

One Christmas Eve a recently ordained young associate pastor of a parish faced a crisis. As he carefully unpacked and began arranging the antique figurines of the church's nativity scene, his arm accidentally brushed against the figure of the Christ child. The statue fell to the tile floor shattering into many pieces. With Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses only hours away, what was he going to do? After a few moments of prayerful reflection the young priest acted on the insight he'd received.

As the hour approached for the first of the Christmas Masses, Cunigunda (she was from a family of strong German stock) arrived early to secure, what by tradition and practice, was her "pew" in what would be the crowded church.

Arriving at the church and laying her coat in the pew so no one would take her spot, Cunigunda went to the Crib to offer a prayer to the Christ Child. Arriving, her face registered shock and anger. Going over to the young priest who was completing some last minute details for Mass, Cunigunda, angrily confronted him, "What have you done to baby Jesus?" It's bad enough that children in grade schools can't sing Christmas carols and towns can't put up Nativity scenes, now you've taken Christ out of Christmas right here in church! Is this some of that "new theology" you learned in seminary, or more of these "changes" in the church?! As I was coming to church today it was a comforting thought that this Christmas, as every Christmas for as long as I can remember, I would come to the crib and find the infant Jesus lying in the manger. And just now as I went over to pray at the crib, where baby Jesus is supposed to be, there's a mirror! If I want to look at myself in a mirror I don't need to come to church. I have a couple of mirrors at home!" (Cunigunda was obviously upset. The priest even feared she might have a stroke!)

After Cunigunda finished venting, the young priest said, "I'm sorry Cunigunda" and then explained what had happened earlier in the day.

"But what's Christmas without the Christ Child?" Cunigunda pleaded.

“The Christ Child is still here,” the priest gently said. “Go back to the crib and look again and you’ll find him.”

“Father,” Cunigunda half frustratingly, half angry, said: “He isn’t there. When I go back to the manger all I’m going to see is myself in that mirror.”

“You’re right,” said the young priest. “Perhaps God allowed that accident with the statue of infant Jesus for a reason. To teach you, and me, and everybody who’ll be coming the real meaning of Christmas. It’s so easy to think of Christmas as an event that happened a long, long time ago. And while that’s true, we can get so caught up in that long ago event that we forget that Christmas happens again today in each and every person. It can be easier for us to deal with a plaster statue Jesus than the Jesus who we live with at home, or here in the parish, or who sits next to us at work, or who checks us out at the grocery store, or wherever. St. John in his gospel tells us that God’s eternal Son, the Word, “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn. 1:14). Now when God looks at us it’s like a mirror, because what is reflected back to God is Jesus in us. On Christmas, Jesus comes again to again make our life, our body his home. In every Mass we’re reminded of this wonderful gift. As the deacon or priest pours a drop of water into the chalice of wine that will become the Blood of Christ he prays, “May we come to share the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.” Like that drop of water our life and Christ’s life are now one. Christmas calls me to see Jesus in you and for you to see Jesus in me and each of us to see and love him in every person we encounter. This is how God chose and chooses now to live with us. So putting a mirror in the manger was not meant to be irreverent or sacrilegious, Cunigunda, I’m hoping it will help us all keep Christmas not only today but every day.”

After a moment Cunigunda said , “Father, when I get home from Mass I’m going to put a mirror in my manger and every day as I look in a mirror remember to see and keep the mystery of Christmas. Merry Christmas, Father!”

“Merry Christmas, Cunigunda!” the priest replied. And Merry Christmas to all of you!