

Well, Its Advent once again, and so this is a time when we can all very easily become extremely busy and preoccupied with many things as we prepare for Christmas. There is the shopping, the decorating, the parties, the baking, the Christmas cards and so on. We all experience the hectic pace that every December seems to bring. And yet Advent is supposed to be a time that asks us to take a step back and quietly reflect on some things about our faith and our lives. If it seems like we can't ever get a moment of peace, we should ask ourselves, what do we think about or worry about from day to day? What is it that causes us anxiety?

Sometimes people agonize over what might be, rather than what is. Sometimes people can become afraid over what could happen. When anxiety fills people's lives, it can eventually turn into depression and despair. Therefore, in order to counteract these feelings, some people look for ways to have control over people and future events. Did you ever wonder why there is so much fascination with things like horoscopes, and astrology psychic readings or the occult? People search out these things in part because they want certainty over their lives. Some people want guarantees that things will turn out the way they want them to. At the root of this search for certainty is a desire for power over time, history, and ultimately, over other people. People desire these things because they haven't placed their trust in God.

What people sometimes fail to realize is that at the heart of the writings and sayings of Jesus about the end times is not some kind of secret code. They are instead challenges for us to live life to the full here and now so that the future will not be something for us to fear. Bad things inevitably happen. But how do we respond to such situations? Are we able to respond with hope, with anticipation, and with joy?

Advent is supposed to be a time of hope, anticipation and joy. Are we a people who have joy in our lives? Joy is not the same thing as happiness or pleasure. In fact the only thing that joy has in common with happiness and pleasure is that once you experience it, you want more. A person can be experiencing sorrow, or grief or misery, and still have joy. Joy is an attitude, it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is a kind of contentment or satisfaction. The effects of being without joy is to be without hope, to despair, to become cynical and give up on God's grace. We definitely see this in our society. How often do we lower our expectations for other people? Why for instance do some adults give alcohol to minors? I am told that this is a big problem on this island. That some parents even here in this parish will throw a party for their 15 or 16 year old kid and either provide plenty of alcohol for all the kids in attendance themselves, or just look the other way while the kids are

drinking. Why do they do this? One of the reasons is that, well they are just going to do it anyway. Too easily do we give up on people. Too easily do we give up on God's grace.

When Mary was asked to become the mother of the Son of God, she could have let many worries and anxieties get the best of her. What if Joseph divorces her? What will people think? What would happen to her? But instead she put her faith and trust totally in God's hands.

Therefore, this Advent season, lets take the time to evaluate our lives. Are we filled with anxiety and fear? It is not healthy for us to be so preoccupied with problems and with what might happen that we fail to live fully in the present. Indeed, the only true preparation for the coming kingdom of God is to be living the kind of life that God wants us to live here and now. When we live lives of mercy and compassion, of justice with peace, of reconciliation and self-sacrifice, the Kingdom is already experienced. Living like this will mean that we have nothing to fear, no matter what the future will bring.

In this Advent season we prepare for the coming of the Lord by learning to love and live fully in the present. In Advent we prepare for the coming of the Lord by examining our lives and surrendering ourselves into God's hands. Because it is in those moments that we experience the hope, the anticipation and the joy that Advent is meant to be.

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