

Liwanag - Tanglaw

International

Holly

If you live in the temperate climes and want to liven up your home for Christmas, you may not have to look very far. That holly plant growing naturally in your own backyard is all that you need. Its waxy, deep green leaves and shiny, bright red berries bring instant cheer and will make any room in your home look merry and bright.

The practice of decorating with holly however isn't a modern tradition. It goes way back—long before there was even Christmas to celebrate.

Winter Solstice—the shortest day of the year that falls around December 21st—has long been celebrated as a non-religious holiday since Neolithic times. With the days growing longer and the nights getting shorter, Winter Solstice signified rebirth because of the sun's lengthening presence in the sky. At the same time, however, it brought a feeling of foreboding because

of the deep winter that follows. Famine was heaviest in the months after Winter Solstice because food reserves often did not last until the next planting season.

In the final centuries of BCE, the Celtic people in Ireland used holly extensively during Winter Solstice. Marveling at its ability to withstand the harshest of climes and even bear fruit when all other trees shed off their leaves, the Celtic people regarded the holly plant as sacred and even ascribed magical powers to it. They brewed tea mixed with holly leaves to cure illnesses. They placed holly branches on their doors



Garden of Bro. Billy and Sis. Vi Carpio in Middletown, New York.

to ward off evil spirits. And Druid priests collected mistletoe in the forest while people wore holly in their hair.

The Ancient Romans also celebrated Winter Solstice. They gave sprigs of holly to honor Saturn, the god of agriculture and vegetation.

Early Germanic people in the fourth century called Winter Solstice, "Yule", and celebrated it for the coming of a fertile and peaceful season. They put a Yule tree inside their homes—which later became the Christmas tree—the evergreen being a symbol of survival in the darkest time of year. They held a last feast before deep winter began, slaughtering cattle and decorating their homes with holly.

When Christianity spread, the Yule festival was absorbed into Christian traditions. Its celebration was moved to December 25th to coincide with Christ's birth. The holly in turn became Christianized.

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Aging Gracefully

Longevity records indicate that Nature, it seems, endowed us with a body that can last up to 120 years. But few, if any, live to be that old. Our eyesight grows dim. Our hearing deteriorates. And our body's coordination becomes impaired. Soon, an organ vital to survival will go the same way and end life. The process of aging in

the human body—still not fully understood by science—seems to guarantee that our stay on earth is only temporary.

There are scientists who think, however, that aging is a problem that can be solved. Aging is not a disease. It's not the wear and tear and the constant banging around of our bodies although these likely

contribute to aging. More likely, aging is programmed into the body's design. There may even be a gene in our DNA whose purpose is to ensure aging occurs. If so, then scientists could one day find this "aging gene", manipulate it so we may live over 120 years, or even remove it altogether so that we may all

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**East Coast
Next Sesyon:**

**December 26 –
Saturday, 4:00
p.m.**

Pag-diriwang sa pag-silang sa laman ng Jesus, ang Kristo; Pag-gunita sa pag-silang sa ispiritu ng Fundador ng Espiritu ng Katotohanan. Gaganapin sa tahanan nina Bro. Regie at Sis. Lina Lopez.

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Whitestone, NY 11357
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- Sis.Fia Zabat Swartz:
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- Sis.Amor &
Bro.Salvador Pia:
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or Fax (619) 421-
5240.

7 Ways to Create a Simpler, More Spiritual Christmas

By Mimi Doe

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What does Christmas mean to you and how you can make that meaning have spiritual resonance with your family? A friend of mine who is a busy single mother says, "I try to tone down the commercial messages about Christmas that seep into my daughter's consciousness. We have come up with our own rituals that include a Christmas Eve gathering of friends with candles, simple foods and lots of singing. We make a gingerbread house for the party, and on Christmas Day my daughter and I take it to the woods and leave it under a tree for the fairies to play in and enjoy."

Here are seven ways you might create a simpler more soulful Christmas:

1. Encourage family spirit by creating opportunities and rituals for sibling collaboration. Maybe the kids are in charge of planning a party for their friends at your home, decorating a small evergreen for the kitchen, making secret gifts as a team or concocting a festive breakfast menu for

Christmas morning.

2. Don't forget the critters.

Make ornaments for the birds using pinecones, peanut butter, and birdseed. Leave a few carrots for the bunnies, a salt lick for the deer. There's an old legend that says you can communicate with animals at midnight on Christmas Eve. When I was a little girl we trundled through knee-deep snow to the barn to visit with our horses. Ask your kids how they might give to the animals this year.

3. Shift your holiday thinking to how your family can give to others from the heart. Is there a way you can reach out in your community? Ask your priest, rabbi or school principal if they know of a



Garden of Bro. Lito and Sis. Grace Santos in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

particular family that is in need. Find out the ages of their children and with yours, create a holiday box full of prizes to be delivered anonymously. There are many families outside the "system" whose spirits would be lifted by your generosity and creativity.

