NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Microclimates, closets and Christmas' truth

Donna Schaper | Dec. 23, 2013 Eco Catholic

Microclimates get a lot of attention from farmers and gardeners. You can grow a good crop on the north side of the property in the global South or on the lean of the hill in the American West.

Christmas is like a microclimate, a time when we are responsive to the seasonal weather. One of my long-term unemployed parishioners wept recently in my office. He said, ?It?s hard enough week after week but to have no money at Christmas, it is cruel. Not to mention what Congress is trying to *not* do for us in extending benefits.?

In the microclimate of the holidays, more stories sprout about those who don?t have. The other day I heard the story of the girl without a closet, being showcased as one of 50,000 homeless people in sparkly, glittery New York City. She lives in 500 square feet at a shelter, with her seven siblings and mother and father. When she gets to school, she takes a long time putting her coat in the closet. Why? Because she doesn?t have one at home.

Candles and carols all around, I become more receptive to grow toward her. I lean toward her, the way a flower catches whatever light it can.

We open at Christmas because a poor baby pierces our heart. We berate ourselves often for not getting the TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS, and yet it always sneaks its way into our lives. The story has a grail to it, that is, a thread that connects the past to the future. It?s a message that won?t be silenced, even on the dark side of the hill.

While yours may come a different way, my microclimate tears came like this:

The radio reporter telling the story of the girl and the closet was particularly effective, like a good lay liturgist who has practiced the texts. I was cleaning out my closet. Out go the short sleeves, in come the sweaters. In my closet -- the one she didn?t have -- I found my old black cashmere sweater, covered in dust on the floor. I had bought it for a whopping $10 at a thrift store years ago. I took it to the washing machine and turned the setting to cold. I forgot that I had placed six crystal wine glasses on top of the washer.

The glasses also came from a thrift store. I don?t really buy anything anywhere else, unable to face the prices at commercial stores. So I fill up my closets and cabinets thriftily. As I listened to the girl?s story, I was using the sneakily hammering shtick of apology on myself: I may have a closet and a cashmere and a crystal -- but I got them recycled, justifiably, thriftily.

By the time the machine went into spin cycle, I had switched from words to music on the radio. ?Away in a manger? played on a harp in the kitchen as the washing machine started its spinning. One of the glasses went straight to the floor, shattering into a million pieces. The other five danced to follow, but I caught them one by one.

Christmas had crashed my thrifty privilege. Would I have known its truth, about the perplexity of the poor and the mangered child, without the harpist or the closet clearing or the good voice of the radio announcer? Or is

every day just a little different now, as solstice comes to re-gather the evening? Or is the truth that of bleak midwinter: The poor are always there, without closets, while others of us have closets that need cleaning?

In this microclimate, with a poor child, we stand and stare deeply into our closets and see our stuff.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/28/2015 - 12:24*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/microclimates-closets-christmas-truth