



For most of us, today is nothing more than the day after Christmas. It is the time to rest, relax, and recover not just because of festivities yesterday, but all the days leading up to it with all the shopping and baking and gift-wrapping that seemed to have no end in sight. It is the day for others to finish cleaning up after family came by for the holidays, not to mention feasting on the leftovers from last night's dinner. However, for many of our siblings in Christ around the world, the day after Christmas holds significant meaning.

I still remember seeing the label on our family's calendar on the kitchen pantry door: December 26 was Boxing Day. And I will not tell you how even until rather recently I thought Boxing Day was about the opportunity for people to take boxes back to the store to return gifts they did not really like. They obviously could not tell their beloved family member about their not so overwhelming appreciation for the present; so, on Boxing Day they could take it in for money or a gift card or some other item they actually wanted. Evidently, that is not what December 26 is about for those in the realm of the United Kingdom.

Supposedly, it goes back to the 1800's: the tradition of the rich boxing up items for the poor, or a day off for servants, who would also receive special boxes of gifts from their masters. Churches also collected money from their members in the weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas, and afterwards, they would distribute the funds to those in neighboring impoverished conditions. In recent years, however, for most it has become not much more than a big day for sporting events and a bank holiday, but for some, Boxing Day still holds an emotionally-packed meaning. For it is on December 26 that they remember those who are often overlooked amidst the usual holiday celebrations. In a way, the time serves as a most wonderful fulfillment of the verse we heard from Colossians, as if it should be a natural result from Christ's birth; the verse being "clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

And so, for an Irish writer named David Park, during his teenage years, the day after Christmas was centered on his father taking a long drive to the coast to see David's mother, whose relationship with her son was rather...complicated. The parents had divorced years before. And although the teenager had no interest whatsoever in seeing his mom, and, instead, would much rather stay home and have fun with his stepsister and playing with whatever gifts he received the day before; his father insisted that he see his mother. He tells the story of the December 26 when he was 17 years old, all insistent that this would be the absolute last time for this Boxing Day tradition, because when he would turn 18, he could most certainly make his own decisions on what to do with his life. Nevertheless, for this year, his father, again, drove him to the coast.

His mother had not been doing well for a while, even in a state of depression, but when they exchanged gifts, David received a magnifying glass. Not so sure what that particular present was all about, when his mother fell asleep on the couch, he decided to take a walk on the coastline, and snow started to fall. He eventually found a bench, and all he wanted to do was take out his gift, that magnifying glass he wasn't so sure he wanted to begin with, and used it to hopefully gaze at each snowflake that fell on that bench and to see each one be different. Each one with its

own edges or delicacies; each one precious, each one beautiful in its own way. And he realized that was his mother, too, with all her complications, all her own edges and delicacies, yet still precious, still beautiful in the eyes of God.

So, perhaps, Boxing Day serves as its own Gospel reminder for those of us who were under the impression that all our celebrating and socializing and family-loving was completed yesterday. However, not all our cherished ones could be with us for a variety of reasons; some of whom are quite often overlooked. Perhaps, Boxing Day, is the prime opportunity to remember them as well with a phone call or a text message or an email or whatever else: to let them know no matter our complicated histories with them, no matter what we think of their particular edges and delicacies; that Christmas is God insisting they are precious. They are beautiful. They are worth God coming into their life from the very beginning, with just as holy of an entrance as through Bethlehem itself.

It turns out today is not about returning boxes of gifts, not even about returning to a sense of normalcy when we didn't have nearly as many obligations of loving so many people all at once. Today is a reminder that Christmas is not meant to stop after one day, or even twelve days, but to remember that our Lord dwells with and in us every single day throughout the year, throughout our lifetime, clothing us with a love that insists on bringing a glimpse of the precious Christ child to life. And this Messiah will not simply make sure *we* feel cherished, but will constantly proclaim that nothing: no edges, no delicacies, no complications whatsoever, will ever separate *anyone* from God's love in Christ Jesus, our Lord now and forevermore. For that Greatest News of all on this Boxing Day and every day, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!