4. Encourage your kids to give themselves a gift this Christmas by setting a personal goal, rereading their favorite holiday book, or soaking in a long hot bath with red and green candles lighting the room. Self-care begins even with our youngest spirits.
5. If you attend a particular church or temple, arrange to take your child there when there is no service. In the quiet sacred space talk about how it feels to be there, explain the symbols, and talk about the upcoming holiday and its significance in your religious tradition. Hold hands and feel the energy of those who have prayed in this holy space.

6. Many Christians light weekly Advent candles sym-

bolizing hope, peace, joy and love. Perhaps you could discuss each quality while lighting the candle it symbolizes. Or, your family might give the candles different meanings. They could represent the light of God that surrounds us, the love of God that enfolds us, the power of God that protects us, the presence of God that watches over us.

7. Make decorating the Christmas tree a soulful event. Play music that sets a serene tone, put some cider on the stove to warm, and let the answering machine pick up calls. When you string the lights, talk about the power of light in our lives and how we are beacons of God's light in our world. You might even roll out your sleeping bags and sleep snuggled under the newly decorated tree.

Mimi Doe is the award winning author of five books including "10 Principles for Spiritual Parenting" (Harper-Collins) and "Busy but Balanced." She is the founder of www.SpiritualParenting.com where her free newsletter goes to over 50,000 parents.

Holly

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At first it represented the masculine features of Christ's birth. The ivy plant—an evergreen like the holly—represented the Virgin Mary. The carol, "The Holly and the Ivy", written around 1710, gave religious symbolism to the holly. The holly's prickly green leaves became the crown of thorns and its berry's bright red color, the blood of Christ.

Today, we busy ourselves with putting up Christmas

trees, shopping for presents, and donning Santa Claus suits come Christmastime. Although they're a wondrous way of merriment in celebrating the most important day of the year, some believe that the heavy commercialization of Christmas obscures its meaning and perhaps secularizes it back into the pagan holiday of ancient times. The disparity between the rich and poor also becomes more evident and the essence of Christmas—that of rejoicing at

the birth of Jesus who taught us to treat one another with love and who favored the poor and the meek—becomes largely forgotten.

And so this Christmas, when we deck our halls with boughs of holly, perhaps we may also remember that since ancient times, holly has been a symbol of hope and an easy way for the poorest of families to decorate their homes for the holidays. In doing so, we may then bring

back the real spirit of Christmas.

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Helping Others

By Bro. Eddie Cantada

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”
—*Matthew 5:29-30*

Reading these verses reminds me of Nichodemus, the man who did not know how to interpret one of Jesus’ core messages—that of being born again. How, Nichodemus asked, could a man be born again? Must he go back inside his mother’s womb so that he may be born again? Jesus replied that he must be born in water and in spirit to see the Kingdom of Heaven.

To me, it is still not clear how to interpret this message. As with most of us, I’m sure, I am treading the path of learning. However, it does tell

me that many verses in the Bible, especially the one about gouging one’s eye that is quoted above, are not to be taken literally.

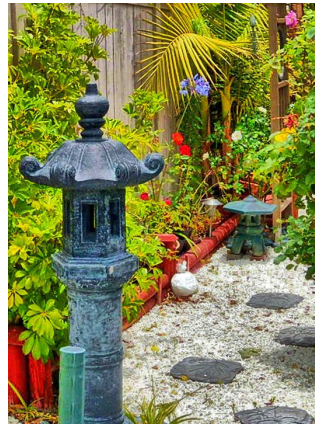
Here we are in the 21st Century and if you look around you many of what you see in stores, on TV, and on the Internet are aimed at improving one’s self-image. Drive this car, look younger, own this widescreen TV, or keep in shape for the sake of looking good. Although in and of themselves they need neither be good nor bad, what they appear to be doing however is make us focus on material things. Rarely, if at all, will you see an ad telling you how you may grow spiritually or help your neighbor.

God wants us to do His will, help our neighbor, and care for our selves. Somehow, we seem to have forgotten the first two.

Helping others is what God wants from us. Should we be fortunate to possess

material wealth, we should see it as being in a better position—indeed, being bound—to help others. It might take real sacrifice to let go of excess wealth, but do it and you will experience the glory that is not of this world but of God’s.

Our duty is to God and to our neighbors. We should always remember that the self is never an issue when it comes to helping others.



Garden of Bro. Ging and Sis. Amor Pia in Chula Vista, California.

author of the book, “The Art of Aging” (2007), thinks that the answer to aging is not living forever. Instead, we should concentrate on improving the quality of our lives. We should accept that someday our turn at life will end and long before that happens, we should work hard to keep our bodies functioning and healthy. Studies show that exercising regularly expands one’s productive years. Those who do not exercise tend to have more to complain about their bodies for a longer period of time—sometimes months or years instead of days

or weeks—during the final phase of their lives. While those who exercise go quietly and quickly with little or no discomfort.

