

An Advent and Christmas message

Advent is a season of hope, hope for the Messiah and Saviour to be born, hope for a new king, and a better world to live in. Advent is starting and if you are like me, you wonder how the season is going to unroll. This year, we cannot have the traditional Lessons & Carols services because we cannot sing inside buildings, probably no Christmas pageants, not even the traditional Christmas celebrations with family and friends because we cannot travel, nor have several families (parents, grown up children, grandchildren) or more than 6 people meet in a house. How can we find hope in the midst of the pandemic, when so many traditions are broken, when we are starting to be tired of all the limitations imposed on us, and long for human contact?

A popular retreat director, Margaret Silf, has written a book entitled “The Other Side of Chaos: Breaking Through When Life Is Breaking Down”¹. How appropriate in our context! Throughout history, human beings have adapted to so many things and again we must adapt, survive and transcend this tempest surrounding us. Silf suggests that we try to live primarily with a new mind-set, defined by our new situation, not the old one. We cannot go back to what life was before but can only move forward. It is quite possible that life will not be the same, even after the pandemic, not in our lifetime. As Christians we should approach this transition by looking at it primarily as a re-birth and opportunity to do something “new”, not as the death of what was and no longer is. We can reflect on the legacy of what we feel we have lost or have to leave behind, but we cannot linger in the past; we need to have faith that something good and bright will come out of this because if we lose faith, then, like Peter walking on the water, we will just sink.

Like Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem and then to Egypt, we too need to travel light, and so shed the baggage from the past that is too heavy for us to continue to carry and which becomes useless in the new context. This is not easy! We should allow ourselves time to reflect on and grieve the past, because indeed something has died, our old way has passed. Remember other times of transition you have already navigated. What helped you make it through? What was not so helpful? Focus on your successes, remember your resilience, envision the future as you would like it to become. Ask God to guide you. We don't want to grieve endlessly, but we want to see the colours of the rainbow again after the storm has passed!

Like the Jews who lived at the time of the Second Temple (at the time Jesus was born), we long for the Messiah to come, we long for the world to be set right, we long to be set free. We want to shed, to get rid of our old skin (figuratively speaking) and clothe ourselves with what is ahead of us. Here is an opportunity for spiritual evolution, spiritual renewal, spiritual growth. Let us ask God to guide us!

We are not alone on this journey. We travel with Elizabeth and Zechariah, who though they wanted children most likely were not too happy about having a child in their old age and not be able to name the baby as tradition had it. We travel with Mary and Joseph, who surely were not too happy to have a baby conceived out of wedlock and whom would soon discover that they would need to flee to Egypt to save their lives and that of their son. We travel with all those who hoped to see the Roman invader chased out of their country and a new king and priest installed in Israel. Like them, we travel with hope, not necessarily happy about what is happening around us or to us, but like them, we travel with faith in God and the promise of the coming Messiah, hoping for a better situation in which the Good News can be experienced and shared. And most importantly, we travel, carrying in our hearts Jesus' promise, “remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”² Jesus is with us on this journey.

During this season of Advent, let us keep looking East with hope, faith and joy in our heart, taking this time to renew ourselves, and keeping our eyes on the Messiah to be born!

We wish you all a blessed Advent and a joyful Christmas celebration.

Josée, for the Clergy Team of the Laurentian Regional Ministry

¹ Margaret Silf, *The Other Side of Chaos: Breaking Through When Life Is Breaking Down*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011)

² Matthew 28:20b, New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.