



A Newsletter from the Missions Office/Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States
Catholic Diocese of Columbus, Ohio

O Come, O Come Emmanuel, Ransom Captive Israel

***To monthly mission donors:
“Thank you for your support!”***

On behalf of His Excellency Frederick F. Campbell, the Bishop of Columbus, and Father Andrew Small, OMI, the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States, I would like to thank you for your prayers, sacrifices and financial support for the missions.

Unlike in Ohio, in the Philippines there are only two seasons – wet season and dry season. The temperature remains virtually the same the year through. It feels like an eternal summer. I like living in Ohio where the seasons are distinct from one another.

In autumn I enjoy the beauty of nature as the leaves turn brilliant colors before they fade and fall. Autumn reminds me again that the things of this world last but a moment and then they pass away.

Like nature, the Church’s liturgical seasons are beautiful. In late autumn/early winter, the Church celebrates the Advent season. It is a beautiful celebration of change, of longing and expectations. We light candles on our Advent wreaths that remind us that Jesus is the true light of the world. He is the light that dispels the darkness that blankets our fallen world. Those lit Advent

candles symbolize our ongoing commitment to come out of darkness and enter into God’s marvelous light.

During the Advent season, the Church invites us to reflect on Christ’s comings – His first coming more than 2000 years ago at the stable in Bethlehem as well as His second coming at a day and time we do not know. In His first coming we participate. His second coming we anticipate.

The comings of Christ (first and second) are the foci of the Advent season. Advent is an affirmation that Christ has already come, that Christ is already present with us today. Advent is also a preparation for His second coming at the end of time. We do not know the day and the hour of His return. And so we must be prepared. We need to repent for whatever hinders our readiness for His return.

In Old Testament times, God through the prophets taught Israel to expect a Messiah to set them free from sin and injustice. This longing and yearning for the Messiah was present through the centuries. As sin and injustice prevailed in their lives and in their land, they cried to the Lord.

As slaves in Egypt, the Israelites yearned for deliverance. All the victims of injustice around the world echo their cries to the Lord today. The Israelites hoped in God

to deliver them from their bitter oppression. God heard their cry. God delivered them.

This hope in God is what our world needs today. God is the world’s only hope. It is this hope, it is this God that brings to the world the anticipation of a King, Who will rule with truth, justice and with righteousness over His people and over all creation.

When Christ returns, it will be to complete the work that we, His followers, have begun in His name. At the end of time, Christ will then make whole that which we have accomplished in part.

During Advent we make Israel’s cry our own. Yes, Christ has already come. Yet we know that sin and injustice still have their terrible effects both in our lives and in our land. We are still much in need of the Messiah to daily set us free.

Let us acknowledge, especially during the Advent season, our need for God’s saving work. Let us long for our glorious freedom which belongs to the children of God.

While there is profound joy in the celebration of Christ’s first coming, there is also a sober warning to prepare for His second one. But even then, the prayer of Advent is still “O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.”

Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us

I did not get the job. I did not meet the criteria. The gentleman who interviewed me at the employment agency told me that to be “Santa Claus” at a mall, one must be a big man with blue eyes, white hair and a big stomach. The standards were too high for me. I did not have the qualifications.

Unlike these days in the United States, Santa was not famous in the Philippines when I was growing up. I could remember at school that Santa appeared once a year during our Christmas program. Santa was not the centerpiece of Christmas.

Instead, what is common in the Philippines is the nativity scene called “Belen.” Virtually every household has it during the Christmas season. Belen is like the Christmas tree and Santa in the United States.

In our culture, Santa seems to be becoming more and more the centerpiece of the Christmas celebration, especially among children. With Santa and gifts on their minds, it seems that Jesus is being pushed behind the scenes during the Christmas festivities.

I like the saying; “Jesus is the reason for the season.” Not Santa! I have nothing against Santa. He is a great saint. He was a good and generous bishop. But Christmas is not about Saint Nicholas.

“Jesus is the reason for the season” reminds us that an angel told Joseph that the child in Mary’s womb was to be named “Jesus,” which means “God saves.” “God saves” – that’s Jesus’ identity; that’s Jesus’ mission; that’s what Jesus does.

Jesus saves! That is what His life is all about. That is what His ministry is all about. That is what His death and resurrection proclaim.

Jesus saves! He saves us from emptiness and meaninglessness. Jesus saves us from discouragement and despair. He saves us from sin and sadness. He saves us from hopelessness and fear, and ultimately from death.

When it comes to us, who have been created in God’s image and likeness, God is not neutral; God is not disinterested; God is not distant; God is not passive; God is not detached. God cares. God is involved. God breaks into time, space and history to save us.

God is with us. That’s what the “Incarnation” means. That’s what Christmas is all about. The Word, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, became flesh and dwelt among us. God did not just somehow fill the world with His presence. God actually became visible by taking a human form. God wants us to tangibly experience, see and hear Him.

Jesus is truly present in our midst. He is in every tabernacle in the world. The red light flickering near the tabernacle reminds us that Jesus Christ, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity is truly with us.

The Holy Eucharist is the center of our life. The Holy Eucharist is the single greatest gift that God can give us in this life. The Holy Eucharist is the gift of His very self to us.

May the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament open our eyes so we can see what God has done for us and will continue to do for us. May we continue to grow not only

in gratitude, but also grow in our desire to be with him.

Merry Christmas!

Pope Francis’ December Prayer Intention:

That the elderly, sustained by families and Christian communities, may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming the new generations.

Quip:

By the time a man discovers that money doesn’t grow on trees, he’s already on the limb.

Quote:

We spend the first twelve months of our children’s lives teaching them to walk and talk and the next twelve years telling them to sit down and keep quiet. -Phyllis Diller

A joke a priest can tell... LOL!

A Jesuit, a Dominican, and a Franciscan were walking along an old road, debating the greatness of their orders. Suddenly, an apparition of the Holy Family appeared in front of them, with Jesus in a manger and Mary and Joseph praying over him. The Franciscan fell on his face, overcome with awe at the sight of God born in such poverty. The Dominican fell to his knees, adoring the beautiful reflection of the Trinity and the Holy Family. The Jesuit walked up to Joseph, put his arm around his shoulder, and said, “So, have you thought about where to send him to school?”

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