My dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

The Liturgical Year, through its celebration of ‘seasons’ (Advent, Lent, Ordinary Time) and ‘feasts’, assists us in our journeying with Christ and nourishes our faith life through prayer, spiritual acts, and systematic reading and reflection of the Scriptures.

I take the opportunity to greet you as we begin this New Year of our faith life with the time of Advent (from the Latin “ad venio” meaning “to come”) - the liturgical season anticipating the “Adventus Domini”, the “coming of the Lord”.

As I reflect on what I need for my spiritual journey during this Advent time, and in preparation for the feast of Christmas, I am led to consider my prayer life as a patient waiting for the coming of God in every moment and in all the ways that God chooses to intervene in my life.

And so, from my recent search and musings, I share these thoughts on prayer with you, hoping that it will also spark some reflection for your preparation. I begin with the following story told by Father Edward Farrell in his book, Surprised by the Spirit:

Fr Farrell was on pilgrimage to Cat Island in the Bahamas where he spent time with a holy Benedictine monk named Brother John. His first request to Br John was to “ask for a word, a blessing of his wisdom, some gift from his prayer, a share in his experience”. The Brother’s immediate response was only a “deep smile”. Sometime later when the day came for Farrell to leave the Island, Br John gave him his “word” (which Farrell asked for when he first arrived). After Mass, Br John turned to Fr Farrell and said to him: “when you go back and talk to your people, tell them to be patient with God, to wait for Him.”
“Waiting in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ”

During Advent, our spiritual attitude and stance is one of: waiting, expectancy, anticipation, patience, watching, alertness, looking forward with joy and hope.

Our prayer is: “Maranatha”, “Come, Lord Jesus”, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” – reflecting a longing for God like in the prayer of the Psalmist:

O God, you are my God, for you I long; For you my soul is thirsting... My body pines for you like a dry land without water...
(Ps. 63)

And:

Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God...
(Ps. 42)

The Experience of Waiting

The experience of ‘waiting’ is an all too familiar phenomenon. We know that events do not usually happen with the precision with which we plan them. Often, we are forced to wait. Especially today in the age of ‘the instant’, we are in danger of becoming ‘instant people’. We want and expect everything now – instantly! In our efforts to be masters of time, we can forget that we are living in time which only gradually unfolds itself in history. We don’t want to wait; but wait we must! We are almost powerless in our waiting, but we cannot do otherwise.

Everything is not under our control. Sometimes in a desperate attempt to control time and make everything happen in an efficient manner, we become impatient. We are no longer capable of waiting, we think we are wasting our time. A special kind of strength is required to yield to time, to let it enter into our lives, to allow it to introduce us to the yet undisclosed and unrevealed future.

In many ways our attitude to the experience of waiting can be the measure of our real interest in life. To wait is to reject that pressure to accelerate time, to bin it down. Rather, we allow time to shape the events and influence the great decisions of our life. To wait is to grow in time!

Waiting in Prayer

To pray is to wait – patiently, expectantly, hopefully, alert to the Presence (God) now in the present moment.

According to St John of the Cross: the whole meaning of life is to live in loving, attentive expectancy. St Teresa of Avila teaches: the best method of prayer is not the mumbling of words, but the fixing of the mind on God in prayer – to look at him. Our own St Paul of the Cross speaks of: staying lovingly attentive to God...with your desire...with your will.
I wish you every blessing for a fruitful journey in this Advent season. May your prayerful and patient waiting in joyful hope for the coming of God in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, strengthen you with God’s tender love this Christmas.

~ Fr Joachim Rego CP
Superior General
3 December 2017
PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
Master of both the light and the darkness,
send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.
We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces
to hear your voice each day.
We who are anxious over many things look forward
to your coming among us.
We who are blessed in so many ways long
for the complete joy of your kingdom.
We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.
We are your people, walking in darkness,
yet seeking the light.
To you we say, “Come, Lord Jesus!”
Amen.

(Henri J. M. Nouwen)