

# A Catholic Approach to Holiday Gift-Giving

by: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio (www.crossroadsinitiative.com)

“Actions speak louder than words.” “One picture is worth a thousand words.” “Talk is cheap.” We have lots of different sayings that generally express the samething—words alone are inadequate to express lots of things, especially personal messages like “I love you.”

So human beings in every culture have developed rituals to express the value they place on people and special events. Take, for example, Turkey on the dining room table at Thanksgiving or presents under the tree at Christmas. And then there are birthdays. Even if all party-goers are tone deaf on the Atkins diet, we must sing the silly song and blow out the candles on that carb-laden cake!

The problem with human beings is that we have a stubborn tendency to allow rituals to become merely mechanical, forgetting their real meaning. The puritanical response to this is to abolish the offending feast. In the originally Puritan state of Massachusetts, for example, Christmas was not an official holiday until the 1890's! And to this day, Jehovah's Witnesses forbid birthday celebrations.

The Catholic approach has always been different. We accept the celebrations with their occasional excesses and their traditional trappings (such as Christmas trees). The goal is to revive the original meaning of the rituals or invest them with a new, Christian meaning. [For example, Pope Benedict XVI recently said: "With its loftiness, its green, and the lights in its branches, the Christmas tree is a symbol of life that points to the mystery of Christmas Eve."]

So what do we do with America's gift-giving extravaganza at Christmas? It's Jesus' birthday, but the presents under the tree are the real focus, especially for the kids. The first is unwrapped and then another and another, faster and faster. It resembles a school of sharks going into a feeding frenzy. Almost instantly the thrill is gone and the room is filled with crumpled wrapping paper.

Rather than following the Grinch and eliminating the gifts, set rules to make them more meaningful. First, try to select at least some gifts or stocking-stuffers that will help people develop their relationship with Jesus: books, CD's, videos, rosaries, etc. Then, on Christmas morning, before going to the tree, gather at the manger, sing a carol, read a brief scripture, and thank God for Jesus, the greatest gift of all. Then open one gift at a time, with everyone paying attention to what others get (this teaches patience!). And we don't open everything on the 25th. Rather, we leave some presents wrapped and under the tree for the other 11 days of Christmas (another lesson in patience!). We get more prayers, readings and carols around the manger this way.

So we have three options on gift-giving: a) just acquiesce to the society's way; b) say “bah-humbug!” with Scrooge and the Puritans; or c) take the traditional Catholic approach and press the custom into the service of the Gospel. I say Catholics have more fun.

## Christmas Mass Schedule

Dec. 24 - 5:00 PM Ashland  
12 Midnight Ashland  
Dec. 25 - 8:30 AM Ashland  
10:30 AM Greenwood

**BARN  
DOOR**

Restaurant  
& Lounge

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7 Days a week!*

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Ceresco NE  
**402-665-2500**  
*Catholic Owners*



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jan@onestrongteam.com  
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# St. Mary & St. Joseph Catholic Churches



**1625 Adams Street, Ashland NE 68003**  
**Saturday Vigil Mass: 5:00 PM**  
**Sunday Mass: 8:30 AM**



**7 Oak Street, Greenwood**  
**Sunday Mass: 10:30 AM**

Pastor: Father Gary Coulter

Rectory & Fax: 944-3554, CCD/Hall: 944-7509  
Cell: 202-3782, stmaryashland@alltel.net

## Welcome to new parishioners,

please call the rectory to register  
or for information on any of our parish  
activities and organizations.

## Confessions a half hour before Masses

Saturday 4:00-4:50 PM St. Mary

Sunday 8:00-8:20 AM St. Mary

10:00-10:20 AM St. Joseph

Any time by calling the rectory.

