

Christmas, 2017

Merry Christmas!

The other night I was flipping the channels when I came upon “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”, the 1964 movie. I was at the part where Rudolph is wearing a glob of mud on his nose to hide his red affliction. Just as the reindeer are ready to play their reindeer games, the mud falls off. *Thud.*

Let’s listen in:

DONNER (the reindeer coach): All right now, yearlings. Back to practice.

(To Rudolph) Oh, no. Not you.

You better go home.

From now on, we won’t let Rudolph join in any reindeer games.

Rudolph is turned away. Turns out it’s a restricted club: red-nosed reindeers need not apply. We realize, then, the sad truth: Donner and the other reindeer are a bunch of four-legged bigots who’ve spent too much time butting heads, and not enough time practicing true compassion. A bunch of butt-heads, that’s what they are. Good thing Santa’s around to keep them reined in. (Heh, heh.)

When I was a young child I intertwined the story of Christ’s birth with Santa, Rudolph, Christmas trees and elves practicing dentistry. It was as if the Santa side of Christmas was a little world created by the same God who brought our beautiful Savior into the world. In other words, *Hermie would become a dentist, but only with God’s help!*

(In reality, if an elf began to work on my teeth, I would probably run in sheer terror).

It seems like just yesterday that Rudolph’s Christmas special almost defined Christmas for me. It was all the joy and wonder of the season wrapped up in one little reindeer and his buddies from the Island of Misfit Toys. Granted, part of the joy of the movie had to do with the fact that, deep down, I felt I belonged on that island. *You, too?*

When I think about it now, I realize that the Island of Misfit Toys has become overpopulated. In fact, it’s become so populated that they had to extend the borders farther and farther and farther. They had to open department stores, churches, schools, coffee shops.... And they put in highways and county roads and cattle pastures. And built apartment complexes and sold cars.

And misfit residents became farmers and business people and Catholic newspaper editors.

It’s a place where life is both joyful and sad, depending on ... well, depending on whether things are joyful or sad.

The other day I was in a department store when I saw two women fighting over a designer purse that was on sale. Each had a hand grasping the strap of the purse. As they struggled, one woman, a slight, elderly woman wearing a pantsuit, broke an arm off a nearby manikin and boinked the other woman on the head! I was stunned! I wanted to intervene, but I bruise easily.

The other woman, middle-age and wearing curlers, was dazed but never let go of the purse, her white knuckles grasped around it like a vice! Instead she flipped her shoe into the air, grabbed it in mid-flight with her free hand, and swatted the other woman across the nose!

The elderly store greeter waddled over as fast as he could in a brave attempt to help. He grabbed the purse with both hands.

“Please! It’s Christmas!”

The women pulled hard and somehow caused the greeter to do a full backward flip, landing squarely on his feet! He looked around somewhat proudly, despite himself. I gave him a 10.

I could hear sirens in the distance. The police arrived, but by then the women had made their getaway, their screeching tires heard throughout the store. All that was left was a piece of torn leather floating down to the floor with a small embroidered patch that read, “Vera Wang”.

Ironically, I think that it is when we become adults that we make the transition from youthful joy and optimism to becoming occupants of the Island of Misfit Toys. Today, the music and decoration in the stores tends to make me a little depressed, but back when I was a kid it was part of the overall celebration of that Most Wonderful Time of the Year.

As an adult, real Christmas magic is all the more special because it tends to be unexpected. Perhaps that ol' magic becomes diluted by the sometimes overpowering weight of an increasingly sad world.

But, on this Island of Misfit Toys on which we live, there certainly *is* magic. The other night I was in Tulsa, driving slowly through a neighborhood with my wife and her daughter, Anne, a TV producer. The Christmas lights were intense. Awesome. And abundant! Trees with seemingly every limb wrapped in lights! How'd they do that? *Why'd* they do that?

We listened to Christmas music while we *ooohed* and *aaahed*. While the scenes were incredible, the real Christmas magic was sharing it with family. Christ said that *Where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there*. I don't think he was referring only to those gathered in prayer. When we are celebrating Christmas, whether driving around looking at lights, worshipping at Mass, or even walking through a store with the thought of Jesus's birth warming our hearts, Christ is with us. Simply look for the Christmas star! It's there, through all the haze. The real gift of Christmas.

Christ: The Light of Lights, where the Christmas magic resides.