

## PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

## Advent — a Waiting Period

From womb to tomb we live out our pilgrimage in a waiting period. Our whole being cries out for a Savior to rescue us from our fears and insecurity. Advent is the season that so beautifully expresses our anxiety. "Drop down dew, O Heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down justice. Let the earth be open and bud forth salvation."



Our whole life, given the humility to admit it, identifies us with this cry for a sense of security and for someone to rescue us from the hard reality of today and bring us to the hope of a better tomorrow.

We pray each day the Advent prayer, "Thy Kingdom come." I wonder how much we understand the implications of that invitation! Advent calls us to face a challenge — to open our hearts to a Guest whose presence assuredly will be disturbing. For He asks hard questions and looks for honest answers.

For those of us, and our number is legion, who are tempted to avoid the pain of **what may be** and opt for the comfort of the 'status quo', our Advent prayer has to be: "Lord Jesus, come, but slacken your pace. You are welcome but not just now."

Advent can be a great grace or another moment of resistance. For it is not easy to be born again. As long as we stubbornly cling to what we have and what we are, we are loathe to leave the womb of our sheltered security to face a world ever challenging us to become someone better than we are.

If you love Advent, you accept the challenge of letting go of your dormant past and of daring to venture forth into a world of multiple options and possibilities to growth. Advent calls us to accept seriously the Lord's ultimatum, "He who loves his life loses it" and, lest we miss the message, He puts it another way: "Whoever puts his hand to the plow and then turns back is not worthy of the Kingdom of God."

I see Advent as a season of hope and an annual reminder that the best is yet to come. It is a time of encouragement that a new world can be born even with simple folk like ourselves. Advent is now for all who have the hope and faith and determination that a loving Providence can transform our wildest dreams into a splendid reality long before His final Advent.

Advent is a yearly reminder that the best of life is still ahead. This season of hope urges us to reach out and embrace the possibilities of a new world being born around us. It is a call to embrace the 'what may be' — secure in the arms of a God who so loves us that He invites us to await with patience and trust His promise of fulfillment that reaches beyond our wildest expectations.

Our God is filled with surprises. That is why He told us to be as little children who love surprises. As adults, we prefer planning — keeping the unexpected at a minimum. Advent celebrates the surprises that God sprang on His Chosen People — up to and including the Advent of His Son.

Those who did not want their Messiah to be a surprise had inaugurated a planning process with a clearly defined job description and a role clarification for their Messiah. What a disappointment — His appointment by the Father!

The same God who surprised His contemporaries 2,000 years ago is waiting to surprise us today. If you have all the answers and leave nothing to the unexpected, Advent never happens.

Johannes Baptist Metz writes this reflection about Advent which, I believe, sadly reflects the welcome we usually give to our Divine Guest:

"What have we done to our faith in Christ? Have we not frequently manipulated it to keep God's expected coming at arm's length, to push it into a distant past or a distant future? We have split up God's coming into two distant episodes, relegating one to a distant date in the past and the other to an unforeseeable future. Then we have provided ourselves with a profane,

secularized, in-between period where we are free to run away from the pressing claims of God's coming and to construct a new image of man for ourselves."

There is little of personal demand in a faith that only leads us to the Christmas Crib to kneel before the Infant and to utter a prayer of thanks for God's entrance into human history 2,000 years ago. And faith in His final coming does not seem demanding either.

Unlike the early Christians who had beheld the human face of God and were impatient and restless for His return, we do not share their anxiety. We have allocated that Advent to some future generation which we feel is surely not ours to worry about.

But to celebrate the Advent that is **now** is demanding. To be open and receptive to His coming now means that we have to become more than we are at this moment. It means expanding our horizons, desiring to mature despite the pain of growth, reaching out to others, to give, and to love. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." And that first Advent is an awesome fact of history. "The Word is exalted in glory and will return among us." And this is the Advent yet to come. "The Word transfigures hearts and minds and that Advent is now — this hour — this day — for all who offer hospitality to Christ."

