

Unforgettable Christmas

Facultas nostra 2021, December (editorial)

For each of us, some Christmases are unforgettable. It could be those in childhood, the one when there was a new member of the family at the tree, the one when we got a long-awaited gift, or when the family got together after a long time. My unique Christmas was different. It was the year 1969, the ground was covered by the smog of communist normalization, however there were still discreet places where the flame of hope was glowing. During that Christmas time I was a student at a grammar school, the eight-year type of secondary school that today surprises no one, but, in the past, those quality educational institutions were not common and were only brought to life by loosening the society rules in the sixties. We, the pupils who belonged to the 6th grade by age, were suddenly going to the gymnasium building with schoolmates at least four years older. Unlike us, they understood that we were going to lose what we had acquired in our naïve freedom – which was confirmed immediately after the holidays by the news that the eight-year grammar schools are being cancelled. On the last day before Christmas, each of the higher classes had their own decorated tree that they carried from classroom to classroom, went to the teachers' rooms to wish happy holidays. The teachers, in unity, totally ignored teaching that day, the corridors smelled of incense cones and sounded with a mix of Czech carols and the Jingle Bells song from tape recorder fetched for that occasion. Even though I went to different schools for further 13 years, I never experienced such atmosphere again.

This year's Christmas will be hard to forget in many ways, too. It will be the second "wartime" one, while the coronavirus pandemic keeps getting strength from somewhere and is not ready to leave. Maybe our fight with it lacks co-ordination and strong measures come in a time when they are already not strong enough. I am astounded by the covid frenzy of both the last and the future governments and the media. I believe that I can filter out a lot of it and get many things right, even though the media confuse it afterwards. But how about an average citizen of this country?

An average citizen of this country should understand that covid is an infection that will stay here with us in some form, with no respect to our wishes but in strength and seriousness reflecting our behaviour. He (or she) should avoid unnecessary contacts outside the family and contribute the time spared by absence at the company Christmas party to getting together with the close ones, from whom the risk of catching covid is lower after all. He should try to spend Christmas in the state of mental well-being that we formally call "Christmas atmosphere" – which, in reality, means to switch the TV on for fairy tales only. He should pay attention to the vulnerable: to the children who, during the period of distance learning in the isolation of their homes, got separated from the environment that is supposed to teach them to know their way around and to bring them up. He should pay the same attention to those at the other side of the age spectrum who cope with the loneliness poorly. He should plan a festive dinner at the Christmas tree, a celebration, holiday, trips, wedding – anything pleasant that brings hope. We cannot let our hope to be taken from us; it helps to overcome the unendurable. And where there is hope, there is no fear imposed on us to make us obedient and easily influenced.

We all have something to be proud of. This year, our students got over distance learning, helping in hospitals, separation from their mates, when they lost the most valuable thing – far more valuable than the knowledge: the student life and social contacts. They keep studying and they offer their help to hospitals again. A lot of us did not have a chance to take even a little bit of vacation, we are tired and exhausted, but we keep curing our patients and teaching our students. I hereby thank everybody, honestly and with respect, for their help.

I can assure each of you that the next year will be one of those unforgettable ones. For us, for the academic community, for the Czech Republic - because for the first time in the history, a woman will stand as a head of the Charles University. And not just any woman. She is a woman from our faculty, our Milena, a colleague, and a friend - Professor Králíčková.

And the virus will get tired, the same way that another virus got tired after the Great War. I give it three years, maximum.

I wish all students, colleagues, and readers amazing Christmas and in the new year lots of health, merely pleasant concerns, and wide smiles without covered faces.

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