

I remember one scaring experience when I was a little kid. My parents took me and my brothers to see a movie one day. The movie was so popular that the ticket-buying crowd spilled out of the square of the theater into the streets. The whole place was packed with people trying to get the tickets, before it was sold out. It appeared to me that there was just no chance we would get the ticket for the time we wanted to see.

Undaunted, my father elbowed through the wall of people, and got the tickets. He then led us through the semi-frenzied crowd, while mother provided the defensive shield for three of us, and extricated us from the jungle of human bodies. After much shoving and pushing, we were finally inside the theater. I was scared of being separated from the parents the whole time.

The movie had already started when we entered the dark theater. Once we took our seats, I soon forgot about the close-quarter combat we survived. That was

one funny movie I ever saw as a child. I remember laughing from the beginning to the end. I did not know the title of the movie at the time, but many years later I found out it was "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang."

So it was a strange thing to notice, when I came to the U.S., that people lined up everywhere without the police's instruction, when buying tickets at the movie theaters. As I was getting used to the culture, I began to see that the long-line forming was not just done only at the theaters. I saw lines at the bank, at the supermarket cashiers, at gas stations, in the school cafeterias, in front of the bathrooms, and even at the soup kitchens. I observed that the greatest patience of all was exercised at the rollercoaster rides. Here the usual wait time was longer than an hour.

I was so impressed with such an orderly scene that I deemed line-forming was the sign of democracy and civility. Soon,

however, I knew that the line-forming had gotten out of hand.

**P**eople lined up in front of stores for the Black Friday sale, or for the Harry Potter book, or for the popular rock group, and the line grew well beyond the city blocks. They camped out with sleeping bags, with lawn chairs, with food and drink to be at the head of the line. I thought it was just silly to spend the whole night outside for a ticket or for a book.

I knew I was not mistaken, when I heard last year that a security guard was trampled to death at a discount store somewhere in Long Island. These people were dead (pun intended) serious about the Black Friday. The crowd could not wait for the opening time of 5 AM, and just busted the door down, and poured into the store, overwhelming the poor soul.

**I** have observed, however, that people usually demonstrated a great degree of patience and civility most of the time, while waiting in line. But imagine how

these people would react—who had been camped out in line all night, even days—when they found out that the store opened its doors, and just allowed anyone to enter, regardless of the seniority at the waiting line. Can you imagine the chaos that could erupt?

Imagine: after all this preparation and waiting in the line for hours, even days, you learn that all you had to do was just to walk in and get what you wanted. There would be a bunch of angry folks!

Imagine: likewise, will the Christians be upset, if they found out that God decided to accept faithful people of any religious persuasion into heaven? What if, God said, "Hey, there is a plenty of rooms here in heaven; any and all is welcome."

**W**hat would Christians do, if they found out that God admits drunks, conmen, adulterers, thieves, robbers, rapists, murderers, child molesters, and warmongers, just because they said "I am sorry for what I have

done"? Maybe these people lived their life of dissipation and exploitation, but at the last moment, they decided to call a priest or a minister to pray for them the prayer of repentance and be forgiven, and be admitted into heaven.

Wouldn't it be neat to enter the store ahead of the folks who camped all night shivering in the cold, who waited for hours at the line? Wouldn't that be cool to get the diploma from the prestigious university along with other cum laude guys, after four years of hard drinking and partying, after skipping classes and not submitting the senior theses, and then be admitted to the top law school, just because your father was a powerful politician? Wouldn't that be a smart way of living for the important and special people? Isn't that the way to go, to have the cake and eat it too? Isn't it better to win by having the most toys while alive and go to heaven afterward?

**W**hat, then, would the faithful Christians say? "Why did we have to live this life of righteousness? "Why did we have to care for the poor?" "Why did we have to fight for justice?" "Why did we have to let go of the shady opportunities that would have made us multi-millionaires?" Why did the Christians need to pursue the discipline of spirituality, if heaven was open for any ethically and morally challenged persons? Can any one enter heaven just for having said the magic one-liner near the end of their lives: "I'm sorry for what I have done."? Does that sound fair to you? Is it how God's love and justice work?

I can share with you this: such is neither love nor justice. That will be nothing more than the extension of what we already have here. If there is indeed heaven, then it has to be different from what we experience here. Heaven has to be run by the totally different rules. Otherwise, what is the point of struggling so hard to enter the place that is run

by exactly the same rules that govern this earthly life? What, then, is the point of struggling to enter the heaven?

**J**ohn the Baptist put it right. He said this to the sinners and criminals who came to him. He was not a diplomatic person. He did not care about the feelings of others, obviously: "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*"

Well, John, in case you didn't know it: no one likes to take God's wrath and bear it. Then John got to the point muy pronto:

*Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.*

Of course, in the kingdom of heaven, there is no privilege, seniority, race, or status that gives any one any advantage over others. Either everyone is special, or no one is special. Arriving there early or having a powerful politician as your father

does not work in heaven. Nothing can get you to bypass the line, and there is no line in the heaven to get ahead of. There is only one way to enter the heaven, and that is:

*bearing fruits worthy of one's repentance.*

So premeditating for the last minute repentance probably wouldn't work, unless you are actually hanging on the cross next to Jesus. Otherwise, we have to show that we have borne the fruit worthy of our repentance. We bear the fruit worthy of our repentance, when we actually live our lives defined by our action that *proves* that we have repented. Repentance is a life-long action. We continue to repent, and be renewed everyday. If we bear the fruit, then we will surely enter the heaven.

May God's heavenly grace fill you and your household this Advent, as you bear the fruit worthy of your repentance.