

## Try to avoid the evil urges of consumerism

by Mark Pavilons

We are entering the holiday season and the infamous ?Black?Friday.?

Sounds more like a reason to panic than to save.

And yet, millions of consumers across North America and beyond will dash to retail stores and wear out their keyboards for a flurry of shopping.

To what end?

If only our species had the same enthusiasm for supporting charities or the homeless, as they do for gluttony.

I'm not saying we shouldn't take advantage of so-called crazy deals, but we should put everything in perspective. I see no reason to out-shop, out-spend one another, racking up even more credit card debt.

Yes, I?have fallen victim to this urge a few times, but I've never engaged in the shoulder-to-shoulder holiday madness. If you've ever seen videos of Black Friday or even Boxing Day mayhem, you know exactly what awaits.

It's a very sad commentary on our species, one I wish we would change.

We are still embroiled in a Canada Post strike, delaying mail delivery at a crucial time of year.

Other delivery companies will enjoy the business, visiting more door steps and porches than Santa himself!

All in the name of consumerism.

Even Jeff Bezos admitted that consumerism is (at its worst) ?getting people to buy things that don't actually improve their lives.?

The folly of consumerism, according to Bryant H.?McGill, ?sends us on a wild-goose chase for happiness through materialism.?

And who hasn't bought something to satisfy a selfish need, or to boost our self-esteem?

I agree with Rachel Campos Duffy:??Consumerism is the reason Christmas has morphed into a hollow shopping ritual that leaves too many families with debt hangovers and an empty feeling inside.?

But it wasn't always that way.

I?remember my mom telling me stories of how they celebrated Christmas back home. The parents would set up and decorate a live tree in the parlour or separate room. The kids were only allowed in on Christmas Eve. Dressed to the nines, they had to sing a song or recite a poem. Then, and only then, would they receive one present. While clothes were the staple, they were permitted one toy.

Today's kids would see that as archaic perhaps even barbaric.

My mom says it was the most beautiful tradition of all. It was about family and blessings, not about things.

When did we become corrupt and morally bankrupt?

I think what many of us do (and I'm guilty) is to show our love for our friends and family members through tokens of gifts. Whether gag gifts or thoughtful mementos, we like to bring a smile to other people's faces. We like to light up their eyes and hearts if we can.

I get it. And I also understand giving our children what they need - clothes, gizmos for their school work, and items they use every day. For working offspring, gift cards are great to give them a buffer between pay cheques.

We've scaled back a bit this year, partially out of necessity and also because we've all reached a point where we require very little. I began the crusade, telling my wife and kids there's nothing they can buy me to fulfill my life or give me supreme joy. I only want to spend time together, enjoy some great meals and even some holiday Hallmark movies. I want to cuddle with my dogs on the couch and eat cheese balls until my fingers turn a bright orange. I want to feel the warmth and love.

Okay, socks and underwear go a long way, but I'd rather have my stocking filled with chocolatey treats.

Some parents will also agree that when our children become adults, their wants and needs change, too. They become more practical. They no longer race down the stairs and fling wrapping paper all over the living room in a child-like frenzy.

Those days are gone, but still quite memorable.

Home for the holidays becomes the mantra for many of us.

My oldest daughter already made a trip to a homeless shelter, donating a ton of clothing and other items. Our closets, it seems, are filled with much, too much stuff, things we will never use.

And that right there is sad, considering there are many who don't have enough, or even the basic necessities.

Lexie is also planning another humanitarian trip to help Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic in the new year. This has been her comfort over the years - to roll up her sleeves, give selflessly and be the boots on the ground.

Blessed is the one who cares for the poor ...?

I went on one of these missions myself, to see first-hand the conditions and the need. I wanted to do more.

I think of that experience often, and more so these days when I take stock of the goodness in my life.

I shake my head when I compare the plight of such people with our rampant, perilous consumerism. Shame on us.

And don't get me started on the huge amount of post-holiday waste and garbage. Despite our dedication to climate change, consumer packaging is at its all-time worst - evil plastic packages that will never degrade but only kill our planet.

I say encourage those itchy, ill fitting hand-made sweaters and cheesy slippers with faces on them.

I will gladly recite a poem of my own creation, to share with my family. I will count by blessings, not by price, but by love.

Enjoy, everyone!