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The Fourth Sunday of Advent (B)

The celebration of the Lord's birth is now only days away and this season of Advent is swiftly drawing to a close. What does it all mean?

The days of Advent are a precious gift given us by Mother Church to draw closer to the Lord as we look for his coming. These days are to be used to increase and strengthen our longing for the Lord until the ancient and beloved cry bursts forth from within us: *Maranatha!* Come, Lord Jesus (I Corinthians 16:22)!

I do not know about you, but, for me, these past few weeks have been anything but restful. With Monsignor Enlow's recent illnesses I have had precious little time to watch and wait for the Lord and grow in eager expectation of his coming. It has been the most trying Advent of my life.

Advent is my favorite season and one that ordinarily fills me with great joy, but, I am sad to say, amidst the flurry of the last few weeks, such is not the case this year, at this moment. I should like very much for Christmas to come tomorrow, if only to have Advent finished and to find days of rest. I suspect the same may be true for many of you.

There is a certain ironic beauty in this, for my desire for the coming of the Lord has increased, though not for the proper

reasons. Then again, the Lord does come to give us rest. He said to King David, "I will give you rest from all your enemies" (II Samuel 7:11). He will also give us rest from our enemies.

If the Lord would come tomorrow he would not find the house of my soul ready to welcome him and receive him warmly. He would find, rather, a home in disarray and me collapse on the couch. There are simply too many other things on my mind at the moment - all of them good and just - but not all of them necessary. I am not proud of this, and this is not where the Lord is calling me to be.

This is not the Advent I had hoped for, nor is it an Advent I would seek again; but it is the Advent the Lord has allowed me to experience and as such it is a graced time. What is important now in these last few days is that I, that we, set aside all distractions.

It is a time for me - for us - to examine the house of my soul. Is Christ the foundation of this house? Is there room for him in the house of my soul, or is the space that is rightly his cluttered with too many other things? Will he find a clean house or a cluttered one? Will we allow him to fashion the house of our soul according to his own design?

Where, then, are we to find this rest, this peace, that he brings with him? We will find it in turning our attention to the words spoken by the Archangel to the Virgin Mary: "Behold,

you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus" (Luke 1:31).

Gabriel was sent to Mary because the house of her soul was found worthy of so great a guest because of the singular grace given her at the moment of her conception. Mary welcomed this Divine Guest, saying, "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

There still is time for me, for you, to ready the homes of our souls to receive the Divine Child with joy and faith. In these last days of Advent, we must look to Bethlehem and focus our attention there in these remaining days. The Lord will help us prepare a place for him, so that he might make his home in us.

To focus so intently on Bethlehem is not easy, especially given the many distractions that we face.

Under the influence of a hedonistic consumerism, unfortunately, Christmas runs the risk of losing its spiritual significance to be reduced to a mere commercial occasion to buy and exchange gifts... [But] stripped of consumerist and materialistic incrustations, Christmas can thus become an occasion to welcome, as a personal gift, the message of hope that emanates from the mystery of the birth of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

If anything other than the mystery of Christmas holds the primary place in our thoughts, we are not yet prepared to celebrate this great feast.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

As we approach the celebration of the Lord's birth, we remember that central moment in history, when, "in the darkness of the night of Bethlehem, a great light was lit."<sup>2</sup> This light continues brightly shining, illuminating the darkness of our lives and shining its radiant light along the path to true and lasting joy and peace.

This Child, this Light, "wants to be the travelling companion of each one of us on our life's journey" and we must be ready to receive him.<sup>3</sup>

Let us prepare for Christmas, therefore, with humility and simplicity, readying ourselves to receive the gift of light, joy and peace that irradiates from this mystery. Let us welcome the nativity of Christ as an event capable of today renewing our existence. ... Let us ask most holy Mary, the tabernacle of the incarnate Word, and St. Joseph, silent witness of the events of salvation, to communicate to us the sentiments they had while they awaited the birth of Jesus, so that we can prepare ourselves to celebrate in a holy way the coming Christmas, in the joy of faith and enlivened by the determination of a sincere conversion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *Angelus* Address, 24 December 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, General Audience Address, 17 December 2008.