Is it more blessed to give than to receive? I know I am delighted if I can find a perfect Christmas present for a family member or a friend. We can walk endless miles through the mall or search relentlessly on the internet for the perfect gift for our spouse, our child, a close friend and eventually begin to feel weary and know that we will have to settle for something that is nice, but not the perfect gift. I love the Christmas short story by the author O Henry entitled *The Gift of the Magi.* It is the story of a newly-wed couple named Jim and Della celebrating their first Christmas together in a tenement apartment in New York City in the midst of the Great Depression. Times are hard and they are very poor. They agree with each other that they will not exchange gifts because they have no spare money, but they do like to window shop at the fancy stores of Manhattan. Della has beautiful long flowing hair and she loves to look at a set of beautiful combs in in the sparkling windows. She often catches Jim starring at a silver chain for a pocket watch. Jim’s father left him his pocket watch a chain could be not be afforded. The next day is Christmas Eve and Della with a scarf wrapping her head prepares dinner. When Jim arrives home, she hands him a gift. He opens it and it is a beautiful silver chain for his watch. He is both surprised and amused as she takes off her scarf and he sees she has cut here long hair to sell it to buy him the chain. He hands her a wrapped set of the beautiful combs that he has bought her by selling his pocket watch.

Perhaps you have had the experience of having someone show up at your house with a gift and you realize you have nothing for them. You secretly take the name tag off of a gift you had for someone else and say something like; I got this just for you. Certainly, the little gifts made at home or in school by our children or grandchildren are more precious than a cashmere sweater. If you really lucky, perhaps, like I have seen in countless commercials, you will wake up and your spouse will bring your outside to see your new Lexus with a bow on it. Does that really happen? Parents shop desperately for gifts for their toddlers only to find the child takes more delight in the box and the wrapping paper than in the doll or fire that Santa has brought all the way from the North Pole. Some of our employers or business associates may give us a gift of a fruit cake which is sometimes called the gift that last all year. Seinfeld talks about re-gifting. I have regifted at times only to find that a year later I mistakenly gave the same gift the person had given me back to them the next year. I quickly offered spiked eggnog to ease the pain. Still, in spite of the many challenges and struggles with gift giving at Christmas, it is beautiful part of our celebration. When I receive a sweater or shirt from someone, I think that the person had to work hard to pay for the gift. He or she had to seek out the gift and pick it for me. They had to wrap it (unless they paid the fee for Amazon to do it). Even if it is size or two too small, I am grateful because I see the gift as a symbol of saying I love you, I care for you, and I want you to show it to you. It is hard to say exactly how our tradition of gift giving at Christmas began; some point to the Magi from the East who visited the newborn Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. There is also the wonderful tradition of good St. Nicholas who by tradition was a wonderful gift giver to children and his DNA test matches that of Mr. Kris Kringle, Father Christmas, and Santa Claus.

I would trace the treasure of gifts back to the source of all gifts: God. It was God who out of pure love created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. It was God who created the angels that sang *Glory be to God* on the first Christmas. It was God who created you and me. Each of us is unique and different one from another with no two fingerprints ever matching another person. The Bible tells us we are made in the image of God. To be alive here and earth with the promise of one day being with God for all eternity is as the MasterCard commercial would tell us: *priceless.*

*Presents and Presence* are two words that are virtually indistinguishable in pronunciation. God is present to us in every heartbeat and breathe. Present in the seasons of the year, the love of family and friends, and in all the wonders of life. God desired to be so present to us, to reveal his profound love that he chose to become present to us in his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit would be the presence of God on earth and in our souls until the end of time. As Catholics, we gather around this altar, on this night and throughout the year as we hear *this is my Body, this is my Blood.* Jesus in Holy Communion will become present to us in a most profound way. As you know, here at St. Mary’s we have a chapel where parishioners come 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year to adore the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

A great Christmas word from the Bible is *Emmanuel* thatmeans God is with is. In Jesus Christ, God has gifted us with the greatest present he could the gift of his loving presence in every moment of our lives. Amen