

Column122020

Companions on the Journey

December 20, 2017

Dear Friends,

An oldie but a goodie reprinted in First Things in January 2007 from *Contes de Noel* from Editions du Seuil written by Jerome Tharaud and Jean Tharaud.

*It was Bethlehem, the end of a long night. The star had just disappeared, and the last pilgrim had left the stable. The Virgin arranged the straw; at last the Child could sleep. But who can sleep the night of Christmas? Gently the door opens, so gently that it seems more like the wind was pushing it than a hand. A woman appears on the threshold, covered with rags. She was so old and wrinkled that you would have thought her mouth was one more deep wrinkle in a face the color of dirt.*

*A fearful chill came over Mary when she saw her, as if a malicious fairy had come into the room. Fortunately Jesus was asleep. The ox and the ass placidly continued munching tier hay, as if there were nothing unusual, as if they had known her forever. The Virgin didn't take her eyes off her. The woman walked slowly, each step seeming to take centuries. She continued, the old woman, and approached the manger. Thank God, Jesus was still sleeping. How can one sleep on Christmas night? Suddenly he opened his eyelids. His mother was completely astonished to see that the eyes of the old woman and his eyes were exactly the same, they both shone with the same hope.*

*The old woman sank down on the straw. One hand disappeared into her rags, looking for something, taking ages to find it. Mary watched her closely, still concerned. The animals watched her too but always without surprise, as if they knew beforehand what was going to happen. Finally after a long time, slowly, tiredly, the old woman pulls out of her clothes a little object hidden in her hand, and she gives it to the child. All the treasures if the Wise Men and the offerings of the shepherds, what could this present be? From where she was, Mary could not tell. She saw only the shoulders bowed down. The woman's back, bent over with age, now bent over even more before the crib, and the Child within it. The ox and the ass watched, and were not amazed. The woman stayed bowed before the Child a long time. Finally she arose, as if relieved from a great weight which had dragged her to the ground. Her shoulders were no longer bowed down, her head almost touched the low roof, her face seemed miraculously renewed as if she was finding once more the vigor of her youth. She turned from the crib and smiled at Mary, and went out the door into the dawning day.*

*Finally Mary could see the mysterious present. An apple, a little apple, having within it all the sin of the world, given to the baby Jesus by Eve, (the mother of all the living) for it was her, the old woman, who had come to worship the Child born of her blood, who would save her from her sins. The fruit of the original sin, and the sin of so many who would follow her. And the little red apple shone in the hands of the Child, as if it were the globe of the kingdom and of the new world which had just been born with the king.*

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry