

Reflect on God's presence during Advent

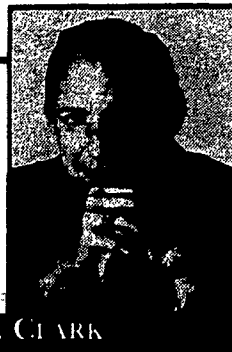
Saturday evening as I turned into the driveway at Sacred Heart Cathedral, I smiled at the single blue light in each of the windows of the parish house where I live. Those lights, the handiwork of Father Tom Mull, are a sure sign that Advent is here.

I love the lights. They are soft and peaceful and give a special tone to December nights. They are welcome reminders to me of the invitation all of us receive to be attentive to life in this special season. It is a time to remember the wonders God has worked among us. It is a privileged opportunity to remember that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

But Advent calls us to more than blessed memory of wonders wrought in the past by God's love poured out on us. It's also a time to be more deeply aware than ever of the great things God does for us today. It means an awareness of how God's love is embodied when a parent cares for a child; when a spouse, although tempted, remains faithful; when an adult child looks after a parent who has slipped into dementia; when a high school student offers friendship to a peer who is lonely; when a teacher offers extra encouragement to a student who lacks confidence.

Advent is a season that calls us to some quiet. It is difficult to see or hear or touch subtle or ordinary things if there is much clutter within us and noise around us. We need to withdraw sometimes. We need to quiet down a little. That is seldom easy. But

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

it is almost always possible, if we put our minds to it, and use some imagination. It can be especially happy for us if we can work with family and friends to enhance our possibilities for the enjoyment of peaceful space and quiet time.

Quiet is not enough. We need also to be attentive to the people and events that influence and give shape to our daily lives. This helps us to be aware of the life-giving qualities of such individuals and experiences. Such attention makes us more aware of how we respond to the good favor of others. It opens us to move deeply to the realization that God is the source of them all.

I am very much aware through personal experience that such listening and attentiveness are not easy to realize, given the pace of living that we experience today. I would guess that those who read these words do not find it any easier than I do to slow down, to quiet down, to be attentive.

It is difficult to do these things. It is not impossible. Therefore it is important that we keep trying to respond to our Advent invitation. Let me offer some suggestions with the hope that one or another of them might help you be attentive to God's presence in your life during this Advent season.

1. Begin each day praying that you will have eyes to see and ears to hear God's living presence in your life through those hours.
 2. End each day with a loving review of the day, asking to re-experience with the eyes of faith whatever memory brings to your awareness at that moment.
 3. Ask someone you love to be quiet with you each day for whatever period of time is possible and appropriate for you.
 4. Try to enjoy a painting or music or a sunset or a good book.
 5. Take up again a prayer you enjoyed earlier in life but have put aside for one reason or another.
 6. Write to a friend and tell the friend about something beautiful you have experienced lately.
 7. Before you leave church on Sunday (or early in the week) look at the readings for the following Sunday and let them speak to your heart through the week.
 8. I leave this last one to your own inspiration. You know your own needs and possibilities better than anyone.
- I wish you a blessed Advent.
Peace to all.

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