

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

December 28, 2011 at 1:44pm

Santa in the sanctuary

by Heidi Schlumpf

NCR Today

I have mixed feelings about Santa.

Sure, he represents the spirit of giving, is based on a saint and can be very useful for coercing good behavior out of children for about three weeks out of the year.

On the other hand, he has come to symbolize the overemphasis on presents, the blurring of the line between "wants" and "needs" and general excessive materialism during what should be a spiritual season. Nothing says "Gimme" like a kid making a list for Santa.

While most parents love to encourage the magic of Santa, making the annual photo on a store Santa's lap an important tradition, others shy away from embellishing the story too much. For it is a story, after all, and one children eventually learn is based on much "fibbing" by their parents.

But if you really want to get controversial, try bring up the topic of Santa in church.

As part of Christmas Eve family Masses, some parishes have added a visit from Old St. Nick, perhaps in part to pique the interest of kids who can't help but be thinking of what will be under their tree the next day.

Sometimes he's out in the lobby handing out candy canes at the end of Mass. Or perhaps he makes a quick pass through the aisles waving with a "Ho! Ho! Ho!" More sensitive liturgists might have Santa stop by the manger, recreating the famous but historically inaccurate "kneeling Santa."

If the recent discussion on our parish listserv is any indication, Catholics have strong feelings pro--and mostly con--about this recent addition to Christmas liturgies.

Most think a visit from Santa inserts a reminder about receiving "stuff" during one of the few seasonal focuses on God's greatest gift to us. Saint or not, he doesn't belong in the sanctuary, they argue.

Others think it makes a nice connection between the gift of Jesus and why we exchange gift on someone else's birthday anyway.

Me? Like anything that has to do with Santa, I'm ambivalent. I probably prefer a Santa-free liturgy, but I'm more bothered by flags in the sanctuary than Santa.

Advertisement

What do you think?

Source URL (retrieved on 08/20/2017 - 16:36): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/santa-sanctuary>

Links:

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>