

CHRISTMAS GIFTING

The publication date of this issue of *The Catholic Register* falls on the Feast of Saint Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor during the Fourth Century. Bishop Nicholas was known for his generosity and solicitude for children; thus, becoming their patron. It is said that he secretly threw bags of gold through the window at night, in order to provide a dowry for the marriages of three young girls. The gold landed, supposedly, in shoes that were drying by the fireplace.

In many parts of the world, it is customary for children to leave their shoes out, to find them filled with gifts in the morning. If a child has been bad, he or she finds a lump of coal instead. The custom of hanging stockings on the fireplace is an offshoot of this same legend.

Yes, Santa Claus was a Bishop, and there was no Mrs. Claus. Sometimes we call him Saint Nick (since his name is Nicholas). Claus comes from the ending of Nicholas (or Niclaus in Latin), giving us Saint (Santa) Claus. The pointed cap is derived from the headdress of bishops at that time, and the red is reminiscent of the purple robes that bishops wore. Of course, to keep up with the times, he now wears pants (probably easier to get into houses as well).

As good Christians, we should not expect Saint Nicholas to do it all. The expectations placed on him today are overwhelming. He appreciates the help. That brings me to the question that is on the minds of many of you: "What am I going to give so-and-so for Christmas?" Several of my friends still prefer the "bag of gold" and, so, my task there is easy.

For several years, I would shop for a gift that I liked and then buy several of them to give away. That usually gave sales clerks a little jolt! After spending time with me, showing me this and that, and I finally making my decision, they were relieved; - until I announced to them that I wanted twelve of the same kind. I have since given up the practice.

Saint Nicholas prompts me to think of two other ways of gifting at Christmas. The holy Bishop provided the three daughters with dowries, which their father could not afford. Without that, they would not have been able to be married. There are many in our communities who could use our assistance, - but not, necessarily, those whom we wish to remember during the holidays. Nevertheless, the two can be packaged together. Helping the needy in the name of those to whom we wish to give a gift is a great idea. Even the Lord has to be pleased with such a gift. This can be done very easily by making donations in the name of others to our Diocesan Catholic Charities, which does so much good throughout our eight-county diocese. If you call them (814-944-9388), they will let you know how.

It is a revelation to many that Santa Claus can have his roots traced back to Christian times. Knowing our roots, as well as those of others in our life, is important for our authentic identity. This brings me to another way of gifting at Christmas time. Both the Gallitzin Chapel House and our Diocesan Chancery have two books that trace our diocesan roots and would make very fine Christmas presents. One is a biography of our evangelizer, the Servant of God Demetrius A. Gallitzin. The other is a pictorial history of our Diocesan Church. Both were written by Dr. Matthew Bunson. A phone call (814-472-5441 or 814-695-5579) can get you more information.

I still have gifts to get and have already used up both of the methods above. Shopping is not something I like to do. Fortunately, I know someone who does and will do my shopping for me.