



BOXING DAY BRINGS LOVE, NOT HARM

I enjoy most spectator sports, but boxing is not one of them. I concede that many sports have some rough contact on the way to scoring, and I confess that I do proudly wear my Carolina Hurricanes hockey jersey even though they dish out plenty of body checks into the boards. But with boxing, doing bodily harm to your opponent is not merely incidental, it is the goal. Where's the fun in that?

Well, today is Boxing Day, but thankfully it has nothing to do with split lips and knockout punches. Nor is it about snagging after-Christmas bargains, as many people enjoy spending this day. Instead, it is a day intended for goodwill toward others.

Boxing Day began centuries ago in England as a special day to attend to the poor. Alms boxes in churches were opened and the alms distributed, and servants of the aristocracy who had worked on Christmas were invited to box up leftovers from the Christmas feast and take them home to their families.

A Victorian Christmas Carol also commemorates the spirit of the day with the legend of Good King Wenceslas, who sets forth the day after Christmas with his page through the wind and cold to take food and fire logs "a good league hence", to a poor man he saw through his window.

As they trudge for miles through the deep snow and bitter weather, the weary page tells King Wenceslas that he can't walk any farther. Wenceslas tells him to follow in his footsteps – literally. When he does, the song says "heat was in the very sod, which the Saint had printed."

So instead of just stowing the Christmas decorations and heaving a sigh of relief that the holiday hubbub is over, let's follow in those warm footsteps and help the needy. As always, the Bible is our inspiration, where God's love and concern for the poor is clearly proclaimed.

Moses conveyed it in God's instructions to the newly freed Hebrews: "If there is a poor man among your brothers...do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ...Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you. ...There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward...the poor and needy" (Deuteronomy 15:7, 10-11).

As he prepared the way for Jesus, John the Baptist said this about serving the needy: "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same" (Luke 3:11). And when Jesus arrived on the scene, He echoed those instructions, telling his followers that whenever they fed the hungry and clothed the needy, "you did it for me" (Matthew 25:35-40).

When Jesus told a parable about wealthy Lazarus ignoring the poor man at his gate, He sternly admonished those with plenty who overlook those who are destitute (Luke 16:19-31). Likewise, the apostle John wrote, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has not pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ...let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18).

Today is also known as the Feast of Saint Stephen, who was among the first deacons charged with caring for the needy, in the earliest days of the Church (Acts 6:1-6). This is a core Christian ministry that has never ceased. So as a deacon, I urge us both to remember that "whoever is kind to the needy honors God" (Proverbs 14:31).

May these scriptures inspire us today to follow in the warm footsteps of King Wenceslas, Saint Stephen, and the Lord Jesus himself, who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). It won't be hard to find a way to act on this in your local community, or to support the victims of Hurricane Helene who are still struggling mightily to recover: <https://www.charitynavigator.org/discover-charities/where-to-give/hurricane-helene-2024/>.

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux