

Treasuring Christmas Memories

At a Christmas Eve gathering, a woman reached out her hand and cradled an ornament on the tree. A friend noticed she had tears in her eyes and asked, “You ok?”

“Nothing wrong,” she said. “Just remembering.”

The Advent and Christmas season is a time of memories. We do not plan them; they come unbidden. They are triggered by someone’s casual words that echo past Christmas conversations, or we return to a familiar Christmas space, or see a photo of a former Christmas gathering, or, as with the woman, hold a Christmas tree ornament that unexpectedly has evocative power.

Sometimes these memories are painful. They hurt rather than enrich, carrying us back into experiences that are best forgotten. We rightfully put them out of our mind and get on with other things.

But, more often than not, the memories are about the people whom we love and who have passed on. They’re about people with whom we’ve celebrated in the past and have to be in touch with now, or about the graced moments from past Christmases when the meaning of the feast came home to us and now these memories arrive again and bring their sense of homecoming with them.

These memories can be both personal and professional. They may be about family and friends or about work situations that made an impact. Being sick and caring for the sick at Advent and Christmas often has a poignancy that touches us deeply. It becomes a part of our inner life and we carry it with us. Then the Advent and Christmas season invites us to treasure again what has happened.

In the Catholic tradition, treasuring is high-octane theological activity. It assumes memories that move us into deeper consciousness, and bring us into a fullness of life. The past can return to re-grace us, for it is not really past. It has been stored in the house of everlastingness. We are open to its treasures through hosting memories and, in mysterious ways, we find a remedy for our sense of aloneness. We are inhabiting the communion between the ultimate Mystery of God and all who lived, lives and will live in the boundlessness of creation.

This may seem like a wild faith. But we dwell in a universe of great creative energies. More is always going on than we know, but at times, we are given a glimpse. These glimpses may bring tears to our eyes. But the tears are not the usual crying scenario.

They are not tears of sorrow; they are not even tears of joy. They are tears that come from inner fullness, from the overflow that happens when we walk the border of time and eternity. They are tears of treasure.

“Mary treasured all these things in her heart.” (Lk. 2:19)