

Short-lived feelings of brotherhood

It was the most insightful and moving Christmas Eve sermon in my memory.

The speaker was Rev. David Harris, pastor of St. Margaret of Scotland Episcopal Church. Father Harris is an intellectual with a superior talent for mixing the academic with the emotional. He was the perfect priest to talk about the "real essence" of our celebration of the birth of Christ.

Father Harris didn't deliver the old hackneyed broadside against the "over commercialization" of the Yule season. But he did address himself to the antimaterialistic symbolism of Christ's birth in a manger.

He urged his audience of middle-class worshipers to avoid any interpretation of Christmas as a holiday for the affluent only. Christmas has a meaning and a message for all mankind, "including the poor in spirit and the rejected," he declared with fervor and eloquence.

The Christian truth is that Christmas belongs to the "poor who are our brothers and sisters," he continued. Father Harris reminded us that Christ's mother was a teenage girl who had been turned away at the inn.

Throughout the sermon one could sense the groundswell of brotherhood and sisterhood. After the sermon the worshipers all shook hands and many embraced the individuals nearest themselves. Father Harris walked up and down the center aisle, shaking hands and wishing God's blessings for us in 1983.

For the first time in a long time I enjoyed a deep sense of brotherhood and unity "with all mankind."

Then it happened. Suddenly the mood and the climate changed.

Within minutes, brotherly love was shunted aside, and contempt reigned. Some unidentified "brother" had bashed in the windows of several cars parked in the church's parking lot. The windows of my car were spared by a split second only because a church officer left the service earlier than most of the worshipers.

The windows of at least four cars had been smashed, presumably in the process of a burglary. The church officer described the culprit as a young man who apparently did not wear an outer coat. "Yes, he was one of us," said the church officer, meaning he was a black man.

St. Margaret is located at 2555 E. 73d St., in Chicago's South Shore community, which is not as underprivileged or as upper class as many other Chicago areas. Why this kind of burglary and vandal-

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ism at this particular church? The cars in the lot were not the luxury kind.

"This is more than a burglary," said one of the victims. "My car doors were unlocked. He didn't have to smash windows to get in."

Another victim said, "That guy could have entered each car with a clothshanger in less than 10 seconds without any damage. The man who did this hates everybody. This is plain meanness."

A look at the car next to mine proved the point. That car's windows were bashed in, and the vandal wantonly had ripped off the chrome molding wherever he could.

I heard no one express a feeling of brotherhood for the vandal. I was so angry that I would have been willing to spend Christmas morning at a jail just to see him locked up. To my credit and the credit of others, we didn't stay passionately angry.

Even though I still thought the vandal should be punished, I tried to understand what it would be like for me to be without money and without an outer coat on a chilly Christmas Eve.

I, too, would be an angry man. And my anger would worsen with the contemplation that for me things hardly would get better by next Christmas. There are thousands upon thousands of American who are candidates for such a sick feeling, especially those who feel permanently consigned to the lower rungs of society.

I had sat in a church and heard a very special Christmas Eve sermon. But there are literally tens of thousands whose hearts and minds have been bombarded with another message, the daily sermon preached by their despair. The latter sermon is more abiding for more people. The latter individuals are going to hate somebody. If they can't attack the sources of their despair, they'll attack whomever is nearby, including other victims of hopelessness.

What we have today is a circumstance in which American will be turned against American, the haves against all levels of the have nots—regardless of race.

With unemployment running amuck and no institutions in authority unwilling to act for change, 'tis not the season (or decade) to be jolly. So much for the prospects of brotherhood in 1983.

WORDS OF LOVE CASE STUDY No. 4

I'm not going to introduce any questions of my own about this one. Let's see what kind of questions and answers seem appropriate to you.