

December Reflection

Thank God for the opportunity to write something on this Advent and Christmas message of reflection. I love Christmas and all that leads up to it and apart from Easter it is my favorite time of celebration. I love to embrace everything that surrounds the season and celebrate with joy the coming of Our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Gospel: Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36 (The Coming of the Son of Man)

This, and the readings of the weeks leading up to this are sometimes difficult to focus on and it seems like there is no joy or anticipation in the waiting period of Advent for the event of Christmas, the birth of Christ. As we look closer and break this Gospel open we can see phrases of great importance and excitement.

“And they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” (vs. 27)

We know that we celebrate Christmas as the coming of Christ for our Salvation and we have many different visions of this. Whether it is the babe in swaddling clothes or the vision of Christ in a cloud, we know that He has come in power and glory for our salvation. During Advent we prepare ourselves for the celebration of His coming. We prepare, by praying, reconciling, and making ready our hearts.

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day catch you by surprise.” (vs. 34)

Some of you may be thinking that you should not overdo your celebration and are taking the words literally. Well perhaps this applies. However, for many of us we do get wrapped up in our preparation for Christmas we often let our hearts fall asleep or become over jubilant for presents, shopping and other things. While this is going on our hearts are beating very slowly for the reality of His coming. Well, we may need a “heavenly pace maker” to kick start our heart to giving and kindness. We often are tired this time of year because of Christmas Hampers and the many requests for food, rent and other help. Sometimes our hearts are hardened and we forget that we are not to judge. We become overwhelmed. Our hearts need to be rejuvenated so that we can “Serve Christ in the Poor” with love, justice and charity. Let our hearts see Christ as we serve over and over again. Pray that our anxieties of life are replaced with love of Christ and vigilant waiting for His coming.

“Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.” (vs. 36)

We must be vigilant, both in our service to the poor and in our prayer. Don't let the planning and process allow us to destroy in our hearts the waiting and anticipation of Christ's coming and the celebration of His birth. Be vigilant in our prayer and the love of those around us. Each person is Christ in a different form, each traffic jam or delay is an opportunity to be with Jesus in prayer. Each home visit and hamper delivery is a chance to be fervent in prayer of thanksgiving and service. We are called to be servants of the poor, we are called to serve Christ in the poor and this is part of our Advent and is part of our vigilance.

Prayer: Lord God, our heavenly Father, help us to make ready our hearts and homes for your coming. Help us to serve you in those people around us, our families, our Vincentian families and our friends the poor who you lovingly place before us. We ask for the prayers of St. Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, Blessed Sister Rosalie and our loving Lady and Patroness, Mary to guide us and influence us to tend the sheep and serve with justice and charity always. We ask this through Christ our Lord whom we serve in the poor and each other. Amen

May you have a joyous Christmas Season and an Advent that is truly filled with hope and waiting. I also include this message that I wrote for Vincentians in the west and I have adapted it for you.

Joy

My dear Vincentian co-workers across Canada, I wish you Peace and Joy. December is a time of peace and joy. It is a time to reflect and be thoughtful. It is a time of waiting and excitement. It is a time to be thankful. Joy is the outgrowth of thankfulness as surely as the rose is an outgrowth of the bud. When you have joy in your heart, love will be there too, and peace is always with them. Peace seems to be elusive in these times of terrorism and war, but always remember that peace begins with each one of us and we spread that peace through prayer with love and joy.

Pure joy seems to be a low ranking quality in today's world, yet everyone can find joy somewhere, if only for a moment or two. For our Vincentian Family at this time of year as we serve our friends, the poor, we want to shout, "Impossible" at this statement. What can our friends be joyous about? They are sick alone, out of work, in debt, addicted to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes. Many feel that love has left them and our world is in a frightening state and many may feel God has abandoned them. Things pile up and we may shout, "Where is the joy?" Joy is found in little things, in simple comforts. For our friends and neighbours, it is the hamper you bring. How you light up their day with the food, and gifts. How glorious they feel when they see your warm loving smiling face bringing Christ to their door. They will notice that you see Christ in them and be thankful for their four snug walls, the food that nourishes them, the clothes to keep them warm and the bed to rest in. We too, can be joyful in all that we have. All that God has blessed us with.

Joy is abounding in the blueness of the sky with its fleecy clouds by day and its star studded stillness at night. You can listen for the song of a bird, feel the mighty power of the wind on a cold blustery winter day, or the warm breeze on a gentle winter day. You can find joy in the fragrances that surround you at Christmas and during Advent. You can revel in the preparations and fragrances of baking, peppermint candy canes, eggnog, mulled wine and turkey. The majesty of joy is in our country, the rain forests and rough coast lines and beauty of Long Beach, the majesty of the Rockies dressed in their magnificent winter splendour, the stretching prairies for as far as the eye can see, the majesty and diversity of Ontario, the beauty and history of Quebec, and the awesome grandeur of Atlantic Canada with its magical coast. Joy is the hustle and bustle of shopping and the nosy city streets with its multitude of traffic jams. Take these moments to thank God for our freedom and our ability to drive or shop. Find joy in all we do in His name.

Make your list of joys a long one, for joy is an important ingredient, not only at Christmas but your whole life through. It adds sweetness to living; it makes the plainest person radiant; it attracts friends and makes the darkest situation brighter. All that is part of Christmas is joy, even the commercialism, because in it we see the preparations for our Saviour, each tinkling bell and shimmering light is a tribute to Jesus the source of joy. To get joy, you must give it; to keep joy you must scatter it. Just as the angels brought tidings of joy to the world more than two thousand years ago, again today in our confused times, the still bring us the same message of "Peace, good will toward all." We join the heavenly host of choirs who sang Joy to the World! The Lord has come."

Each and every one of you at one time or another in the past year has brought joy to someone and many have brought me joy. Whether that was your warm smile; sharing a lunch; an email, or a cheery hello, each person I have met across Canada in this great Society has touched me and spread joy as we work together for the poor and pray for each other. I have felt the warmth of the many prayers from many of you and hope you feel prayers from me and other Vincentians as we continue to pray for each other. We share the joy and love with our friends and neighbours the poor as only Vincentians can. So keep spreading the joy and may the joy of the Lord be with you this Christmas Season and may that joy and peace continue all through 2004.

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