

A Christmas Story

By and Based on the Books of Robert J. Cormier (www.thefaithkit.org)
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Ernesto had been alone in America... in the United States, for some time now. He had come alone, with the sole goal of helping his family—his parents and younger brothers and sisters back home where there was little work and no money.

Here in America, Ernesto had found some work but had almost no money. Almost all his money had to go home. There was little left to live on. But that was OK. Ernesto hadn't come from riches; he had grown up learning how to enjoy the simple things in life; and he was conscious that it was faith that made this possible.

The main joy that Ernesto had found in America was Angela. She was beautiful and good in every way. She spoke his language and understood his struggles. She, too, lived alone so that she could help her people back home.

Angela had been in America a little longer than Ernesto; and she had a little nicer place to live in.

She had invited Ernesto to visit her this evening. It was Christmas Eve and Ernesto needed a place to go.

It was Christmas Eve, and he would be a guest, and Ernesto really appreciated Angela. He needed to bring a gift, he thought.

It was already a little late, and of course it was dark, and of course Ernesto didn't have a car. He would walk to Angela's, and he would walk past many shops, and maybe he would see something she might like.

The first shop he came to was a jewelry store. It was filled with shoppers and had many nice things in the window. Ernesto stopped to look. He saw gold and he saw diamonds and other things that cost a fortune. He saw some earrings that looked really nice but these, too, were too expensive. There was no way that Ernesto could buy anything for Angela here.

No, there was no way that Ernesto could buy anything for Angela there, and he stood in the window and felt bad about it. After a while, he

consoled himself by remembering something he had learned in church: People who are crazy for gold do not much appreciate *themselves*. They don't really feel their value as people, and so they think they can get value by wearing it.

Ernesto understood that people could do better. He had been taught, and he could see, that the only thing that really says something about ME is ME, who I am, who I am inside, what is the depth of my spirit—my faith and my love. No, NOT needing gold says more about what is good in me than anything that buying gold would say. Ernesto moved on.

He walked on a little further and came to a clothes store. This, too, was filled with shoppers. It was a *good* clothes store, with all the latest fashions. This, at least, is what Ernesto presumed. There were nice things for sure, most of the same color; and everything was very expensive. Once again and very quickly, Ernesto recognized that there was nothing he could buy for Angela here.

Once again he lingered, and, being honest with himself, allowed himself to feel sad. This time he consoled himself with the truth that Angela was beautiful, and didn't need expensive clothes to look good—not at all—and that nothing was more beautiful than her smile, which, like no one else he knew, seemed to project the inner beauty of her soul.

Thinking now about his own ordinary clothes, Ernesto again thought about something he learned in church: It doesn't matter what other people see, and maybe think; it matters what God sees. If it matters what other people think, you will live your life under judgment and you will never know a moment's peace. If, instead, you pay attention to what God sees, you will always feel important and inspired. You will prepare well to see God as *He* really is. And this is when everyone else will see you as God does now. Ernesto moved on.

This time he walked a while.... He had already seen enough clothes stores.... And Ernesto liked walking. Just moving made him feel more relaxed; it seemed to remove him from problems and preoccupations. It freed his mind to think about bigger things. And the bigger the "thing" he thought about, the better he felt.

Finally, Ernesto came to an electronics store. Once again there were many shoppers, and many things to look at in the window. Of course, Ernesto had noticed this before: The smaller the device, the more it cost. Everything in this store cost too much for Ernesto.

This time he consoled himself with the idea that people depended too much on electronics. This was a need they never had before! Now they need to be “connected.” They can’t be on their own. They have to know what “everyone else” is doing. They have to report their little experiences even as they have them. This makes sure that their experiences stay “little.”

Ernesto did notice that this store also sold movies. And the cheaper ones were not too expensive. This, however, did not attract him much. Sitting watching a movie with Angela. “I would rather talk to her,” he thought. “I would rather look at her.” I do not want to spend hours watching other people do things. How can this be a life for ME?

Right next to the electronics store was a place that sold candy, gift candy. The smaller boxes were not too expensive. But they were small, Ernesto thought. How do we share that? How much joy will Angela get from a couple of overpriced pieces of chocolate? How impressed will she be by the overdone packaging?

Just then Ernesto got an idea. He had one more stop to make and then he went to Angela’s house.

He knocked on her door and she opened it quickly and this made him think that she was eager to see him. He hoped that she was NOT eager to see what he had brought her.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t bring you something much better,” he said. “All I really have is my happiness for the chance to spend this time with you. And this....”

Ernesto handed Angela a card. It read: “Thank you so much for inviting me.”

One more thing, dear reader: This story is conceived as the material for one of my plays designed to be performed by non-actors, perhaps in

church at the time of the homily. (See the Panorama of Plays menu at www.thefaithkit.org/panorama.) I envision Ernesto as walking around the church looking at imaginary windows, the story narrated according to the text by a different person with a microphone out of sight. Ernesto would say, to a real Angela, only the lines the story says he said out loud.