

Reserve time to listen to the Lord

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Monday, December 2.

Through the month of November, I told you about a number of activities in which I was engaged. I remember, for example, mentioning the semiannual meeting of our National Conference of Catholic Bishops and some of the work we did then.

I also recall telling you about my trip to Atlanta and about how fascinating an experience it was to be with the priests of that part of the country and the catechists of the archdiocese.

And although I did not write about it, you know that the ongoing work of our Catholic School reorganization is another example of many issues that have occupied a considerable amount of my time and energy these days.

Given all of that, I confess to you on this Advent Monday that this holy season arrived to find me less prepared than I'd like to be this year. Oh, I knew Advent was coming all right, but it dawned on me when I sat down to write this column that I really hadn't done much to ready my heart for it during the weeks of November.

Just to sit and write these words — although writing itself is yet another activity — is a salutary reminder to me of what this season is meant to be: a time to remember and contemplate God's gra-



A LONG THE WAY

cious kindness to us in Jesus, and a time to express our faith and hope that Jesus will one day bring to completion the good work begun in us.

Our memory is a marvelous gift, in that it allows us to travel back 2,000 years and to recreate in our mind's eye the miracle of that first Christmas.

In such a journey of memory, Mary and Joseph and the babe do not long remain statues or pictures or characters in a carol.

Rather, they come to life as real individuals who can walk with us as intimate friends because they share our human condition, understand us and love us very deeply.

Advent also allows us — indeed, it teaches us — to be an expectant, hopeful people. It invites us to trust in the Lord and to understand the passing, sometimes erratic, experiences of life in the context of the Lord's enduring love for all us.

Such trust and understanding occur when we are willing to reserve some time each day for no purpose other than to be still in the Lord's presence, to listen to the Lord as carefully as we possibly can.

A wise friend reminded me recently that listening to the Lord is about all we can do. We can offer the time. We can listen with care. The rest is up to the Lord.

The alternative to that is to fall into the kind of trap in which I found myself when Advent began — that is, the trap of being so caught up in the urgent, pressing affairs of daily living that I was forgetting the truly important things that give life its deepest value.

If your experience these days has been anything like my own, let me invite you to join me in making an honest effort each day of this Advent season to commit some time to the sole and exclusive purpose of being quiet and being open to the Lord's ways with us.

I yearn to do that and will appreciate your good company in the weeks ahead. Peace to all.

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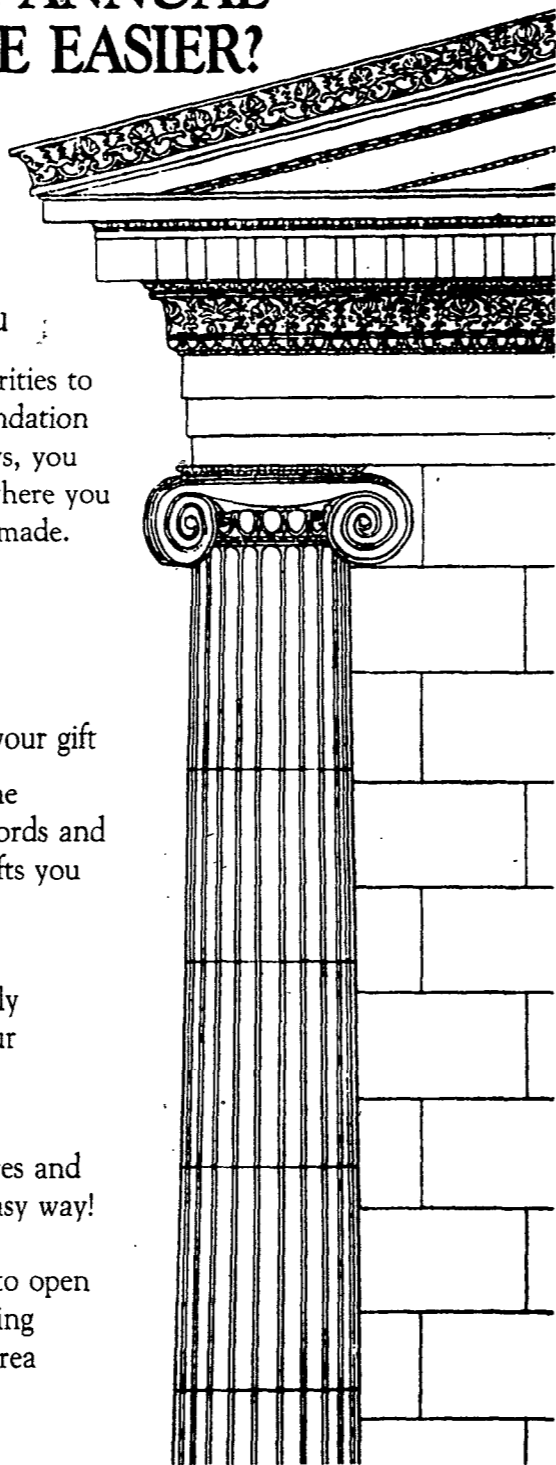
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