

Advent a time to touch deeper realities

As you may know from what I have written in years past, I love the season of Advent. Its invitation to be alert — to be attentive to deeper realities — is one that I welcome. It is one that I need.

It is good for me to remember that what God begun has in us in Christ, God will bring to completion when Christ returns in glory. That awareness helps in many ways. For example, I am much more inclined toward hope and optimism in the face of my faults and failings, sins and limitations. Those are certainly real, but Advent reminds me that they do not define me. Indeed, Advent offers the real encouragement that things can get better and that growth is possible.

I also appreciate Advent's reminder to be people who are attentive in prayer. Daily experience and conversation with you leave little doubt in my mind that a great many people today feel that they are overloaded with activity. I get the sense that these activities are very good individually but that, taken together, they can be very burdensome on those who engage in them.

As I understand from those who comment on the experience, these activities keep them on the go all of the time! As a result, they cannot enjoy the individual events as much as they would like because, immediately after they are over, there is at

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



least a figurative wish to get on to the next. As a result there is little opportunity to think about, talk about and, therefore, learn from the significant moments of life.

The second effect of this activism of which I hear quite often is that it takes away time and diminishes energy for the quieter, more contemplative pursuits that tend to strengthen the body and rest the spirit. I refer to such things as enjoying leisurely meals at home frequently enough that family members can be in good touch with and express their care about what all of the others are up to. For so many that kind of sharing is quite important to the natural deepening and maturing of relationships that are important to all of us.

It interested me that during the National Catholic Youth Congress in St. Louis, several young people spoke of family meals. In some cases, meals were very positive occasions for the family. People

prayed together, shared information, told stories of their days, discussed matters of interest and, generally, had a good time together. Others who did not have such meal experiences left no doubt with us that they wished they did.

One final example: Some of the young people spoke about family prayer. Most were accustomed to prayers of blessing and thanksgiving at the table. Some also enjoyed the practice of a brief time of prayer at the end of a meal for those at the table and for the persons and concerns mentioned during their conversation. One young man mentioned that his family prayed the rosary together each day; and a few enjoyed reflecting with family on a passage from Scripture.

I am not trying to push any particular form of family togetherness or prayer practice. I just want to note that if you do feel breathless and strained more often than you would like, you need not accept that as a necessary part of life today. There are some proven ways people have found to leave the fast track for a while so that they can enjoy the deeper things life has to offer.

Whatever it means to you and however you seek it, I hope that the Advent season will be a season of special grace to you and your loved ones.

Peace to all.

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