

We all know that Christmas is coming soon, with today being the first Sunday of Advent. I know I'm very excited about going home in two weeks to enjoy a nice break from school. Everybody is looking forward to celebrating Christmas with their family and friends. Although a little clichéd, we need to remember the true spirit of Christmas while celebrating with presents, trees, and lots of food.

A single biblical quote which embodies this spirit, which is hard to miss in our society (being printed on clothing store bags, painted on football players' faces, etc.), is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." This is the greatest act of charity in the history of humanity, and is the ultimate example of the charity we are called to.

Having been born after 1950, some of the best examples I can think of about the Christmas spirit and the charity associated with it in today's world come from movies. One of my favorite Christmas movies, right alongside the classic "A Christmas Story," is Irving Berlin's "White Christmas." This film has one great example of charity in the Christmas season.

The story of White Christmas begins with a group of American soldiers in Germany wishing a farewell to their beloved general, who had been given orders to leave his command for another. The story fast-forwards several years, and two friends (played by Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye) who met while serving in this unit find themselves spending the Christmas holiday at a ski resort in Vermont. They find out the ski resort is owned by the general who commanded them in Germany and that his business is struggling, being that there is no snow, so the resort is empty. The general feels old and forgotten. These two men decide to cheer him up, and call upon every other man who served in their unit during WWII to come spend the holiday up at the ski resort in Vermont in order to show the general that he is not forgotten and that many people still care very much about him.

Although this is definitely an extreme example, as only Hollywood can produce, it shows us a way we can be charitable during the Christmas season. We can work to show others, who may be feeling lost or forgotten, that they are still cared about and that someone loves them.

This story also reminds me of another calling we have as Knights of Columbus, Patriotism. The characters in the movie all share the bond of having served together in the Army in the nation's defense and this bond of patriotism helps them to act with charity. Patriotism is not something that we should express only on the 4th of July, but is something we can have every time of the year. Most of us remember the "Knights to Christ" books we received at the beginning of the semester. Reading ahead a few days, the page for December 5th reminds me of this story and the way a call to patriotism calls us to so much more.

This page has an excerpt from the commencement address given to the Class of 1962 of the United States Military Academy by General Douglas MacArthur. This address, in its entirety, has been given to every new cadet at West Point at the beginning of their plebe year (freshman year) ever since it was given. The excerpt reads:

“Duty. Honor. Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be. They are your rallying points, to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems to be little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn. . . They mold you for future roles as the custodians of the nation’s defense. They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure, but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for actions, not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur of difficulty and challenge. . . They teach you to be modest so that you will remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength. . . They teach you in this way to be an officer and a gentleman.”

These words describe the way in which the character acted in the film “White Christmas,” bringing hope when hope was lost, and acting with courage in the face of difficulty. These words also describe how we, as Knights of Columbus, are to act in the face of a challenge; not necessarily to become an officer and a gentleman, as General MacArthur’s audience was, but rather to learn to be a Catholic gentleman.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, and look forward to seeing you next semester.