

*Arise! Shine, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord has dawned upon you.
Though darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds, the peoples,
upon you the Lord will dawn, and over you his glory will be seen.*
- Isaiah 60:1-2

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings to you as we begin this season of Advent. This is the season to prepare ourselves for the Solemnity of the Nativity of our Lord and, more importantly, for His second coming – a twofold celebration!

May this season be a time for a lived experience of the passage of Isaiah cited above, a passage that calls us to arise and shine, to recognize the glory of the Lord shining around us, even though darkness and thick clouds cover us. This darkness can be physical, emotional, mental and even spiritual.

This past several months have brought many challenges to our lives. I, myself, have been challenged in being a pastor and a parish priest with all the duties and responsibilities that have been entrusted to me by the bishop. Some of you are suffering with this virus – either personally or with someone you know and love. Others of you are concerned about job security. Still others of you are anxious as you work on the frontlines of the pandemic. Many others are simply lonely for the company of your friends and family, due to the “stay-at-home” orders. These are real lived experiences, causing feelings of anxiety as we adapt to the new normal that changes almost every day.

This reminds me of my first experience in the Holy Land on the Sea of Galilee. We boarded our boat late in the afternoon and, after only a few minutes, the wind arose and the boat was tossed around – very similar to the experience of the disciples, who were frightened and cried to the Jesus, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” (Matthew 8:25). Likewise, we may now feel tossed around by challenging winds that buffet us from many different fronts. On the health front, some doubt the seriousness of this pandemic while others suffer personally with their health or the sickness or death of a loved one. On the political front, the validity of our democracy has been tested. On the nature front, wildfires continue to affect our county and our state, threatening the homes and lives of thousands. Given all this upheaval, it is normal to wonder where Christ is in all of this.

And yet, Scripture reminds us that Jesus calmed the storm. Scripture also reminds us that God is faithful. If, as described in the book of Exodus, God was faithful to the people of Israel - a group of stubborn, sinful, selfish individuals - we can be certain that God will be faithful to us.

On the First Sunday of Advent, our Holy Father emphasized that “Advent is a continuous call to hope. It reminds us that God is present in history to lead it to its ultimate goal and to its fullness, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. God is present in the history of humanity, He is the ‘God-with-us’, He walks beside us to support us.”

Pope Francis stressed that “God wants to draw close to us but will not impose himself; it is up to us to keep saying to him, ‘Come!’” He urged us all to repeat the simple prayer “Come, Lord Jesus” frequently throughout the day, including "before our meetings, our studies and our work, before making decisions, in every important or difficult moment of our lives -- 'Come, Lord Jesus!'"

Comfort, give comfort to my people says the Lord. (Isaiah 40:1)

As we await the Lord, I would like to extend my own appreciation to our parishioners who are healthcare workers and those who are first responders. I would also like to thank our school teachers and staff, clergy, parish staff, and volunteers for all they do to keep the mission of Christ alive for our family of faith.

Finally, John the Baptist invites us to join him when he says, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.” May this be a time of tranquility, healing, joy, and good health, as we care for ourselves and for those who are the most vulnerable among us by wearing masks, maintaining at least six-feet of distance between us and others not of our household, and being generous with our time, talent, and treasure with those who are in need.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Fr. Paw