

Christmas Day

The snow was about six inches deep one day many years ago when a family from the parish stopped by the house where I was living at the time to drop off some papers for me. The parents had come with their 8-year old daughter. We finished our business rather quickly, but the little girl's face clearly showed that she was disturbed about something. She looked at my front yard. I thought there was no need to be upset: A path had been shoveled so that visitors could get to the door, and the rest of lawn looked neat, crisp and clean with a shimmery white blanket of snow. That little girl stared hard at the yard, and then she looked back at me. Her eyes locked on mine. When she spoke, she used the tone you'd expect from a parent scolding a child. She said to me, "You haven't been playing in your snow." To her, six inches of snow were a gift from God, and I was squandering my opportunity to enjoy it. There wasn't much I could say. I was guilty as charged. To this child, footprints in the snow bear good news. They signify joy. They show that people used their feet to announce glad tidings.

The opening verse of the first reading on Christmas Day uses this same metaphor, and at first it just sounds strange. Isaiah says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, 'Your God is King.'" You would expect Isaiah to say, "How beautiful is the sound of the voice of the one who brings glad tidings," or even "How beautiful are the lips." But no. Isaiah focuses on the feet. These are the feet that run across the mountains spreading the news. Those who see the messenger run realize something special about this news. Its message is not local. It's universal. It concerns everyone living everywhere that feet can run.

The good news on Christmas Day is that a child is born to save us all from our sins. This child is born not just for us, but for all the world. We would never have heard that message if someone hadn't used their feet to tell the world the good news.

You will do the same thing today if you make an effort to be physically present with family or friends on Christmas Day. These days we establish and maintain many friendships through electronics. I stay in touch with people through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I send emails, I text, and I talk on the phone. All of this is great because we can stay in touch, keep friendships alive, and say, "Merry Christmas" in many ways. Still, there is nothing quite like being in the presence of someone. You cannot shake hands when you text. You cannot hug with a tweet. You cannot kiss on Facebook. If you want to spend quality time with someone, there's only one way you can do it. You have to move your feet. When we are together at home or at church this Christmas Day, we owe it to our feet. They announce glad tidings. They proclaim that we cared enough about the meaning of Christmas to express it personally with other people. Whether your feet walked through snow, ran across mountains, or brought you to your knees before the mystery of the Word made flesh, you are sharing your belief in good news. Salvation has come to all the world, to people who want to celebrate and people who need some help. They will hear good news best if we get up and move, and stand in their presence upon our beautiful feet.

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