

[Home](#) / [Godzdogz](#) / Advent Art: A Christmas Carol, by F. S. Coburn

Advent Art: A Christmas Carol, by F. S. Coburn

by [Br Thomas Thérèse Mannion O.P.](#)

[21 December 2019](#)

1.28k

By [Br Thomas Thérèse, O.P.](#) | *'Will you let me in Fred?' Asks Scrooge. Br. Thomas Thérèse asks whether we have adequately prepared for Christmas like Fred, Scrooge's Nephew by living our advent wisely? Have we prepared ourselves to open our shut up hearts freely or has our advent been a selfish time of gain and self interest?*



"Will you let me in, Fred?"

Advent is a time when we prepare for Christmas and one of the things I love to do is watch Christmas films. I have a particular soft spot for The Muppet Christmas Carol which has more theological insight than may first appear. A Christmas Carol is a sort of festive memento mori in text and now film form rather than sculpture. When Scrooge is visited by his deceased former business associate Jacob Marley covered in chains Scrooge is warned 'these are the chains which were forged in life' through his ill deeds

and lack of repentance. He was neither prudent nor wise but rich. Their riches had not made them truly wealthy but had impoverished their hearts and hardened them. They had not done advent properly; they had not prepared to welcome Christ into their hearts which also means they had not prepared adequately for death. Scrooge hardens his heart refusing to believe: 'there's more of gravy than of grave about you', he replies. I always find this a chilling warning for myself about my Advent and Christmas priorities. Gravy is good and a quasi-necessary feature of Christmas, but what will it profit me to have the best gravy in the world if I neglect my soul. At its best a time of conversion, and purification, rather than commercialism or consumerism.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux was noted by her sisters as having a love for new things and non-broken things, particularly when she was younger. In many ways, she had a very privileged life. Her father had been a watchmaker but her mother's business in Alençon lace, sometimes called the Queen of Lace, was the most lucrative leading him to leave his business to help hers. This lace is recognised today by UNESCO as part of the 'intangible culture of humanity' because of its unusual craftsmanship. When walking around their home at Les Buissonnets one sees the expensive toys and dresses with which they were accustomed.

The Martin family went to Midnight Mass in 1886 at St. Peter's Cathedral. Thérèse writes 'I used to love to take my shoes from the chimney corner and examine the presents in them: this old custom had given us so much joy in our youth'. However, on this occasion Thérèse heard her father say this would be the last year; in his mind Thérèse was soon to be 14 and no longer a child. Thérèse understands this to be a great gift of Jesus. Thérèse believes she is being called at this moment to look beyond her own desires and needs and to empty herself for others. She later writes in her diary 'everything is grace'. She says she will stand before the throne of Jesus empty handed because she has nothing except what he has given her.

Thérèse writes: 'Thérèse was no longer the same; Jesus had changed her heart! Forcing back tears, I descended the stairs rapidly; controlling the poundings of my heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa, and withdrew all the objects joyfully. I had the happy appearance of a Queen. Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing; Celine believed it was all a dream! Fortunately, it was sweet reality; Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half, and she was to preserve it forever!'

I dare say St. Thérèse would have relished the opportunity to convert Dickens' fictional character Scrooge; I think she would have enjoyed meeting Fred, Scrooge's nephew:

"There are many things from which I might have derived good by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew, "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas-time, when it has come round-apart from... the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that-as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

It is this spirit of Christmas which we must live all year around. It is this spirit which Our Lady of Walsingham wants to take root in our hearts. We must prepare in our hearts a Nazareth for God, the people of God and Godly things.

Have we opened our shut up hearts freely to Jesus or to profit, self-interest and material gain? Have we opened our shut up hearts to our fellow traveller to the grave? To the ones who we despise, the ones who make us feel uncomfortable? There is a little time left to ensure the spectres of Christmas do not pay you a visit. There is still time to break the chains we forge in life. The words of Scrooge are also the words of Christ, 'Will you let me in Fred?'