



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

2019 Advent Message from Bishop Stephen J. Berg

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is with great joy that I send you Advent greetings! I would like to express to you my heartfelt thanks for all your prayers during my recovery. Things are progressing nicely, and every day I feel stronger. As the Church's liturgical year comes to an end, we look with eyes of hope toward the dawn of a new beginning with the season of Advent.

The first part of Advent ("Coming" in Latin) focuses our attention on the end times. In the Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent, Jesus reminds his disciples to be alert. This alertness becomes the primary posture of our lives. We are daily about the business of discerning what God is asking us and we do this by becoming *little* before Him. This *littleness* helps us be constantly alert to the movement and workings of the Holy Spirit. To this end, we are essentially an Advent people—eagerly awaiting the return of Christ.

The readings for the second and third weeks of Advent look to Saint John the Baptist heralding the coming of the Messiah. John is revealed as the messenger coming before the chosen one to prepare the way. He is the one foretold by the prophet Isaiah crying out in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord" (Is. 40:3). John's message is one of great urgency, calling for renewed faithfulness to the covenant relationship established in the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12: 37-42). In our time, the message of Saint John the Baptist speaks to the heart of who we are. God has called us as His own, and as His people we have the responsibility to live up to the expectations of this relationship by loving God with an undivided heart and loving our neighbor as our self (c.f. Mt. 22:37).

December 17 marks the beginning of the oldest segment of this liturgical season. The tone of Advent shifts ushering in the birth of Christ. In a special way, the Church waits in joyful expectation for the coming of the Savior. The Gospels recall for us the days just prior to the birth of Jesus. From early times in the Church, these eight days before Christmas were intense days of spiritual preparation. These days begin with the Great O Antiphons in the Liturgy of the Hours. These antiphons all begin with the interjection, "O," and use different names for God found in the Old Testament. They recall the great things God has done for us and make the plea for His return. "O Emmanuel" come and save us!

As I write you this letter I am reminded of our beloved patronesses, Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. It is Our Lady of Guadalupe, with a black ribbon around her waist, who appears to us as a pregnant mother, filled with maternal hope as she joyfully awaits the birth of her son and our Savior. Advent is the season of Our Blessed Mother, the time of expectation and hope.

So too, during the season of Advent in the year 1886, as Saint Thérèse was preparing to celebrate the birth of our Savior, the Savior of the world was preparing her to experience a moment of grace that would change her life forever.

“On that luminous *night* which sheds such light on the delights of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, the gentle, *little* Child of only one hour, changed the night of my soul into rays of light. He made Himself subject to weakness and suffering for love of me. He made me strong and courageous. Since that night I have never been defeated, but rather walked from victory to victory. The source of my tears was dried up” (*The Story of a Soul*, p. 97).

The commercial world tries for our attention from Thanksgiving Day to Christmas morning. We choose to set our gaze elsewhere during this much-needed time of holy preparation. So, let us make the most of this time by taking advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, increasing our daily Mass participation, acts of charity for the poor, and making special time to pray before the Blessed Sacrament as we indeed look with eyes of hope toward the celebration of our Saviors birth. Christmas will be much happier if we take time to do these things.

With prayerful best wishes for a blessed Advent, I am,

Most Reverend Stephen J. Berg
Bishop of Pueblo