



Frosty Chapel Roof

Ravens in the Persimmons

St. Nicholas Day!

Anonymous

The end of the first week of Advent. Retreat time! Burn or shred all of your list of things to do. Do it NOW!

Didn't that feel good? Even though you didn't do it? But at least maybe it would help you put the brakes on. My Ohio Quaker friend Emily would relate how her Grandmother Lucy, when encountering a person in stress, would say, "*Friend, perhaps Thee has too many cumbrances.*" Well, if we did not burn the lists at least perhaps we can go through and cross out a number of items and not be so encumbered.

The word "*cumbrance*" has a colorful history. In medieval times it was used to describe obstructions on the road we were traveling. And it often implied something self-imposed – such as cutting down a tree so it fell across the road and obstructed our journey. Emily's grandmother had chosen well when she warned us to avoid putting "*cumbrances*" in our spiritual path.

In northern Europe December can be pretty bleak, in weather and in religion. In past centuries the Dutch Reformed Church dropped quite a few *cumbrances* on anyone's path to joy. To counteract this gloom the Dutch populace has long embraced the Feast of St. Nicholas, *Sinterklass*, on December 6. Although it can be a bit stressful for children when on the evening before, the old Bishop pounds on the door and enters with a sack and a scroll on which the misdeeds of the young people have been carefully recorded throughout the year. But somehow it all ends on a positive note and little gifts come out of the saint's sack. The moral and emotional slate of mistakes has been wiped clean!

Perhaps on this date, or any other date, we can seek St. Nicolas' help in shifting our focus from obligations to brighter alternatives on the path of life.

But let us all lose the "to do" and "ought to" stuff. These days are full of potential—outside of our window, in the faces circling the table, on everything great and small that we encounter in heaven and on earth!

Brother Toby