

I heard a while ago that a high school basketball team in Texas beat the other team 100 to nothing. Initially, the team rejoiced in the shutout game. As the story spread over the media, however, things began to change. The winning team was vilified, and eventually its coach lost his job.

What is wrong with winning by a shutout? Isn't winning everything? Of course, winning isn't everything, I hear you, coach. But did you ask any of your kid: do you play to win or to lose? What is the answer?

Why is such a perfect victory something to be vilified? It turned out that the sportsmanship of the winning team was questioned. That was so, because the other losing team was made up of the students who were developmentally challenged.

In a fair competition, people do expect that the two competing teams are a fair match to one another. Indeed, we do not want to go and see a pro basketball

team playing a shutout game against a middle school team. It is not in the law, but people instinctively have the sense that some things are not supposed to be done.

That kind of sense is deeply ingrained in the human mind. And if some people just cannot see that kind of disparity between two different teams, then we know that those people do lack something vital, something that makes a person *human*—something that gives the *human* identity to a person.

The human mind perceives that a victory is not always a victory, unless it meets certain criteria. It seems that the human mind deems that a shutout game is rarely a victory, but a plenty ground for the scrutiny of the winning team.

A different kind of winning takes place at the Miss America pageant. It produces one winner at the end. Just for the sake of looks, the answers given, and some meager talents, a

substantial reward is accorded to the winner.

What is interesting is that the contestants parrot the same answer almost every time: invariably, they all want the world peace. The crowned winner sometimes becomes a goodwill ambassador afterwards, and travels the stricken, third world countries, being a spokesperson for their plights.

That may be one way of promoting the world peace, but it leaves us with questions: How does it actually achieve peace? Isn't it rather a mockery of peace, for one individual to achieve one's own ambition, and to launch a career, after having invested a lot of money and time to become a beauty queen? And don't those third world people serve merely as extras in the one-person show of world peace?

Most people believe that peace is the opposite of war. When the war ceases, people call the period that follows it the peace time. But it is not true. The absence of

war is not peace. People can still live miserably and die meaninglessly in that peace time, even when the society runs like a clock work, even when the law is upheld, and even when the government is run by the democratic constitution.

Even then, the so-called democratic society could be, de facto, run by a repressive and oppressive government, or by the powerful and wealthy few. The pattern never changes: no matter what form of the government is in power, the powerful oppress the powerless; the majority rules over the minority; the privileged exploit the disenfranchised; and the wealthy trample roughshod on the poor. It is just about the same everywhere.

And it was just the same two thousand years ago. That sort of peace had been imposed on many nations, and it was known as Pax Romana, the Roman peace. It was rather a system of rule than peace imposed by the Roman conquerors upon the vanquished.

As long as the vanquished abided by the Roman rule, paid the tributes, and did not make troubles, they were granted the quasi-autonomous statehood. Life could go on undisturbed as before. People could work and make money, even become successful and achieve their ambitions. They just weren't so free to be who they wanted to be.

Then we hear from the mouth of a young, pregnant woman a song—a song of joy that glorifies God for the mighty works done for her, and for her people, who happened to live in the system of Pax Romana at the time.

When the human eyes witness the powerful vanquish the weak, few human beings regale in the victory. When the powerful nation subjugates the weaker nation, even the near complete restoration of the governmental, cultural, and religious autonomy fails to convince the subjugated people that they live in the peace time.

Mary's song is the testament to that defiance against such peace. She glorified God, because the little baby whom she carried in her womb would uphold that defiance against those who had been imposing the shutout games upon the poor, the weak, and the lowly throughout the human history. She sang this is how he would do it:

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

That was what the Christmas meant to the First Christians. That was what the birth of the Messiah meant to those who had longed for him. Christmas was God's promise fulfilled, despite the reality that said otherwise. Christmas was the defiance to all the forces and all the power that denied life and abundance to the lowliest of people.

St. Andrew's UMC
December 20th, 2009
Luke 1:46b-55
"My Soul Rejoices in God My Savior"

Christmas is the light in the pitch
darkness. Christmas is the green
leaves in the midst of the cold
winter. Christmas is Peace with
Justice and Righteousness. This
Christmas we celebrate. This
Christmas we live everyday.