

12/25/16 Christmas, 2016

-- Few of us would recognize the name Theodore Geisel, but many of us (at least of a certain age) would recognize his pen name, Dr. Seuss. I'd hope some children now would, too, if their parents still use his books.

-- One of his most famous books is *The Grinch that Stole Christmas*. It was written in late 1956, made into a TV movie in 1966 and a full length film in 2000. It tells the story of a mean creature who goes out and steals the gifts for kids under the Christmas trees in a certain town.

-- One girl spies him doing this. But she calls the children of the town together and they celebrate Christmas without the gifts. They know it's about something more important. It's about what God did for the world in the birth of Jesus Christ.

-- Well, the Grinch sees this taking place and has a change of heart. He returns the gifts and celebrates with the children.

-- Over the centuries there have been many "grinches" who've tried to steal Christmas. The feast wasn't officially celebrated until about 500, and it was primarily a feast of the poor. But the empire co-opted it for purposes of power. Still, its meaning wasn't really lost.

-- The celebration of Christmas began to be challenged in the 16th century for being too pagan. The British Parliament banned its celebration in 1647 under the Puritan influence. But ordinary people resisted and still continued to celebrate the feast.

-- In New England, Christmas celebrations were officially outlawed until 1850. Schools were opened, people had to work. But the Christmas traditions continued despite this effort.

-- What is the power of Christmas that resisted repression? It is much more than the desire for a good party or a day off work. It is the fact that God loved us so much that he came down in the flesh to be with his people and save them from sin.

-- It's a power that even children can recognize as they stare at the manger scene with a tiny baby, who is the very face of God. They see what St. Paul called the grace of God appearing in the person of Jesus Christ.

-- It's the power of the baby lying in a manger, a feed box. This has a deeper meaning, for Jesus Christ is food for us. His body and blood is given to us under the form of bread and wine each time we come to celebrate Mass.

-- Today we have our own version of grinch who would steal Christmas from us. Yes, some of this comes in the secularization of society, the excessive commercialization of the holiday and everything connected with it.

-- Perhaps, though, the greater challenge comes from fear: fear of terrorists who would interrupt holiday celebrations, fear of foreigners who we think threaten our jobs or even our way of life, fear of the unknown around us.

-- Like those in 17th century England and early New England, we can and must resist those forces of fear. We must reaffirm our faith in God, who came down and pitched his tent among us so that we might have life. We must believe that God's love conquers all fear.

-- When Theodore Geisel wrote his children's work, he was having his own crisis about Christmas. This holiday was not inspiring to him. He wrote this work to get back to the true meaning of what we celebrate.

-- Most of us will have times when we waver in our belief in what Christmas means. That is why we need to revisit the mystery of God made human in Jesus Christ. God thought enough of each and every one of us to come to earth: not in power and majesty, but as a helpless baby—but one who would save the world.

-- May you, your family and loved ones, have a most blessed and hope-filled Christmas season.

