

Advent illuminates life's deep longing

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

There were tears in the young mother's eyes as she showed me the picture of her newly adopted son. He is a Korean child and the picture caught him grinning as he struggled to sit as upright as his 7-month-old muscles and frame would allow him to do.

The mother spoke with great joy about being a parent to this baby for whom she and her husband had waited for such a long time. First, they waited for years hoping that they might be able to conceive. Then they waited through the long decision-making process, which is part of the adoption process.

I think of that very happy couple in these early days of Advent. And I must confess that I envy just a little their experience of adoption, which will make Advent a special time for them this year.

If Advent is a time of expectation and renewed longing, these years of waiting for

their child will attune them in a special way to that dimension of this holy season. If Advent is a time in which we yearn for the completion of what God has already begun, then their hopes and dreams for the growth of their son will also prepare them in a beautiful way for Advent prayer.

And, if Advent calls us to recognize God's loving presence in all that is real, surely these parents will be especially blessed as they hold close their little son who is made in God's holy image.

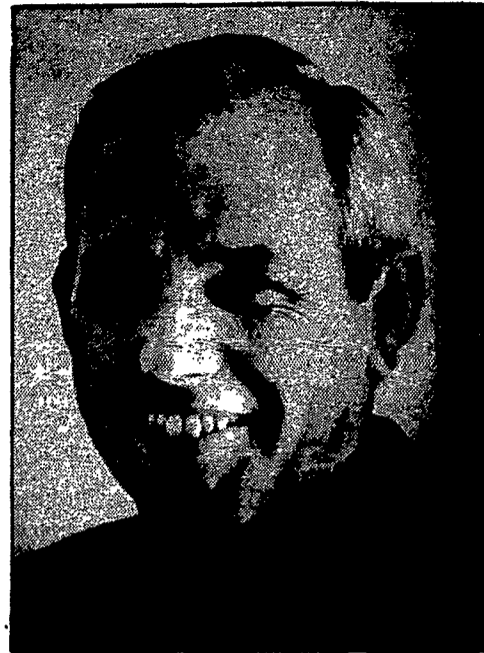
We may not have had the special privilege of adopting a child, but I hope that all of us can identify in our human experience some event or relationship or longing that somehow draws us into the spirit of Advent.

Is there anything which you long for in a particular way and for which you pray daily? The health of a loved one? Freedom from some addiction? Freedom for oppressed people? Reconciliation of family mem-

bers? Employment? Friends to care about you? Greater protection for the unborn? An increase of human services for those in need?

Or perhaps your prayers focus on the desire for continued growth and deepening of good things you already experience. An expansion of what seems to be the recovery of freedom among the oppressed people of Eastern Europe? An ever more mature and deeper relationship with your spouse or fiancée? That a relationship which has come to mean more and more to you might someday lead to marriage?

It may well be that you yearn most for the grace to live in the presence of God and to recognize God's loving presence in the people, circumstances and events of daily life. That is not an easy accomplishment. And when we are able to read reality in that way, we can do it only because of our faith and the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. I am not talking about predicting the future.



I speak rather of accepting the reality of the present and realizing that it is in the present place and time that we are called to respond to God with all of our spirit and being.

That can be relatively easy when things are going our way. It's generally more difficult when a strong dimension or aspect of our present experience is painful for us or strongly frustrates us. We can so easily yearn for the experience to pass so that we can get on with our lives. Surely there is nothing wrong with praying and working to move beyond unpleasant aspects of life. But we need to take care that whatever the circumstances, we do our best to respond with the peace and simplicity and reconciling spirit of Jesus Himself.

It's a tall order but it is inevitably a source of inner peace, allowing us to share a spirit which is one of hope and encouragement.

So dear friends, let me encourage you to rest when and as you can during the Advent season so that you can consciously and peacefully invite the Lord to open for you the life-giving dimension and possibilities of the more troublesome dimension of your life. And when you do that, please pray for your friend.

Peace to all.

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Let the little children come unto me.

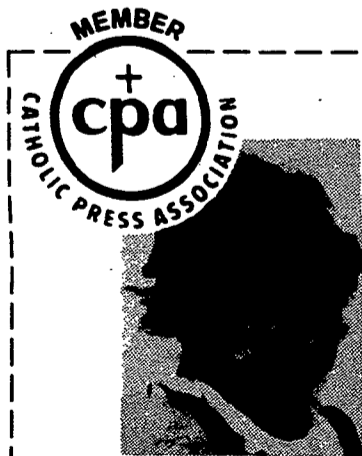
— Mark 10:14



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