

MERRY CHRISTMAS 2011

Dear Saints and Aints.

Shalom.

It is one of these rare beautiful evenings. It is peaceful. It is truly *shalom*. The soft breathing sound of a city in the late evening blends nicely with the whirring sound of the ceiling fan and the subdued hum of the computer. From the loudspeakers, barely above the level of consciousness, the sound of old hymns being played on a piano intrudes itself on my mind. The digestive system, satisfied with the offering that came its way, contentedly works in the background leaving me with enough blood to *digest* the sights and sounds of the evening. The dogs too are at peace biding their time - till everybody is asleep.

My birthday came and went. I am not much for such things; I prefer a quiet evening with a few friends or staff. But the kids enjoyed it as Bapu served them ice-cream and chicken biryani. When people ask me what I want for my birthday I remember the story of a grandmother who replied to that question from her grandchildren with, "Give me a hug – I don't have to dust it." Still Bapu bought me a new mattress and bedding and Viru, our computer man, a 32" HD ready TV. I basically got everything my heart desires and a million dollars would not add anything to me as that which I still lack, a growth of "The fruit of the spirit" - is not fertilized with money.

Looking at my life it seems to me that God, in the following passage, is speaking about me:

"I have carried you since you were born;
I have taken care of you from your birth.
Even when you are old, I will be the same.
Even when your hair has turned gray, I will take care of you.
I made you and will take care of you.
I will carry you and save you."
Isaiah 46:3,4

Still, the other day I grinned at myself while looking in the mirror. I am becoming an archeologist's delight resembling more and more a ruin; saluting myself I quip, "Hi old ruin!" Yet it is something that befalls all mortals - should they live long enough and – 76 is not a bad age. Also, before we get too depressed let us remember even a wreck or ruin cannot completely hide the *magnificent thing or person* it once was...

While unable to restore this *Adonis* to his *former glory* I did something for

my room. I have it *redecorated* with the help of three *interior decorators*, a worker with a hammer and a supervisor. It was cheap – some coffee, omelets and biscuits. The three *interior decorators* - three boys - equipped with a broom, a mop and dust rag transformed the room – by cleaning it. You can now pick up a Bible now from a bookshelf without creating a minor dust storm and having to wash your hands thinking you actually had a copy that Moses of old and the Israelites carried with them through the wilderness of Sin. Dust, but during the rainy season, plagues us all year round. Dusting and cleaning besides, a coat of paint completed the decorating job. I am sure I also got a bit closer to sea-level - after the floor got swept. The man with the hammer was responsible for mounting some pictures.

The room looks really clean and nice. When I am near the little boys I am sometimes tempted to extend this sort of *redecorating* to them – except for the hammer part. Though when they try to play cricket in my garden I feel like adding that part too.

But it is difficult to stay angry for long. Their happy grins and sparkling eyes and their cheerful “Good Morning” – even when their misdeeds detracted some from the *good* in “Good Morning” – makes me quickly forget my wrath.

Now with Christmas but around the corner their excitement is palatable. Irving Berlin’s “I am dreaming of a white Christmas” finds no echo in their heart. Snowflakes melting on your nose while walking barefoot through the snow are to them no fun. However dreaming of a great Christmas dinner with ice cream or cake – or preferably both to top it off – would make a song to their liking. They certainly do justice to the culinary delights offered; some walk out of the dining hall resembling barrels on legs rather than little boys...

Yet not only food but some small gifts will be bestowed upon them. It is difficult to know what to give to the kids especially the little ones and especially when these little ones are boys ... In terms of clothing, the Garden of Eden, prior to the Fall would have suited them well; at least they always would have known where their “clothes” were. This year Bapu is thinking of giving everybody a shawl which will double up as blanket. Of course, there also will be balls and pens, kerchiefs, sweets and such things; for the college boys I suggested a good quality towel and sandals besides the shawl. Let us see what will happen.

The Christmas program, which will be held on Christmas Eve, will tell, through skits, dramas and songs the story of the birth of Christ. Ethan and

the kids are working on that. They have a lot of fun.

Yet ...

“Celebrating Christmas without considering *why* is hazardous to your soul.”

I am afraid many people celebrate Christmas like the victory in a battle that never took place and honoring heroes that never existed. I am no iconoclast nevertheless we are in danger of turning the birth of Christ into just another myth, a fairy tale, a story emptied of its substance; teaching it only to children as a careless custom.

Yet it is the home that is responsible for keeping the truth of Christmas alive. While we should celebrate with good food, drink, gifts, laughter and full of joy – God told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover that way - nevertheless, the celebrations should reflect the event we are celebrating. God told Israel, “When your children ask you, ‘what does this ceremony (Passover) mean to you?’ then tell them...” Exodus 12:26.

This gift – the true story of Christmas - we also offer our kids, that when the joy over the food, shawl, towel or whatever has evaporated, the true joy remains.

As for my Christmas wish for you, may the reason for Jeremiah’s joy be yours as it is mine.

“Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O Lord, God of hosts.”
Jeremiah 15:16

**Thank you for another year of praying and caring!
Frank, Bapu, Yohan, Ethan, Staff and kids**