

## Come now, O long-awaited Holy One!

Many people started putting up holiday decorations right after Halloween. It seems there was a collective sense of feeling “done” with months of coronavirus and a desire for a bit of hope and festivity.



I've seen Facebook posts of Elf on the Shelf returning to homes to keep a watchful eye on children, properly quarantining first, of course. Across our neighborhood, houses and trees are lighting up, and inflatables of holiday corgis, Jewish menorahs and Christmas Santas are popping up everywhere – some even with masks on! It warms the heart and even causes an “LOL” or two.

While I am a big fan of strict observance of liturgical seasons in my décor, I also recognize that we are all in need of a bit of joy and fun. However, we also are struggling a bit with how exactly to do this in the midst of pandemic. We don't know how to be when, on the one hand, we are suffering the loss of loved ones; dealing with changes in daily habits, relationships and responsibilities; and experiencing the collective grief and anxiety of pandemic. On the other hand, we also experience the joy of life – Facetime with loved ones, professional success, a beautiful sunset, a funny pet moment, a tender word.

When I was 15 years old, my grandfather was dying in the hospital. My siblings, parents, aunts and uncles, and grandmother would take turns visiting with him. In between times, we camped out in the solarium and took over one of the tables. We'd sit for hours joking with one another, telling stories and playing card games. I remember laughing a lot in that room. Although I didn't have the words for it then, I caught on to a very important part of living in difficult moments – it is too hold together both grieving and rejoicing.

Grieving and rejoicing are two sides of the same coin. We grieve because we have loved deeply. Grief, suffering and pain are real and must be respected. At the same time, it is loving deeply which is worth celebrating and which knows no boundaries – life or death, COVID-19 or health, joy or suffering. We live every day in the midst of small deaths and resurrections – it is part of the paschal mystery. It is okay to have these seeming opposites happen simultaneously in our lives just as it is okay for sun and rain to happen at the same time. After all, that's when rainbows appear.

What weighs heavy in your heart? What gives you delight and joy? Ask God for help in holding both the grieving and the rejoicing. What is your “rainbow” gift?

Julie Vieira, IHM