

Remember gifts and offer help to others

Each year at this time I find myself deeply attracted by the convergence of themes from our national feast of Thanksgiving and our liturgical season of Advent. I know that those two realities are not directly related to one another. They do not even have the same central theme. But they do happen close in time to one another and each in its own fashion invites us to be in touch with the ebb and flow of our lives.

Thanksgiving calls us to an awareness of God's goodness to us and for appropriate expressions of gratitude for blessings received. And so, Thanksgiving orders us to the past. Advent bids us be aware that the good work Christ has begun in us will one day be brought to completion when Christ will come again in glory. And so, Advent orders us to joyful hope about the future.

Even as I type these words I hope that you see as clearly as I do that we cannot define such matters as thanksgiving and hope by time frames as easily as all that. Gratitude for past favors is not truly an act of thanksgiving without some reference or orientation to how I will express my gratitude in the future. There can hardly be real hope, much less joyful hope, without some past experience or promise that founds the hope.

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

For such reasons I invite you to fold your happy memories of Thanksgiving into your Advent prayers of hope and anticipation. You might start with a revisiting of those people, gifts and opportunities for which you were most grateful on the Thanksgiving feast. Follow that recollection by peaceful and interior exploration of ways in which you can appropriately and generously share such gifts with others who yearn for such things but have no way, unaided, of realizing them.

For us who were born and raised in the most prosperous nation on earth it is an understandable temptation to forget the incredible opportunities we have had, how much we owe to others, how much we have received. I once heard the same thought put this way, "We can too easily be born on third base and conclude that we hit a triple."

As to the joyful anticipation of Advent: While that turns our head to the future, it also calls us to the past and to the experiences or promises that make us hopeful about the days and years to come. That is not always an easy task. It rather forces us to acknowledge, at least implicitly, that the future is something beyond our power to control. And that brings us into an awareness of vulnerability and uncertainty, which are rarely comfortable for us.

Difficult as it may be, there is great peace to be known when we can at least want with our hearts to entrust our future well being to the goodness of the God who loves us more than we could ever imagine. As is true with a genuine expression of gratitude, so it is with hope: We truly express hope when we support our sisters and brothers as in their journeys from doubt to hope.

What do I suggest? Remember those good gifts for which you are most grateful and help someone to take a step closer to enjoying similar blessings. Review the fondest hopes of your own heart and be a strength to a sister or brother in their quest for deeper life. There are fewer better ways of realizing the presence of God alive, loving and active among us.

Peace to all.



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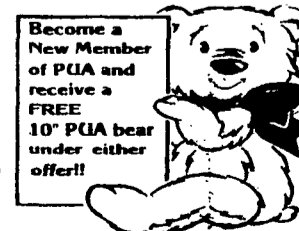
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