

Henry Van Dyke - a Presbyterian minister, author, and statesman - was born in 1830 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. He taught English Literature at Princeton University and lectured at the University of Paris. President Woodrow Wilson appointed him Minister to the Netherlands and Luxembourg. He also wrote the lyrics for the hymn "Joyful Joyful We Adore Thee," which many of us are familiar with.

Van Dyke wrote two Christmas stories: The First Christmas Tree - in 1897; and before that The Other Wise Man - in 1896.

In the story, The Other Wise Man, Van Dyke writes about a fictional fourth wise man who it would seem was always a little bit behind schedule. On his way to rendezvous with the three magi, he stops to help a dying man - and so is late. By the time he arrives, the caravan has set out across the desert. He is forced to sell 1/3 of his treasure to finance his own journey to Bethlehem. When he arrives in Bethlehem, it is in the midst of the slaughter of the innocents by King Herod - which we heard of in last Sunday's Gospel. The Holy Family has already fled to Egypt; and this wise man again uses 1/3 of his treasure to save the life of a child by paying off the troops sent to kill the children. For thirty-three years he travels around - always just a few steps behind Jesus - living his life as a pilgrim and as one seeking for Jesus. When he finally finds Jesus, it is in Jerusalem ... on Good Friday. He is again distracted, using the last 1/3 of his treasure to ransom a young woman from being sold into slavery.

At the death of Jesus, the earth shakes, and our wise man is trapped under a falling stone at the temple. He feels that he has failed in his life's quest - never meeting Jesus ... and spending his treasure which was intended for the Christ Child so many years before.

As he is dying - beset with remorse -, he hears a voice that tells him:
Verily I say unto thee, Inasmuch as thou hast done it
unto one of the least of these my brethren,
thou hast done it unto me.

That is, despite what appeared to be failures to achieve his own life's goal, he had lived out the Beatitudes in his acts of mercy and charity.

And in that sense, had not only met Jesus - but had served as the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

For ourselves, especially around this time of year, we make “New Year’s Resolutions.” To lose weight, or read more, or work harder, or be nicer. Whatever they may be. And more often than not, we last a few weeks.

Although last year, our school’s Student Council President made a resolution to get to Mass every week. And, despite not be old enough to drive, he managed to get to Mass every week ... with his parents and siblings in tow.

You may know ... or you may not know ... that in addition to the School’s Facebook Page, the church also has a Facebook Page. If you key in “stelizabethreese” in the search field on Facebook, you can find it. And if you click “Like” you’ll get notices from our website.

Now, the reason I’m telling you this isn’t because we want to increase our “Likes” on Facebook. But because my resolution is to put up “Friday Freebies” on the parish site. These will be suggestions for improving your spiritual life. It might be a suggestion for prayer, it may be an online MP3 or Youtube video, or maybe a short excerpt from a book. My hope is that you can find ways to enrich your spiritual life without having to add another thing or meeting to your calendar.

And so, as we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ; let us pray for the graces to truly be renewed by God’s presence among us. May we discover Christ in our daily lives ... and be His hands and His feet ... His mouth and His ears ... in the world in which we live.