

Niece's growth inspires thankfulness

• To remember and to give thanks for the wonderful works of God
 • and, in the remembering and thanksgiving, to express our joyful hope that the good things God has begun in us God will one day bring to completion.

These, I think, express in a simple way the invitation and call of Advent. This season is our way of acknowledging that what has begun is not yet complete, that there is a now to life and also a not yet. The gratitude of Advent — based on our awareness of what has been and is now — is meant to ground us and sustain us in the joyful hope in which we're called to live as persons who believe in the promise of Christ.

We're invited to that kind of prayer in many ways during this time of year. For example, our readings for the Sundays of Advent call us strongly to such prayer. So do the lovely celebrations of Lessons and Carols, which have become increasingly popular in our parishes in recent years. Such family customs as the Advent wreath do the same. And there are, no doubt, many other ways in which our families and communities help one another to pray during this special season of our church year.

I know that all of these Advent activities are helpful to me because, in one way or another, they nourish my soul. That's because they all help me to be more alert than I would otherwise be to the ways in which God speaks to me in the ordinary events of life.

Let me give you an example: Last weekend

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

I had occasion to stay overnight at my sister's home in Waterford. When I arrived I noticed hanging on the family bulletin board one of Margaret's recent mathematics exams. I was delighted to learn that she had done well in the exam because I knew that she had found the course to be particularly challenging — so much so that she had arranged for some tutoring to help her learn the material.

As I stood looking at the paper I became aware that what Margaret had worked so hard to master was far beyond me, and that she had succeeded because she was committed to her work at a level deeper than any I had ever achieved when I was her age. And the moment, even though it was a very brief one, put me in touch not only with Margaret's growth over the years, but also with my own.

The next day my sister, for reasons I now forget, showed me a letter I had written to Margaret from Rome in March 1979. In those years my practice had been to convey love and greetings to Margaret in letters I

wrote to my sister and brother-in-law. Then, at the ripe old age of 6, Margaret had decided and communicated to me through my sister that she was now old enough to receive her own correspondence. The letter my sister showed me was that first "all her own" letter Margaret ever received from me.

The math test and that first letter were wonderful gifts in this Advent season because they made real and deeply human for me the invitation and opportunity offered by this beautiful season. By putting me in touch with the life and growth of this bright, lovely young woman who has brought such joy to my life, they invited me to reflect more deeply on the love of God and the countless, wonderful ways in which God enters the life of all of us. The young woman who once was 6 years old is now a student of higher math. It's hard to believe that, but I know it's true.

What about Margaret's tomorrows? What will tomorrow hold for her and her sisters, for all of us and the people we care about? I don't know the answer to any of those questions, but the gift of Advent strengthens my confidence that, no matter what happens, God will be there with us, faithful to the promise and bringing to fullness the good things already begun in us.

I hope that you have been able to find some calm moments for yourselves during these days which can be so filled with activity.

Peace to all.

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol. 107 No. 12 December 14, 1995

Published weekly except the last Thursday in December.
 Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Second-Class postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.
 POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624

MISSION NEWS

Lord, help me prepare for your coming by holding your mission-poor in my heart:
 ...the tiny child, abandoned, bravely sitting in his crib, holding back tears
 ...the grandmother, in the midst of war, waiting, waiting, in a camp for the homeless
 ...the young family with none of this world's goods, searching for the treasure we call faith.



Home for Abandoned Children, Bangladesh

For them, Christ is born, come to bring good news to the poor.

By my prayers and generous help, let them know the Good News through me! As Christmas comes, Lord, help me to be your missionary, here, today, right where I am.

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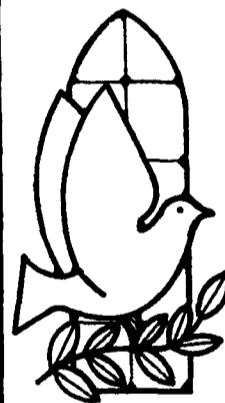
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