

Form own themes for Advent prayer

May the blessings of the Advent season fill your heart and help us all to prepare worthily for the Feast of Christmas.

This is a season of attentiveness and receptivity, a time of anticipation and renewed hope. Its invitation to us is that we take time for prayer and to note the presence and power of God among us. Advent is a season that puts us in touch with our world so we become more aware of the gift of life that is ours, and become more responsive to Christ's invitation to advance the Kingdom of God.

I was much impressed by the brief Advent message Pope John Paul II gave to the pilgrims in St. Peter's Square at noon on the First Sunday of Advent. In his short message, he invited us to open our hearts to the peace of Christ, and to



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Along the Way

imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, both in our expectant hope and in the way we nurture the Word we bear in our hearts.

That kind reminder and gentle encouragement is solid in its content and faithful to the themes of the season. I would have been quite content to take those words of our Holy Father to heart and let them

form the core of my Advent prayer. In fact, I intend to do so.

But I will also add to my Advent prayers other themes to which he referred on that occasion — his admonitions to pray that the peace of Christ may be established in war-torn areas of the world; that we pray fervently for those afflicted with the HIV/AIDS virus and commit our resources to its prevention and cure; and that we continue to work against the death penalty.

I was not at all surprised that our Holy Father's message attended both to sublime spiritual truth and to a call to the human family to deal with the hard demands of the Gospel message — a gift that does not shield us from life's pain, but calls us to engage with faith and confidence in the power of God.

Think for a moment of the attitude we bring to such issues as the death penalty, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the war in Iraq. My experience tells me that a great number of Catholics on this planet hold views on these issues much different from those of John Paul II. Perhaps you do too.

Surely, such dispositions would not surprise John Paul II. He has been around the block (better — the world) a few times, and knows full well people's attitudes about the sensitive, sometimes volatile, issues cited above. And yet he keeps reminding us of our spiritual heritage and the profound respect for life in all of its stages to which that

heritage calls us.

Our Holy Father wasn't instructing us in the particulars of our Advent prayer in his Angelus address. Rather, he was encouraging us to make our own the rich themes of attentiveness, joyful hope, receptivity and anticipation. Further, he was encouraging us, I believe, to let those themes shine on whatever in our lives may need the light of Christ.

Those needn't be limited to global issues. They can be wounded or fragile relationships, perplexing ethical questions, one's lifestyle or pace of life, our perspectives or priorities, or our honest efforts to live the Gospel.

However you choose to pray, I hope that the Advent season will find you more alert than ever to the presence and call of God in your life; that you will have a deeper sense than ever of the meaning and direction of your life; that you will know that the prayer of our community supports you in your journey to deeper life in Christ.

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Let me add that the family gathered on Saturday for the baptism of Kevin James Grignon. It was a joyful occasion at St. Edward the Confessor Parish in Elnora, N.Y., followed by a wonderful party at Kevin's home. I further note only that on the 31st day of Kevin's life he was as calm, cool and collected as he was on his first.

Peace to all.

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Matthew