CCD & Youth Group each Wed. 7:00 PM

## Mass Schedule for this week

Sat.	Dec. 20	5:00 PM	Ashland	+ Ben Buckingham
Sun.	Dec. 21	8:30 AM	Ashland	For the People
		10:30 AM	Greenwood	+ Ed Sobetski
Mon.	Dec. 22	9:00 AM	Ashland	+ Maggie Owens
Tues.	Dec. 23	9:00 AM	Ashland	+ Groenjes All Souls
Wed.	Dec. 24	9:15 AM	Care Center	William Hartman
		<b>5:00 PM</b>	<b>Ashland</b>	<b>For the People</b>
		<b>12:00 Midnight</b>	<b>Ashland</b>	<b>+ Jerry Proctor</b>
<b>Thurs. Dec. 25</b>		<b>8:30 AM</b>	<b>Ashland</b>	<b>+ Sally Sohl</b>
		<b>10:30 AM</b>	<b>Greenwood</b>	<b>+ Ben Buckingham</b>
Fri.	Dec. 26	9:00 AM	Ashland	End to Abortion
Sat.	Dec. 27	9:00 AM	Ashland	Special Intention
		5:00 PM	Ashland	+ Medina All Souls
Sun.	Dec. 28	8:30 AM	Ashland	Poor Souls
		10:30 AM	Greenwood	For the People

December 21, 2008

Ministries for Next Weekend

Sat. Dec. 27 -5:00 PM  
Servers: Holbrook, Survil, Craven  
Acolyte: Todd Survil  
Lector: Dennis Holbrook

Sun. Dec. 28 -8:30 AM  
Servers: Stille, Vaveks  
Acolyte: Ken Broz  
Lector: Karen Stille

Sun. Dec. 28 - 10:30 AM  
Lector: Leslie Krings  
Offertory: Chaffin

Our Return to the Lord, Dec. 13-14		
	St. Mary	St. Joseph
Adult:	\$ 1,066.00	\$ 183.00
Plate:	\$ 65.00	\$ 19.00
Children:	\$ 7.00	
Weekly Budget:		
	\$ 1,587.49	\$ 390.59
Flowers:	\$ 283.00	

Readings and Celebrations this week:

December

22 Mon 1 Sm 1:24-28 / Lk 1:46-56

23 Tue Mal 3:1-4, 23-24 / Lk 1:57-66  
[Saint John of Kanty, priest]

24 Wed 2 Sm 7:1-16 / Lk 1:67-79

**The Nativity of the Lord** (Holy Day of Obligation)  
Vigil: Is 62:1-5 / Acts 13:16-25 / Mt 1:1-25  
Midnight: Is 9:1-6 / Ti 2:11-14 / Lk 2:1-14  
Dawn: Is 62:11-12 / Ti 3:4-7 / Lk 2:15-20  
Day: Is 52:7-10 / Heb 1:1-6 / Jn 1:1-18

26 Fri Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59 / Mt 10:17-22  
Saint Stephen, first martyr

27 Sat 1 Jn 1:1-4 / Jn 20:1a, 2-8  
Saint John, apostle and evangelist

HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH  
Sir 3:2-7, 12-14 / Col 3:12-21 / Lk 2:22-40

Fourth Sunday of Advent

**Stewardship Thought**

**4th Sunday of Advent**

The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she has found favor with the Lord and will give birth to a son and call him Jesus. Mary responds that she is the servant of the Lord and accepts His will for her.

As we open our hearts to the gift of the Christ-child, in what ways have we acknowledged that we are stewards of the Lord? Do we know God's will for us? How do we accept it?

**Congratulations**

Marriage Anniversaries this week  
Merl & Pauline Linder

Birthdays this week  
Haley Fudge  
Anna Jamrog  
Karen Egeberg  
Norm Luetkenhaus  
Chris Schmidt  
Don Krittenbrink  
Christy Fritzler  
Nick Pease  
Karen Stille

**Calendar for This Week**

Sun. Dec. 21, 2:00 PM **Penance Service**

Wed. Dec. 24 9:15 AM Mass at Care Center

**Christmas, Holy Day of Obligation**

5:00 PM **Christmas Eve** Mass at Ashland

12:00 **Midnight** Mass at Ashland

8:30 AM **Christmas Dawn** Mass at Ashland

10:30 AM **Christmas Day** Mass at Greenwood

**Parish Announcements**

The Ashland Ministerial Association thanks the many Volunteers who helped assemble and deliver the **Christmas Food Baskets** this year, and a special thanks those who gave donations to help with the increased expenses this year.

