

Some last-minute gift suggestions for Christmas

December 20, 2015, By Daniel J. Bauer

I expect one day in the future to be awakened in the middle of the night by the insistent ringing of my telephone. It'll be, say, about 3 o'clock in the morning. It will be very dark outside.

I'll say, "Oh hell. Who in the world could do this to me?"

Then I'll yank myself out of bed, and fumble through the dark. I'll pick up the receiver of the phone. A voice speaking English in a thick Swedish accent will confirm my identity, and then tell me that I've been selected to be a recipient of a Nobel Prize.

"Which one?" I'll gasp.

"The Nobel Prize for Procrastination," the voice at the end of the line will say. A great pause will follow. Then the voice will purr, "Sincerest congratulations."

One of the wonderful advantages to becoming the lucky fellow to get the dubiously desirable Nobel Prize for Procrastination is that, at the time you receive the news, you don't have to start to worry about what to say in your acceptance speech. You can tell yourself there's plenty of time for that hassle later. Why do today what you can do tomorrow, anyway? With a clean conscience, you can put off anything that even remotely resembles preparation.

Like Updike's Beck in the days before his ceremony in Stockholm, you think you can take it easy for a good long while. You can do everything later when it's much more convenient.

Well, so, here we are, less than a week away from Christmas in a land that does not celebrate Christmas, but who is ready for it? Who is not guilty of procrastination? Now wait," someone says. "Taiwan celebrates Christmas!"

Well, the pretty green (and big, big) trees, the shiny ornaments, the tinsel, oh sure, we are very "Christmassy" over here. And don't forget Taiwan's international reputation for food. Our most popular buffet tables tilt like the Titanic, they're so lopsided with Christmas delicacies.

Others may say that alternative signs of Christmas surround us. Some are obviously spiritual, the portrayals of Bible versions of the original story with the baby Jesus and pure young mother and confused father and, you know, the parading of priceless renaissance art on cards and posters for church services.

Other signs of Christmas strive to be humanitarian. We see politicians visiting social service centers with an entourage of aides and photographers as they distribute colorfully wrapped bags of fruit and chocolate. We smile at employees (of all ages and shapes) behind counters of stores, fast food restaurants, and occasionally the wheels of taxis and buses. They look photogenic in their goofy but cute Santa's helpers caps of red and white.

As the appearances of the holiday spring up around us, a cloud hovers over our heads, however, with "Christmas presents" written on it. That cloud is a tamer version of the sword of Damocles. The darn thing looks down and says, "Are you all ready for your Christmas presents for those special people in your life? You haven't procrastinated, have you?" But some of us have.

So, quickly, speaking as a procrastinator to procrastinators, here are a few suggestions for last minute Christmas gifts.

1) Go to your bookshelf and find a novel, biography, short story collection, or other book that gave you hours of pleasure this past year. Sacrifice yourself for the happiness of another. Blow the dust off the book and give it away as "an oldie but goodie" to someone you love.

2) Visit someone you have not visited in a long time. Tell this person you think the world of them, and are sorry for losing touch. Tell the surprised object of your attentions that you are not procrastinating now, and you are glad to be on time this year. "Hello, old friend," you should say. "How the heck are you? Happy Christmas!"

Now, "visiting" is an interesting word. We can visit someone by calling them on the telephone. We can visit in person. We can send a card or write a letter.

3) "Write a what? Who writes letters anymore?" That is exactly the point. People "line," or "Facebook" or email, but they don't write letters any longer. For many of us, receiving a letter the old fashioned way is like receiving a gift.

My gifts to readers this year are the words above, and two simple but sincere wishes. I wish you peace, and I wish you light. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points

- 1) This column presumes readers face pressure in arranging for gifts for loved ones at Christmas time. At Christmas or other times of the year, what pressures do YOU have to please other people?
- 2) The writer makes jokes about 'procrastination,' THE HABIT OF POSTPONING, of putting off till the future what we could do today. Do you put off your duties? What are examples of procrastination that you experience or see around you?
- 3) The writer suggests simple gifts for procrastinators who still did not arrange gifts for loved ones this Christmas. What are those gifts and what is your opinion of them?

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