Nuland believes that pursuing immortality would be wrong. Nature, as she always had, will have her way. Instead, we should strive for a life worth living. By that he means a life where one gets a finite chance at doing something that will make a difference. Fail to do that and—even if we had lived for thousands and thousands of years—we will have failed to live at all.

A Moment of Silence

Sis. Norma Roman

Sis. Norma Roman, 65, of Elizabeth, NJ, passed away on October 7, 2009. She is survived by her daughters, Leogelia Roman-Ulep and Jocelyn Roman, and by her husband Bro. Sixto Roman.

Her daughter, Sis. Ledge Ulep, wrote:

“My Mom loved to cook (her specialties: kaldereta, pansit, arroz caldo). Even when she wasn’t feeling well, she would insist on cooking because it made her forget her illness. She also liked to travel because she enjoyed seeing the world. (Her favorite was Europe.) But most of all, she enjoyed it because she was with us.

“When she was undergoing treatment and couldn’t leave the house, she learned how to knit scarves, then later to cross-stitch. She became good at her craft that her creations looked like paintings.

“There was never a dull moment with my Mom. One memory I will always remember is of her dancing while watching Wowowee just so she could get a laugh out of all of us.

“My Mom enjoyed gardening and everything she touched blossomed, much like she did to everyone whose lives she touched. She was thoughtful, patient, understanding, and kind. She was a mother as well as a friend. She was someone you would go to for advice—and not feel that you were being judged. She told me once that when I meet a man whom I decide to marry, I should use my head first before my heart. Years later, I knew that made perfect sense.”

Sis. Norma displayed tremendous heart and courage, calmness of mind, and on her final weeks, a deep acceptance of God’s plan. We learned so much from her.

Sis. Norma, farewell. We will all miss you.

Aging Gracefully

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live forever.

Immortality, however, comes at a price. Room on the planet is finite. There are 6.5 billion people on the planet today and already some are clamoring to put an end to human-induced global warming. Also, if we reach several thousands of years old, then we would all be physiologically of the same age. How would relationships within the family—the social structure that shapes our personalities—change if everyone is of the same age?

Dr. Sherwin Nuland,



It's late at night and he's walking along a street that has a bad reputation. The night is chilly and the man wears a jacket perhaps for warmth but perhaps also for something else. Lights loom from lampposts above casting dark shadows on the man's face. The street is illuminated as if it is some form of stage waiting for some action to take place. This man, he watches carefully as an elderly woman makes her way out of a convenience store and steps into the night. Purse carelessly dangling from her dainty arm, the man waits until the woman is alone—an easy prey.

Wonder what she's got in her purse.

The man quickens his pace, throws his jacket's hood over his head, and tilts his body forward like a predator about to pounce on its meal. He approaches the old woman from behind.

And just as the man reaches into his pocket ready to lunge with his knife, the old woman turns and faces the ominous-looking stranger.

"Excuse me," she says in her frail, cough-strewn voice, eyes straining to see in the dark, "I forgot to wear my watch today. Would you happen to have the time?" Then with a friendly smile she adds, "It's awfully dark now, isn't it?"

Our hooded friend stops in his tracks, releases the knife from his hand—thankfully still concealed inside his pocket—and scratches his head. Shaken. But hoping not visibly so.

"Uh..." he mumbles, reaching into his other pocket for his cell phone. The thing doesn't have any service on it. Why would it when he couldn't afford to pay his bills? Since he lost his job he

grew tired of making ends meet and turned to a life of crime. But the phone sure comes in handy for telling the time. "It's 9:12," he mutters.

"Oh, goodness," she says. The look of concern that flashes across the woman's wrinkled face prompts a feeling of sympathy to wash over the man. But no sooner is the woman's concerned expression gone than the same warm smile returns lighting up her face.

"Thank you," she says graciously, turning her back on the man and continuing her walk.

Our friend, confused by the sudden change of circumstances, slides his hood down and runs his fingers through his hair. Regret begins to gnaw at him, his conscience throbbing obnoxiously loud inside his head. In mere seconds, the old woman has given him an identity, one that was different from the one he assumed. He's not a fiend—at least not all the time. He's a mere, harmless passerby from whom the old, defenseless, and frail woman felt comfortable enough to ask the time. He couldn't decide if it was bravery, foolishness, or naiveté on the part of the old woman but she was, in essence, telling him, "This is the world. And you're part of it. My friend, welcome."

Trying to shake his feeling of guilt, the man turns and walks away. He has been saved. This one time. By an old woman. Should there be a next time, he will have to do the saving on his own.

As he crosses the street his head turns to look one last time at the old woman. He watches her as she slowly disappears around a corner.

I hope she gets home safe.

Coming Sesyon

Marso 6 – Sabado, 5:00 p.m.

Pag-diriwang sa anibersaryo ng pag-angat sa kalagayang relihiyon ng Institution. Gaganapin sa tahanan ni Bro. Sixto Roman sa 860 Colonia Road, Elizabeth, NJ 07208. (908) 354-5060.

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"Christmas Wreath" by Sis. Vi P. Carpio