

GLIMPSE

A Well-Wrapped Gift

Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

"Slow as molasses in January" is an old saying used to indicate a lack of speed, usually employed by somebody who is experiencing impatience with another. Not all old sayings are accurate.

In Boston, on a rather warm January day in 1919, it was 43 degrees and a six story poorly-welded tank full of molasses sprung a leak. Two and one-half million gallons of the sticky sweetness burst out killing twenty-one fleeing persons. The 35 mile an hour tidal wave of molasses also caught up with two horses and collapsed the steel supports of the nearby elevated train tracks. Slower than molasses in January is peanut butter and faster is the breath we expel from our mouths when sneezing, generally about 90 miles an hour on a cold day in January.

We are surprised, usually, by things which happen quickly and not by the slow. Surprise means we were not expecting, the word literally means to watch-out for. It is said that it takes humility to be surprised. The fearful, powerful, the controllers of our acquaintances, strive to make sure that nothing upsets or disturbs their plans and processes. Walls and fences make good protections, but rather sad neighbors. I had a loving grade-school teacher who referred to me as "Mr. Ya-buts". Anything she would propose of an adventurous nature I would respond, "Ya, but what if...." I was making sure I would not be tackled from behind by the unforeseen embarrassments of life.

Real gifts are delightful surprises when and if we dare to open them, but "what if?" We might have opened some well-wrapped gifts and have not known what exactly it was. We might not have known from whom the gift came. We might not have known a proper way of responding. This is where the humility comes well-wrapped within the gift itself. The biggest surprising gifts which can take a long time to unwrap are other persons who are offered to us by life and by God. It does take humility to be gifted, to be receptive, and to be grateful for being given to with love. God does it all the time if our fences are down even a little bit.

To really be loved is quite a surprise; it is a gift and not earned. Earned love is called payment. We do not expect to be loved, we expect to be paid or rewarded. God's love moves quickly like a sneeze and slowly but surely as a tectonic plate. What takes humility is to watch-out for how it is offered, how it is wrapped and just how each of us longs to receive it. It is only a glimpse. Typists and computer junkies grow fingernails faster than we slow dudes.