

**December 23, 2018 - Christmas: A Message of Hope and Love!** (Column for Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas)

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 23, we lit the fourth candle "Love" of the Advent Wreath and we knew that Christmas had almost arrived: our Advent journey was coming to an end just 24 hours later... with Christmas' Eve celebrations. In last week's bulletin, I wrote to you extensively about the names on each of the four new Advent banners hanging in the church: **Hope, Peace, Joy and Love!** Several of you had made earlier comments, including why "Faith" was not mentioned. In preparing for this Christmas message to you, I have given some further thoughts.

I also benefited from some insightful comments made at our weekly Scripture Prayer Group (Tuesday morning after 9am Mass/Friday Faith and Fellowship 7pm). Sr. Rosario also told me how at Sunday's Children Liturgy, she explained to the children a simple meaning of our new Advent banner identifying each of the words with the **name of Jesus: Jesus is Hope. Jesus is Peace. Jesus is Joy. Jesus is Love.**

This simplicity makes it easy for children to understand not only the meaning of the Advent Journey but also the meaning of **Christmas**. I believe it is also helpful for adults. It is all about our own **Relationship with Jesus!** We believe that **God is Love** and **Love is God!** We also believe that at Christmas, for the first-time ever in the history of the world, **God** becomes **Man** on earth and this changes the whole world once for all and brings all of us the **Hope of Salvation: Jesus** (Joshua in Aramaic which means **Savior**) is both **God** (as second person of the Holy Trinity) and **Man** (as the son of Mary and the Holy Spirit). **Jesus is God. God is Love.** So we can affirm too that **Jesus is Love!!** Like children, we too can relate more easily with Jesus, both man and God, than with God alone. Like children, we can say at Christmas: Jesus is my Hope, my Peace, my Joy, and my Love.

The lighting of each of the four candles of the Advent Wreath reminds us also of the lighting of the Paschal Candle at Easter. As Jesus told his disciples: "**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life**" (John 8:12). Jesus became man so that he could die for us on the Cross to save us. From the moment of his birth, through his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, **Jesus remains our light and our salvation!** These are the mysteries of Incarnation and Resurrection that we celebrate at **every Mass** when as promised, Jesus returns to us as the Bread of Life: "**I am the Bread of Life... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has Eternal Life**" (John 6:48 and 6:55). Every Mass is Heaven on Earth, as Heaven is to be with God and God comes at every Mass as the Body and Blood of Christ become really present at the time of Consecration of the bread and wine. **Christmas is Christ's Mass.** At every Mass we celebrate both Christmas and Easter.

**Today the Angel of the Lord announces to each of us,** as he did 2018 years ago to the shepherds keeping night watch over their flock near Bethlehem: "**Behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David, a Savior has been born who is Christ and Lord.**" (Luke 2:10-11). At every Christmas Mass, like at every Mass, we recall this amazing birth of our Savior. Yes, God sent His only son to all of us so that we can be saved. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). **This is the Christmas message of Hope and Love!** I trust in you Jesus. I believe that you are my savior. I believe that you are my light and my salvation. **I hope to be with you forever, both on earth and in heaven. Jesus, you are my hope, my only hope! Jesus, you are my love forever: I know that you love me and my greatest desire is to love you as you love me!**

To paraphrase Bernadette Farrell's lyrics of the beautiful song "Christ be our light", in a world where there is so much darkness, we are longing for **light**; in a world where there is so much despair, we are longing for **hope**; in a world where there is so much hatred, we are longing for **love!** Christmas is a special time every year when we can find that hope and love we are longing for and that we can recognize that without Jesus, we are nothing, and that with Jesus, everything is possible.

**May we find Hope and Love on Christmas Day! Come Lord Jesus, fill my heart with your hope and love!**

May God bless each one of us and may we all have the best-ever Christmas!

One in Christ,  
*Father Alain*