

St. Nicholas Talk - Advent 2B December
7, 2008
St. David's

Greetings, fellow Christians. My name is Nicholas. Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined that people would still remember me and even imitate me, 1700 years after my life. Well, sort of imitate me. Today I think you in America most often call me Santa Claus, which comes from the Dutch translation of my name. The Santa part comes from the Dutch word for Saint, (yes, the church made me a saint after I died), and the Claus part comes from the word Klaas, which is Dutch for Nicholas.

But to tell you the truth, the character you portray as Santa Claus has little to do with me. I didn't have a sleigh or reindeer and I certainly did not live at the North Pole. I did wear red though, but it looked more like this. I wore red because I was a Bishop at the turn of the fourth century. In those days, the Bishop's color was red. Today, you have switched to purple because that would become the color worn by royalty in the Middle Ages. I didn't wear a red hat with a ball on it, but this, a miter, the symbol of a Bishop. Your Bishop Carolyn and your Presiding Bishop Katherine, still wear them today. That's pretty exciting that you have women Bishops now. We had some women clergy in the very early days of the church, but by the time I was around in the third century, we had bowed to the Roman culture and kept them out.

The part you got right about me is that I spent most of my life trying to help people, especially children. I loved them all and I tried to help them without anybody knowing who did it. I guess that's where the idea of all of you giving gifts in the name of Santa came. But this whole idea about St. Nick checking a list and determining what

child was naughty and nice is all a bunch of nonsense. I tried to help everyone, not just those I thought deserved it. I believe that is much closer to what Jesus taught us.

Let me share with you a little bit about my life. I was born at the end of the third century in a little village called Patara, not far from Myra, where I would eventually become Bishop. My parents were quite wealthy for the time, but they both died in an epidemic when I was a young child. I was quite touched by the message of Jesus, even as a kid. I particularly remembered that he said we should “sell what we own and give the money to the poor.” So I did. I used my entire inheritance to care for those in need.

I became Bishop at a much earlier age than your Bishops do today. During my tenure, my reputation for caring for others spread. There are many legends about me that didn't really happen, but one of those stories is pretty close to actual events. There was this family in Myra with three unmarried daughters. The father did not have enough money to provide them with suitable dowries. In those days, that meant that none of them could marry and the only way they could survive would be to become women of the evening. So on three successive nights, I secretly walked by their house and tossed a bag of gold coins through the window. (In later tellings, some would say I threw them down a chimney and hence the Santa Claus stuff.) Anyway, the young women had their dowries, all married and lived full, dignified lives.

I also had many other passions in my life that seem to have been forgotten. For example, I loved the sea and had a deep concern for all of our sailors. My birthday was yesterday and that is why December 6 became my feast day in our church.

I am so grateful that you all remember me as the great gift giver. But the important thing is that all of you continue my tradition by caring for one another, especially all the children. With your permission, after the service, I will be giving all of your children some chocolate gold to remind them and you of the real St. Nick. Thank you for letting me visit your beautiful church.