brought a message for people of all nations: "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Jesus Christ."

It would be a pity if that tradition of reaching out at Christmas disappears. It is a time of bringing good news and being good news. In the last parish where I went to Mass, just before Christmas each year, the following was included in the parish newsletter

I have a list of people I know, all written in a book.
And every year at Christmas time, I go and take a look.
And that is when I realize that these names are a part....
Not of the book they're written in, but of my very heart.
For each name stands for someone who has crossed my path sometime,
And in that meeting they've become the rhythm in each rhyme.
And while it sounds fantastic for me to make this claim,
I really feel that I'm composed of each remembered name.
And while you may not be aware of any special link
Just meeting you has changed my life, and a lot more than you think.
For once I've met somebody, the years cannot erase
The memory of a pleasant word or of a friendly face.
So never think my Christmas cards are just a mere routine
Of names on a Christmas list, forgotten in between.
For when I send a Christmas card that is addressed to you,
It's because you are on the list of those I am indebted to.
For I am the total of the many I have met
And you happen to be one of those I prefer not to forget.
And whether I have known you for many years or few,
In some way you have been a part in shaping things I do.
And every year when Christmas comes, I realize anew
The best gift life can offer is meeting those like you.
And may the spirit of Christmas that forever endures,
Leave the richest blessings in the hearts of you and yours.
(author unknown)

Each year just before Christmas I read that passage again and take a look at my list of those I prefer not to forget. There are relatives and friends, teachers and work companions, some who were there at the right time, some who brought joy and laughter and hope in times of trial. Life would have been very different without them. There were some who encouraged dreams, there are others who were there to confide in. Some who changed my life although he or she may never have known it. The Christmas card list means they are not forgotten, overlooked in the hectic pace of life these days.

Near the top of that list is Hickey, an elderly neighbour who looked after us when we were children and our mother was ill. She often said a prayer for us at night that started, if memory serves me correctly with words like these:

May you always have an angel by your side, watching out for you, someone to catch you if you fall, who turns fears into smiles and who reminds you that rainbows come after the storm.

Inevitably at my stage of life, some of those on my list have died this year. For others, this year has brought blessings, for others hardship. There are some, I am ashamed to say, I have not been in touch with this year, even just for a phone call or an email or whatever. But, on the other hand, I have also met a couple that I have added to the list.

Whether you send cards or not, Christmas offers us the chance to reflect on those who have made a difference to our life this year and in years past, to reach out where we can and say thank you, to tell those on our list that they are appreciated, that they mean a lot. In that way, we give a gift that never ends and who knows, it might be at the very time they need it.

Regards
Jim Quillinan

Email: jquillinan@dcsi.net.au