

Something happened last night in Lincoln Center before the N.Y. Philharmonic concert, & this morning at breakfast I told fifteen beloved friends, seated in a circle, about it. As you will see, the story includes the Christmas card printed herewith because some of them wanted copies, & one was gracious enough to ask that it be put in a Thinksheet.

*The conversation went approximately as follows, the words of the plain-looking, late-middle-aged woman being in this serif type.*

Seating myself next to her, I said: You are new to this seat, aren't you? Yes, I am. My name is...( & she gave me hers). Where, may I ask, do you live? Brooklyn. Ah, yes. And what, may I inquire, is your religion? Strange that you should ask. Just last night I was feeling very religious & decided to read the Bible straight through, beginning immediately. I'm Armenian Evangelical, but we don't have a church in Brooklyn so I joined the Episcopal Church. But let me tell you what happened last night. I started reading, & it said that God created darkness & light. (She paused, I looked at her.) Why the frown? Well, I can understand God's creating light, but why darkness? Now, let me get this straight. Last night you started reading through the Bible & you got stuck before the 3rd verse of the 1st chapter of the 1st book? Yes. If you're going to bog down that easily, how many years do you figure it's going to take you? (She appreciated the gentle humor, & laughed.) But if I don't understand what I'm reading, why bother? Why, indeed! The Bible is a talk-back book: you talk back to it, as you did, & it will talk back to you. Reading is one word for this process, prayer is another: God's Spirit helps us understand as we reach for the light as we read. Yes, the light! You think it was not a good idea of God to make darkness? Well, sometimes it seems that way. Yes, it does. In my pocket I have a 480-year-old Christmas card that may help. It was given to me as a greeting this afternoon by the librarian of N.Y. Theological Seminary. The paper isn't that old, but the greeting is. It's by Fra (Brother) Giovanni, who lived joyfully for Jesus in humility & poverty. (I then read it to her, pausing to look at her after each section, her smile broadening throughout.) I think I'm ready to go on reading.



## SALUTE YOU!

As we stood up to leave after the concert, which included Kurt Weill's "The Seven Deadly Sins," she smiled, squeezed my arm, & said "Thank you for the Christmas card."

A few comments on this do-it-yourself, pre-commercial Christmas card:

1 Bro. G. gave, as a Christmas present, all that he had, the gift of challenging words closing with the gift of prayer.

2 Rest, "in this dark world of sin," is heaven: heavenly rest! And, like "eternal life" in the Gospel of John, it's available now, for the taking, with open heart & hands. So not having it is something one has done to oneself.

3 A hunt for mind & heart, to find the "hidden" peace here & now!

4 So much is beyond our reach, but joy is not among that much.

5 Today is epiphany, day-break!

There is nothing I can give you which you have not; but there is much that, while I cannot give, you can take.

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today.

Take Heaven.

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant.

Take Peace.

The gloom of the world is but a shadow; behind it, yet within our reach, is joy.

Take Joy.

And so, at this Christmas time, I greet you, with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

—FRA GIOVANNI

A Salutation written to a friend by Fra Giovanni in 1513.

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