

Christmas 2013

Dear Family and Friends:

In the fall of 2012, RV attended the funeral of a beloved aunt in Pennsylvania. On the way, he visited St. Catherine's Cemetery just outside Titusville, Pennsylvania. Many of his ancestors are buried there—indeed, his aunt was to rest there as well. As he strolled through the grounds, he came upon the burial plot his mother and father had purchased years before. Given his mother's obviously failing health, it was a most poignant moment.

In June of this past year, our family gathered at the Chapel at St. Catherine's Cemetery for the interment of RV's Mom. She was a blessing, giving herself fully to those she loved. She was our counselor, teacher, and confidante. She was there for us at every turn and at every bump in the road. She was foundational to our sense of belonging, of how we ought to carry ourselves, of right and wrong. She loved us like a rock. She and Dad modeled an enduring, steadfast, self-giving love for one another and for each of their children that is such an excellent marital and family model.

A strange opening to a Christmas letter, is it not it? Christmas is such a festive time, that to speak in such a way seems out of place. If there cannot be real, uplifting cheer, then some of the feigned variety is in order. However, the Christmas season can be a difficult one for those whose sense of loss is still at hand. We would just like to take a pass on the celebration and hoorah of the season.

This year, RV will raise his voice in hymns like "Joy to the World" with a new sense of their import. Christ's first advent did not immediately obliterate the law of sin and death but left us with the hope that the quandary does not have the last word. A personal faith in Jesus Christ augurs a new and eternal life from above.

C. S. Lewis once remarked that joy is the serious business of heaven. He was not speaking primarily of glory and our yearning for it, but of heavenly joy invading our earthly toil, aches, and pleasures and transforming them while we live in this present order. If that is to occur, then the faith structure that frames that joy needs to attend our earthly pilgrimage. The quandary that haunts our trek through time, need not rule it. That journey can be ruled by His grace. By faith, we can see a different, better result and something we can live into with hope and with purpose.

Christmas celebrates the inaugural event of that better result. It is so much more than good cheer one time a year. From our home to yours—Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.