

Advent invites us to remember and anticipate

The special invitation of Advent is to be mindful of both the "already" and the "not yet." Advent invites us to remember and to celebrate the wonderful things God has done for us, most especially the gift of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. This holy season also calls us to a renewed awareness that one day Christ will come again in glory to bring to completion the wonderful work of our redemption.

How does this dual invitation, renewed each year in the rhythms of our liturgical life, speak to our hearts in these early days of December, 1996? There are a number of ways in which we can respond, some helpful and some not so helpful. Let me mention some of the possibilities:

1.) We can experience what the idiom of the day calls the "been there, done that" syndrome and make no investment at all in the season. As I observe in others and experience in myself a tendency to this kind of non-response, I sense that it does not come from ill will or denial of the season's worth. Rather, it comes from a sense of being overwhelmed by the demands and pace of life. We get ourselves in a frame of mind that says, in effect, that change is so slow and we are so busy that — much as we would like to — there's just no time to get involved in this kind of Advent awareness.

2.) We can get into the season and remember the past in a way that makes us its captive. I mean remembering the past

along the way

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in such fashion that we idealize it. When this happens, we can focus our dreams and our energy on the re-creation of a reality that can not be recaptured. And, in the process, we can forget that the past, while it had its good points, was never perfect. Besides, when we focus on going back to the past, we miss the real opportunities that lie before us.

3.) We can also accept Advent's invitation by focusing on the future in a way that is neither in the spirit of the season nor very helpful for daily living. I mean that we can look to the future, not with a joyful hope in the Lord's fidelity, but with a sense that life is so complex, so overwhelming that nothing we do can make much difference anyway. In that frame of mind, we tend to hunker down, dare little and become passive in the face of life's challenges. Life then becomes an ordeal. We are here to survive rather than to grow into the kind of persons God wants us to be.

4.) Or we can receive Advent's dual invitation to remember the past and anticipate the future in a way that makes us deeply attentive to the present. I mean the present not in some vague and abstract way. Rather, I refer to it as today's living opportunity to be aware of the Lord's faithful love for us every moment that we live. To me that means being alive to the moment, to what is real and alive deep inside us, what is happening around us, and how both of those realities speak to our hearts.

What is your deepest concern just now? And what is your deepest joy? What are the origins of each? What are your hopes for the future relative to them? What steps are available to you to advance the situations in directions for which you hope?

What is your best guess about how the person you love most in this world would answer the above questions? How might you support her or him in advancing her or his issues in favorable directions?

Have you recently experienced any forceful reminder that there are real, sometimes painful limits to what we can achieve or control? What was that reminder? How did you respond to it? Would you consider revisiting that response in the course of your Advent prayer?

I hope that these days of preparation for the Christmas feast will be blessed ones for you and your loved ones.

Peace to all.

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