



A Holiday Reflection

As the fires raged in southern California this past October, I watched with a feeling of disbelief, shock and compassion for all the humans and animals affected by the blazes everywhere. I felt sad for those who had lost their homes, and who would have only a pile of ash and rubble to return to when they did go and visit.

Some were happily surprised to discover their homes were still standing, while others found everything that had been important to them was suddenly gone. Evacuees left with little time and often only the clothes upon their backs. It was a defining time for all of us here in southern California. As our firefighters bravely battled the flames, many of us carried on a quiet vigil of prayer for those who were experiencing this occurrence.

I had many thoughts while witnessing the infernos on TV. I wondered how people must feel who have lost everything - who were returning to the burned out shell of what had been their home finding nothing that is salvageable.

I wondered how I would feel. I wondered what I would take with me if I should be evacuated with a few moments notice? What articles or objects would I consider first?

It's a difficult question to answer - I know that adrenaline must be high at a time like that, and our thinking altered by the rush of the moment.

The choices would be different for each of us - the obvious things would be our family members, pets, wallets or purses, identification, important papers, photos of family, perhaps clothing, blankets and pillows.

Many years ago, the shake roof of our home caught fire from embers of another fire down the street. The Santa Ana winds were howling. The children were not home when it happened.

Fortunately, the firefighters were just a few houses away and the fire was put out before much damage could be done to it. There was an eight-foot hole in our roof and smoke and water damage in the house. My concern then was for the Christmas ornaments in the attic that the children had made through the years. Fortunately, they were intact - and we escaped serious loss.

The things that really matter really are not necessarily things. Yes, I treasure belongings that came from my grandmothers or great grandmothers, but the things I treasure most are those which cannot be replaced with money.

Having said that, as our holidays approach, and we all find some time to reflect on this past year, let us be grateful for the people in our lives who truly matter. Let us savor good memories more and all the rich food less. Let's focus on the spirit of giving - not just of things, but time and love and appreciation.

There are many families this year that will not be celebrating their holidays at home - because their homes are gone - what will they be valuing most? I can't know for sure, but I believe most of them will be sitting around a table somewhere and giving thanks to the God of their understanding for life, and for one another. What a good way to celebrate the holidays. **HB**

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