

The big question this week is "What did you get for Christmas?" "What did *you* get?" Sometimes I ask kids, "What did you *give* for Christmas this year?" That usually stumps them. There is no getting without somebody giving.

There's been a lot of giving at St. Regis this Christmas. In our giving tree appeal for the needy you purchased and wrapped nearly 400 gifts. In addition you gave cash for the poor and a truckload of groceries for the hungry. You gave time and talent to our choirs, our decorations, our liturgy, and our hospitality. In homes you give presents, time, and food for your families. Your contributions tonight will help us pay some large bills this week as they do every year. Our parish and school budget often resembles the Cratchit family, but you always come through in our times of need. I love this job because I see giving more than receiving.

You might assume that giving began with the magi -- that when friends asked the holy family, "What did you get for Christmas this year?" they answered, "Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. How about you?" But the origin of gifts goes back just a bit farther. Jesus gave himself to us, wrapped in swaddling clothes, God gift-wrapped in human flesh, willing to be torn apart by the very people he came to love. In Luke's gospel, Jesus appears in a poor family, away from their home, unable to acquire lodging. They hole up in a barn. He has no cradle, no colorful plastic mobile dangling above his head, no mattress covered with Pokémon sheets. They put him in a manger, a trough where animals feed. He has no health insurance, no college fund, no Johnson's baby lotion. He is born dirt-poor. He is king. He is God. He came as a servant. He came as the first gift, for us to use or to abuse.

Whenever you give a gift, you don't just give something away. You give something up. You give up some of your treasure, some of your love, some of yourself. When you give a gift you cross a threshold. You enter a new world, but you leave another world behind.

Pope John Paul II opened the holy year door in Rome today, inviting us to cross the threshold into the jubilee year. This year celebrates the gift of freedom, forgiveness, life, charity, peace, and promise. But we'll have to give something up. We'll have to leave something behind at the door of this holy year. We'll have to leave behind resentment and fear, selfishness and greed. We'll have to leave behind all the ways we hurt ourselves and our community: the abuse of drugs, disrespectful language, stereotypes, violent solutions to domestic problems, road rage, commercialism, avarice, the glorification of professional sports, the harm we bring to innocent human life.

Each of us knows -- you know what you need to leave behind this Christmas to give the gift of jubilee. You've given a lot, but this jubilee asks for something more: a change in attitude, a change in behavior, the total gift of ourselves to Jesus Christ.

What did you get for Christmas? You got an example. You got a baby lying in a manger. So, what did you give? What must you give up?