

AT HOME IN GOD AND GOD AT HOME IN US.

I hope, dear sisters, you noticed, that this is one of the shortest Advent seasons, we have had for a long time. It gives us a reason to be happy that we do not have a longer waiting time for Christmas to arrive - a super joyful event for all Christians around the world. But for us religious it could make us less happy as there is not sufficient time for prayer and waiting in silence before Christmas.



The world around us in general and that of Christians, picks up a pace in the run up to Christmas, not just with preparations but also with all the advance Christmas parties, buying presents for Christmas, writing, and sending Christmas greetings accompanied with all the humdrum of life. That leaves hardly any time for people to reflect on the

meaning of Advent or joyful expectant waiting for the greatest event in the history of humanity. Unfortunately, we religious too, get caught up or influenced by the hectic activities around us, leaving us little or no time for silent waiting for this beautiful event of the unfolding of God's Love for humanity and for each one of us.

My thoughts go back to the synodal journey in Rome last October and especially to the meditation offered by Fr Timothy Radcliffe O.P. during the Synod retreat before the Synod. He contended that we may wonder how this ancient story of a child born in a manger might seem relevant to a world that is fractured by wars, violence, and suffering (Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Yemen, Sudan etc.). He asked if this Christmas could be different and make us find our home and hope in God.

In the Gospel of John, we hear several references to God's home that describe vividly where God is right now. In John 1:14, we hear that the Word – God in Jesus Christ – became flesh and made his home among us. Literally, Jesus pitched his tent in our home. Later, also in John 1:38-39, two disciples ask Jesus where he is staying. And Jesus answers them, "Come and see"! In other words, "Come and see my home, my place, and my way." Again, when Jesus is getting ready to depart, he says convincingly, "In my Father's home there are many dwelling places, and I am going to prepare a place for you" (Jn 14:2-3). And then, in that upper room where the disciples were staying at 'home' in fear, Jesus breathes the Spirit into them and by extension into us, again entering our homes to stay (Jn.20:22).

In these words from Jesus - the WORD of God - we see that we are already home with God and God is at home with us. God's home is our home, and our home is God's home. Thus, through Jesus' Incarnation and literally living with us in our human world, God truly made in us God's own home and continues doing it in this time and place. And now Jesus calls us, invites us to dwell with him in his home, following him and his way of "staying at home" by trusting in God (faith) and loving one another in all that we say and do. Could this then mean for us, that we find ways to help those who have no physical homes? For, if indeed in Christ we are at home in God, and God has made a never-ending home in us, don't we need to help people find a Home in God – in Jesus?

Fr Timothy Radcliffe in his talk said, "When we think of the Church as home, some of us think of God as coming home to us, and others of us coming home to God. We must enlarge the tent of our sympathy to those who think differently. All our homes are Nazareth where God dwells." St. Charles de Foucauld said. "Let Nazareth be your model, in all its simplicity and breadth... The life of Nazareth can be lived anywhere. Live it where it is most useful to your neighbour. Wherever we are or whatever we have done, God comes to stay with us. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev.3:20)

How does one achieve this reality of letting God make his home in my personal life even as scripture suggests that He has already made his home in us? And that brings me back to where I began i.e. the silent waiting, away from too many hectic activities, for the Lord to make His home in us (me).

Advent calls us to wait patiently. It summons us to trust in, as I read recently in a reflection on Advent, 'the slow work of God'. During this season, we live with the silent trust in the "not yet." We are called to abandon the hurrying and decide to call sacred what is yet unfolding and unshaped. We are quite naturally inclined to bypass the slow in-between time. We want to rush getting it done. Our prayer should be, "O God calm our impatience, strengthen our trust. Mary our sister, teach us what it takes to wait well".

So let us choose hope! Let us find space for prayer, for the Word, for forgiveness and for welcoming those in need. Let us cultivate His expectation without letting ourselves be distracted by so many pointless things, and without complaining all the time, but keeping our hearts alert, that is, eager for Him, awake and ready, impatient to meet Him. Then we can proclaim with confident hearts the news of great joy that 'Today is born our Saviour, Christ the Lord'. And let this profound knowledge about God's great love for the world inspire in us a desire to continue to be part of this Good News.

May the grace and peace of Christmas touch the hearts of all in our community and the world at large.

The sisters of my team and I wish you Merry Christmas and a Grace-filled New Year!!

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