

Living the Spirit with Advent Joy

HOPE



The Church's prayer at the start of Advent is that we may live with *steadfast faith, joyful, hope and untiring love*. Faith, hope, and love are united in a Christ-like life. Hope for the Catholic theologian is described as an expectation that the promises made by God will be fulfilled. We possess this spiritual habit or virtue of hope because God is faithful. He also cannot deceive nor be deceived. Of His goodness we have all received.

Jesus proclaimed frequently the good news that became the foundation for the faith of his followers. He presented himself as the fulfillment of the promise made long before his coming on earth that there would be a Messiah, a Savior for His people. With His coming the long Advent of the Old Testament had come to an end. We can imagine the thrill He must have felt when someone recognized Him for who he is. I think here of Peter saying to Him: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*"

Because we have faith, we can have hope. As we look about us, we have choices every day to activate this virtue or to allow it to become distorted. We can really hope or fall into despair or presumption. Perhaps there is just a touch of both of these distortions in our lives. We manage somehow to hang on to just enough hope.

We have taken to heart the response given to the question: how much hope is enough? It is simply: Enough!

In Advent this hope of ours is meant to cast out fear. We are to be joyful in our reliance on the Lord's promises. Recently the Christopher News Notes had this very theme. It reminds us of the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: "I have said these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete." (John 5:11) The Lord could be joyful even as he faced His death. This is because joy comes from love, and Jesus as God is Love.

We hear the command: "*Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say, Rejoice!*" Today and tomorrow in your Advent days there is a chance, a good one, that you can find joy around you. While many of our traditions are too materialistic, even commercially exploited, I think I find in the observance of them a spirit of joy. The joy may be emotional or find expression in a general good feeling that this time of year can bring. It is joy!

The Spirit calls us to find in our very human joy some of the deeper meaning He brings into our lives. Our infused virtue of hope is made to work and bring us happiness. Jesus has come to us over and over again - a reason for spiritual happiness. His coming brings to us a joyful hope that will not be disappointed. That hope leads us to a perfection of spirit whereby we respond by loving God with our whole heart. That hope helps us to see Jesus as our friend.

We should share with one another our personal faith and our joyful hope. I admit that at times, like most people I have known, I get a bit down. Perhaps I even get a bit presumptuous. I find there is an antidote. It is to do what that song tells us to do: Count your blessings. How many I have been given. Reason enough to be happy. I often think, too, of how Msgr. Sacks has said to me: "You are only as happy as you allow yourself to be." Then I believe and hope that what lies ahead will be the joyful fulfillment of the promises of Christ. Won't it be great to find that God is Love and that He loves us?

This is repeated from a previous Advent. I hope you will find it worth your reflection.

BLESSING OF A CHRISITMAS CRECHE **OR MANGER SCENE**

The Sign of the Cross is made.

L. Our help is in the Name of the Lord

R. Who made heaven and earth.

L. We are at the beginning of the days of Christmas. At this season we will look on these images of sheep and shepherds, of Mary and Joseph and Jesus.

Then the Scripture is read.

L. Listen to the words of the Gospel according to St. Luke. *[Luke 2: 1-7]*

The Birth of Jesus Christ

In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The figures may be placed in the manger. A short period of silence is suggested.

All: The Lord's Prayer

L. Pray now for God's blessing as we look on these figures:

God of every nation and people, from the very beginning of creation
When our need for a Savior was great,
You sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary.
To our lives He brings joy and peace, justice,
mercy, and love.

Fill our house with hospitality, joy, gentleness and thanksgiving,
and guide our steps in the way of peace. **Amen.**

Thanks be to God.

[A Christmas carol may be sung.]

In this time of the pandemic, we should do all possible to maintain safety for others and ourselves. It will take some ingenuity to know what you can do safely to celebrate Christmas. Know that the liturgical Christmas time lasts for many days. Maybe trying to put celebrations into its parts over these days may help. Do not forget the spiritual of this feast day. May you have a blessed Christmas!