An advent **Penance Service** will be today (Sunday) Dec. 21, 2:00 PM at St. Mary, Ashland with multiple priests available to hear confessions. At Greenwood there will be extra time for confessions after each Sunday Mass.

**Christmas Flower** memorials are being accepted. Extra envelopes are in the back of Church. Give a donation for our Christmas decorations in memory or in honor of a loved one. Names will be published in the bulletin.

Congratulations to Ken Broz and Karen Stille who were elected to the St Mary **Parish Council**. A special thanks to Cindi Tylski and all those who serve on this advisory council.

The Knights of Columbus have religious themed **Christmas Cards** for sale in the back of St. Mary. Keep Christ in Christmas.

**Thank you** for the generous year-end gifts. Please be sure to remember your parishes this Christmas. Donations need to be received by Dec. 31 to count for the 2008 tax year.

**Community Announcements**

**Katie Kresak**, member of Swedeburg Covenant Church, is raising funds to go on a mission trip to Africa (Helping Hands [www.hhiminc.org](http://www.hhiminc.org)) in Feb. Donations can be made to St Mary or contact Katie at 521-0588.

**Diocesan Announcements**

A Holy Family Mass in honor of the **Holy Innocents** will be Sun. Dec. 28, 2:30 PM at the Bl John XXIII Chapel, 37th & Sheridan Blvd, Lincoln. Those who have lost an infant child are invited to attend. To have your child's name remembered call 488-2040.

Deepen your spirituality and draw closer to God on a **Cursillo Weekend Retreat**. From Thurs. evening to Sun, retreats consist of talks given by priests and laity, and celebration of the sacraments. Upcoming weekends are Jan. 8-11 for men, and Jan. 15-18 for women, both in Lincoln. For more info, contact Mark Pribyl, Cursillo Lay Director for the Lincoln Diocese at 641-7199 or [mpribyl@diodecom.net](mailto:mpribyl@diodecom.net), or your pastor.

**You Can Help Your Marriage** - Feel alone? Frustrated or angry? Do you argue? Stopped talking? **Retrouvaille** (pronounced retro-vi) has helped tens of thousands of couples through difficult times in their marriage. For confidential info about or to register for a weekend on Feb. 20-22, 2009, call 1-888-317-5654 or see [www.HelpOurMarriage.org](http://www.HelpOurMarriage.org).

**High School Retreats** that focus on having a relationship with God and meeting new people. TEC for juniors and seniors will be at Wahoo Feb. 14-16, QUEST for freshman and sophomores will be at Wahoo Apr. 4-5. Contact the parish or call 488-2040. See info about other youth events at the Diocesan Youth Ministry blog: [lincolnyouthministry.blogspot.com](http://lincolnyouthministry.blogspot.com)

**Pregnant** and don't know what to do? There are options - call the **Option Line** at 1-800-395-HELP or visit [www.pregnancycenters.org](http://www.pregnancycenters.org).

**Nebraska Respite Network** helps caregivers deal with their task and stress by providing them a needed break and time for themselves. If you are a caregiver in need of services, or an individual who like to make a real difference in your neighborhood, call toll free 1-866-737-7483.

**Healing after Abortion**  
[www.hopeafterabortion.com](http://www.hopeafterabortion.com)  
Project Rachel: 1-800-964-3787  
Rachel's Vineyard: 1-877-HOPE4ME

**Please Pray for our Seminarians**

Pray this week for Corey Harrison from St. Leo, Palmyra, NE. In College 2 at St. Gregory.