

Monday with Mikey: December 26, 2016

Happy Boxing Day! Happy St. Stephen's Day!

Sometimes I get curious, so I look stuff up.

When I was a kid, my favorite source of information was *The World Book Encyclopedia* in my elementary school's library. With the advance of technology, and the tendency of my mind to go off on tangents, I came to use Wikipedia as a fairly reliable source – but I often fact-check it through Snopes. In addition, my travels to faraway places in search of interesting customs and forms of imbibition (NOT imbibement!) have given me insights into the customs and traditions of many nations and cultures.

One of the least understood customs – holidays – in the English-speaking world is Boxing Day. Let me start by telling you that Boxing Day is NOT the day we:

- box up all our Christmas decorations
- toss out all the boxes from the Christmas gifts we have received
- repackage the toys Santa brought - and which we cannot assemble without the aid of the child who was supposed to receive them – and return them whence they came (North pole, Toys 'R Us, Amazon, etc.)
- recognize the significance of the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901 in China (but that's another tangent)

As best as I have been able to discern, Boxing Day is, in The UK and among its Commonwealth nations, began in ancient times as:

- a day off for serfs and servants of landed gentry to spend with their families. The landowner often gave boxes of food and household necessities to their minions as a token of good will.
- a day when churches' alms boxes were opened for the distribution of money to the poor.

Today, Boxing Day is a "bank holiday" throughout the Commonwealth. It is a major day of shopping, much like "Black Friday" here in the USA. It also coincides with the Feast of Stephen or St. Stephen's Day in the western Christian Church. (In the eastern Christian Church, St. Stephen's Day is the 27th of December – but I won't get into the differences between the Gregorian and the Julian Calendars.)

St. Stephen was the first Christian Martyr. He was known during his lifetime, according to the 6th chapter of The Acts of the Apostles, as having been involved with distribution alms to Greek-speaking widows in Jerusalem. (You can look it up.)

The Song "Good King Wenceslaus" celebrates a charitable act of the sainted Czech king on St. Stephen's Day.

I could go on. The rabbit hole got pretty steep when I started looking at all the ties to European legend and Church tradition that have led us to Boxing Day – a holiday about which few Americans even know, let alone understand.

Bottom line: Boxing Day – and Rotary – are about helping people in less fortunate circumstances than ours.

Let's all take the opportunity to do just that TODAY.

Until next Monday (which is also next year), let's keep **"Doing Good, Having Fun!"**

Mikey

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