Let us phrase our welcome in these words:

"Father, the day of salvation draws ever near; your light grows steadily around us to pierce the darkness of our minds and open us to your promise of life. Your Son, Jesus Christ comes in the midst of us, now in Spirit where once He came in flesh. Open our eyes that we may see His presence and our ears that we may hear His call, in all the events that fill our lives today. Give us courage to say YES to Him, to carry on the work of love and service for which He was sent and for which He calls us. Give birth to Your Son in our lives that through us He may give life to the world."

## Pope to Children:

## 'Grow in Love Of the Church'

On Oct. 30 the Holy Father received 10,000 children from the elementary schools of Rome at the end of their pilgrimages in the basilicas to acquire the Jubilee indulgence.

Beloved children of our Rome diocese!

You have come in large numbers this morning, with the Cardinal Vicar, and with your parents and teachers, to bring us the joyful greeting of innocence and freshness and to celebrate the Jubilee at the tomb of the first Apostle, as if driven inwardly by that hope which, like charity and faith, each of you received as a gift in holy Baptism, and which represents, because of the riches of its supernatural and human content, the fragrant flower of your age.



While the Holy Year has now reached its peak with the frequent and devout assemblies of these days, a new note is added to it with your presence, a different, colored note, which makes it more beautiful and complete: with you, among you, we can rightly speak of the "Children's Jubilee".

Do you know what it means? It means in the first place a "special year", which we call "Holy Year". Why special? Why holy? Because it is made, it is instituted precisely for the good of our souls. You see: it is

necessary to pay attention to differences of times. There are, for example, the seasons, different from one another; there are different days, school days and holidays; there are different hours, for play, for work, for sleep; and so on. In the same way there is in the sacred calendar of life, every twenty-five years, a special year, like ours, 1975, which is intended specially for prayer, penitence, examination of conscience . . . and is called Holy Year. You will have heard about it already; and then you will have seen the crowds of pilgrims coming to Rome to pray, to remember that they are Christians, to be converted and become good.

For you, why do we say it is a "holy year"? For two reasons particularly: first, to make a great examination of conscience, with regard to one's own life, one's own future. You must think of yourselves . . . second: you must make resolutions, programs. Remember the baptismal promises; do you wish to be and remain "Christians"? This is the time to confirm your choice, your decision, your commitment: I wish to be always a sincere and strong Christian! This is the Holy Year!

We wish, therefore, to express to you sincere thanks for the answer that you are giving, in such an appropriate way, to the invitation that the Church has addressed to all the faithful. Your pilgrimage professes that you feel "involved", and intend, in fact, to be among the first, in living the religious renewal, at which the present Jubilee aims. And we also thank those who promoted the initiative: the school authorities who encouraged it; the leaders of the diocesan

Office for Education and the Italian Section of the Pontifical Society for Holy Childhood.

The name of this Missionary Society, of which many of you are members, is enough to inspire in us a second sentiment, one of fatherly encouragement and good wishes. You are well aware that it is not possible to be Christians only in name, nor would it be enough to say that one had the faith in one's own individual conscience. For faith is also communion, that is, communication and irradiation, and it requires, therefore, a serious effort to share it and spread it. You, too, must be apostles of the faith, growing in love of the Church, educating yourselves to a deep missionary spirit, showing interest and concern not only for the children in mission countries, but also, and in the first place, for the children of your own age whom you meet in everyday life.

If we had more time at our disposal, we would like to recall so many cases of children and adolescents who exercised this apostolate, in an exemplary, holy way. We will be content, on the contrary, to sum up the exhortation in one short sentence: "Children also have their own apostolic work to do"; it is written in a Document of the II Vatican Council, "in their own way, they can be true living witnesses to Christ among their companions" (Decree Apostolicam Actuositatem, n. 12). Living witnesses to Christ: these are the great words of the Council, this is our particular souvenir, this is the instruction we entrust to you for the Jubilee you will celebrate in the year two thousand!