

Holiday symbols of Advent promise

We were all together for a holiday for the first time in quite a while. Guests at the festive table of my sister and brother-in-law, Helen and Jim Early, were their five daughters, four sons-in-law, four grandchildren, our dear friend, Father Tom Powers and me.

It was a joy to be with everyone - to hear the stories, to share the laughter, to glimpse the hopes of people you love very much. The company at table lent freshness to my perspective on life. They sharpened my awareness of the blessings God gives to me. They dulled the sharpness of anxiety that can gnaw at my energy. Those great people of three generations didn't have a plan for all that. They healed and encouraged and gave hope just by being themselves.

I think of Liam, the youngest among us. He'll be 6 months old on the day this article is published. He gave us all the lively gift of his presence, pure and simple. He fascinated me as he soaked in the sights and sounds around him. When, his cousin, beautiful Julie, dangled a spider on a string in front of Liam he laughed aloud, the first time I had heard him do that. When I held him I noticed the strength of his hand around my finger and thanked the Lord for his good growth.

Megan, now 3½ years old, and Patrick, at 1½, are new people to me each time I see them. Such is the rate of their growth. I marvel at the store of energy that allows them both to function non-stop at such elevated levels. The more do I admire their parents for their stamina in keeping abreast of

along
the way



By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

those precious little ones. Watching them all primes my spirit to be in touch with the growth to which each of us is called all the days of our lives. Such growth, unlike that of the little ones, is not easily perceived. Ours is quieter, more gradual, deeper. But, because it is no less real, it is important that we be aware of its reality and its importance in our lives.

The mix of adults at table carried the double gift of happy memory and renewed hope. You know of my affection for my five beautiful nieces and how much their friendship means to me. It is a joy to know that now they are adult friends. But it is especially enriching to follow the threads of those friendships - and their love for their husbands and children - all the way back to their beginnings. So much has changed. So much has remained the same.

I borrow the name Seasoned People from a group of contemporaries at St. Pius Tenth, Chili, to refer to the quartet from my generation at the Thanksgiving table. Helen and Jim's seasoning has come through their years

of giving of themselves to one another in marriage and in the rearing of their family. As I have observed them and many other married friends through the years my admiration for them has deepened. Their commitment to one another and to their families is one for which I have the greatest respect. I add a note of gratitude for the inspiration they give me to live out my own vocation as bishop as generously as I can.

Tom and I had dinner with Bishop Howard Hubbard on the Friday of Thanksgiving weekend, something we have been doing on that night since we were young priests. I guess that we too have known some seasoning since we first started out. The years of ministry have taught us a great deal. If nothing else, they have taught us that we still have much to learn - and to be glad about that.

Now the thought and prayer stimulated in me by our Thanksgiving celebration flows into the renewed promise of the Advent season. I have always loved the transition. In concrete fashion the beautiful experience of fullness and renewal at the holiday table, especially the young new life there present, symbolized for me the promise of the Advent season.

I hope that you and your loved ones had a happy Thanksgiving. And I wish you a blessed Advent. It will be a season of grace for all if we take time to thank God for the blessings of our lives, if we pray for the fullness that is God's promise to us.

Peace to all.



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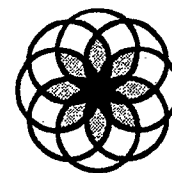
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