

There's still time to unplug from holiday consumerism

Carol Meyer | Dec. 22, 2010 Eco Catholic



Many of you are probably familiar with Kathy in the comics. The

quintessential

shopper, she's gullible to every sales pitch, buys expensive things she doesn't need, and is neurotic about buying the perfect gift. She wouldn't be funny or popular if she didn't reflect some truth about our obsessions.

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Jesus came to free us from our obsessions, so let's give him a chance to help us do things differently. We don't have to be mindless consumers, overburdening our lives with material possessions. I teach classes now and then on "Clearing Your Clutter," and it's amazing to see how people cling to possessions, even when they are burdensome and unfreeing.

Christmas will be here in a few days, but it's not too late to take a few immediate actions to defy the consumption patterns that assail us like the flu bug.

1) *Forget the after-Christmas bargains.* Don't even glance through the advertisements (unless you truly need something). Just because things are on sale or cheap, doesn't mean they don't come at a high price—for our peace of mind, our beleaguered pocketbooks, or the Earth. Somebody always pays when one more unneeded possession ends up in our hands.

2) *Don't give in to the urge at the last minute to buy one more gift or a bigger one.* I recently told a friend that I was making some simple gifts, and she immediately talked about getting me something. If you're the kind of person who keeps thinking of more people you could/should give gifts to, worries that your gift isn't good enough compared to someone else's (and thereby might need to zip out and get a better one), or thinks you have to reciprocate if someone gives you a gift, I hereby give you permission to let go of those ideas. Your worth, or someone else's, is not tied to gifts. If you're still tempted, consider not buying more gifts as a gift to the Earth and to God. Nice compromise, right?

3) *After Christmas, resist the desire to upgrade to the kinds of gifts your friends, neighbors, and family received.* Keeping up with the Jones is not a gospel value, nor is envy. You won't be relegated to the trash bin of society just because you don't have the latest and best. Stand firm and proud in your love for the Earth manifested in your simple living.

4) *Over the holidays, don't consume unhealthy food/drink or in excess.* I know, this one really hurts. You're probably thinking the suggestion alone is un-American. Doesn't everybody become gluttonous over Christmas? All I ask is that you examine your eating and drinking patterns from a pro-life perspective. Regularly eating too much and unhealthy foods diminishes vitality on every level and hardly enables us to be fit temples of the Holy Spirit. (And while you're at it, also consider the junk that goes into your psyches through over-consumption of TV and the internet).

5) *Make a New Year's resolution to cut way back on your consumption.* To make this work, you'll need to get detailed and concrete about how you'll do this and in what areas. It also helps to pray about this and repeat something like, "God, I promise to live more simply for You and the Earth?" or "Thank you, God, for helping me put the spiritual over the material."

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Eco Catholic is an exploration of the green Catholic imagination and ecological spirituality. Contributors include Rich Heffern, NCR staff writer, columnist and author, and Carol Meyer, executive director of the Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition.

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