

In our family we've taken some of the risk out of buying Christmas presents. We draw names, which happily limits the number of gifts we buy, but sadly lowers the number of presents we get. It's no secret; we tell whose name we've got and we ask that person, "What do you want me to get for you?" It's all above board; you sometimes wonder why we even bother with wrapping paper. Sometimes it backfires though; this year I drew my brother John's name and before he could tell me what he wanted for Christmas, his wife Becky said, "What he needs is a new set of dessert plates." He got to tell me whether he needed eight or twelve. I got him fifteen; it's a surprise.

Actually there is no risk to Christmas. Every gift gives love. It will inspire the receiver to love back. We may think we love someone, but unless we say it or do something about it we still don't have love figured out.

It took King David a while to figure out love. He began his career with a slingshot and ended as commander-in-chief of Israel. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, but repented and built a holy nation. In today's first reading, he relaxes in the royal palace after wiping out all his enemies. He acknowledges the favor of God, present in the ark of the covenant. But then David looks around his palace, looks at the ark, and wonders, "Maybe we can do better for God. I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." So he lays his plans to build a temple, to give a gift, to show his love. But God said, "No, let me give you a gift; let me build you a house." God built a royal house, descendants who would rule throughout every generation. God said, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne, David, shall be established forever." It is a descendant of David whose birth we celebrate this week; he sits on a throne forever as king. David thought he could give God a gift, but God only loved him more.

At St. Regis, too, we are building a better house for the presence of God, but God is loving us more. God provides faith in our time of need. God gives us children who bring us hope. God puts charity in our hearts; many of our families have shared it this month behind the scenes to provide food, clothing, toys, and utilities to the needy. As welfare begins to do less for the poor, it's inspiring to know people who do more. In giving gifts, we receive gifts of faith, hope, and love.