

Posada

We are a world-wide Church in a globalized world. Circumstances have spread our membership far beyond the borders of Galicia where my grandparents swore allegiance to Franz-Joseph and the Habsburgs, far beyond the boundaries of Soviet Ukraine where people groaned under an oppressive yoke, far beyond the territories most recently governed by two Viktors – namely, Yuschenko and Yanukovych. We are no longer *diaspora*; rather, we are firmly rooted in such far-flung places as Austria and Australia, Argentina and Brazil, Detroit and San Diego, Houston and Seattle, Minneapolis and Minot and Mishawaka. In these places, we encounter and are enriched by cultures which we find strange because they are so different from ours.

My priory in Chicago is located in a neighborhood called Pilsen, which is basically a Mexican *barrio*. In this season, Pilsen will witness the re-enactment of an ancient Mexican tradition known as the *posada*. This tradition recalls the Holy Family's wanderings through the streets of Bethlehem as Joseph desperately sought a place where the Virgin-Mother could give birth to the Savior of the world. In the *posada*, children dressed up like the homeless Mary and Joseph wander from house to house in search of welcome.

Ukrainians can relate: for over a century, our people have found themselves far from their homes - strangers in strange lands, dependent on the hospitality of others. Dominicans can relate: we are itinerant, which means that we move from place to place, stopping wherever human interaction elicits the Gospel from us – either through our words, or through the witness of our lives. Faith-filled Ukrainian refugees and wandering preachers know instinctively the truth that St. Augustine put into words: that our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

How far we are from this “happy ending” is seen in our restlessness, in the frenetic mobility of our society: like those on a merry-go-round reaching for the brass ring, people whirl about in search of the illusive peace which seems just beyond their fingertips. What of the venerable institutions which resist the siren-song of nanosecond popularity followed by instant obsolescence? Old neighborhoods are abandoned by people in search of greener pastures elsewhere; long-established parishes decline. Ancestral languages and traditions are lost, rote-learning and old answers are abandoned or forgotten. We seem destined to live out the words of the book of Ecclesiastes: “There is an appointed time for everything, a time for every affair under the heavens: a time to be born, a time to die ... a time to tear down, a time to build ... a time to seek, a time to lose, a time to keep, a time to cast away.” (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-6 *passim*)

All too often, we have put our faith in the earthly rather than in the divine – that is, in the physical manifestation rather than the deeper reality to which we are called. We have placed a greater reliance on buildings and brocade and bank accounts than on God.

These trappings divert our attention from what is important: since our superficial whims are satisfied by such passing splendors, we pay no attention to the deep hunger that gnaws at us from within, which only God can satisfy. In the words of Ecclesiastes, “He has put the timeless into their hearts, without men’s ever discovering, from beginning to end, the work which God has done.” (Ecclesiastes 3: 11b) Though covered with the ashes of our lives, the spark of eternity remains buried within us: the flame of the Spirit is ready to be kindled to light the darkness of our lives, to warm the chill of our winter.

As the *posadas* make their way through the cold, dark Chicago nights, looking for warmth and light, so does the Word of God seek hearts where the divine spark can be stirred to life. As our own Ukrainian carolers go from house to house after Christmas, they will carry a star illuminated from within by a candle. May this ancient tradition be a sign for all the world that we have indeed been open to the coming of the Lord, for He alone can transform us into lanterns of God’s light for the world. Perhaps then people will praise God in the words of the prophet Isaiah: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone.” (Isaiah 9:2)

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op