



ADVENT - CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2015

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

As we begin the liturgical season called 'Advent', it is a reminder to us that the significant and precious feast of our faith called 'Christmas' is approaching. So the message to us is: PREPARE! But, "prepare what?" ... "prepare how?"

Since the beginning of November I already noticed the secular signs of Christmas, such as Christmas trees, advertisements, and other decorations on display around the city and shops of Rome. The same is most probably also true in your part of the world.

Many people have already been, or are in the process of, buying Christmas presents for loved ones and friends. For some, this whole exercise becomes stressful in deciding what to buy, in running around from store to store to find the right product for the right price, in trying to keep within and not to blow out the budget. For others, this is the one time of the year when contacts will be renewed and friendships kept alive through the sending and receiving of Christmas cards (or emails!).



For others still, this will be a time to remember those who are less fortunate and, through the distribution of Christmas hampers will bring some cheer to the needy. If done for the right reasons, all these things are obviously very good and positive, because it reaches out to others, it strengthens bonds of relationships and, hopefully, contributes to building a better world.

However, all this is only the **external preparations** and, as important and necessary as they are, Advent is more than this. So often Advent becomes the season we play in the background while we neurotically work our heads off preparing to celebrate Christmas. We get whisked away in doing all the external preparations of work and planning and buying that we arrive at the celebration of Christmas exhausted. This is not what Advent is about!

Rather, Advent is the season of "waiting" and "longing" and "expectation". Advent is that liturgical, prayerful time that invites us to make an **internal, spiritual preparation** – not for something important, but for *someone* special: **Jesus – our Redeemer and Saviour.**

I remember one year being asked by a friend what I would like for Christmas, and I replied: *"Nothing! Don't worry about buying me anything because I don't really need anything."* Of course I knew that she would go ahead and buy me something anyway! But her question drew me inside and got me reflecting because, later on, I was prompted to ask myself the same question: *"What do I really want for Christmas this year?"*, which, in turn, led me to ask the deeper Advent question:



"What am I yearning for?" In my reflection on this question I came to understand that my "yearnings" are not really concerned with those external things which are so easily purchased; rather, my "yearnings" are for those deeper, more wholesome gifts of peace, and joy, and mercy, and contentment which only God can give, and which God does give – if we let God in.

The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, tells a Hasidic story that touches on the significance of times and seasons for us as human beings, and as Christians:

A Rabbi once asked a group of learned men who were visiting him, "Where is the dwelling place of God?" They simply laughed at him. "What a question to ask," they said. "Is not the whole world full of God's glory?" Then the Rabbi answered his own question, "God dwells wherever people let Him in."

This is our ultimate purpose: **to let God in**. When all the world is about "doing", our prime concern as people of faith is about "letting" – letting God in, letting God do.

With all the preparations that you will be making in the lead up to welcoming Christ in a new and fresh way this Christmas, try to make time during these weeks of Advent to reflect on the Advent question: **"What are you yearning for?"**, and commit to make greater room in your life **to let God in**.

In the midst of our Advent preparation this year, our Holy Father, Francis, has proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* – a Holy Year which invites us to open the door of our hearts more boldly and trustingly **to let God in**. This is an opportunity and moment for **conversion!** Let us accept with joy and not fear.

The angel's message to the terrified shepherds at the birth of Jesus was: *"Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people... a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."* (Lk. 2:10-11). Jesus saves us and loves us with the mercy of God which, for us Passionists, is contemplated in the Passion of Jesus.



In his Bull of Indiction, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis reminds us that the Child born to Mary and Joseph, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a Bethlehem manger is **someone** special: *“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him.”* (n. 1)

And so, as we ponder the Christmas event this year, let us take up the invitation of the Holy Father *“to constantly contemplate the mystery of mercy”* which, he says, *“is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it.”* (n. 2)

I wish you every blessing in your preparation, contemplation and celebration during this Advent and Christmas time. May your yearning bear fruits of joy, serenity and peace.

~ **Fr Joachim Rego CP**
Superior General

