



Dear Friends in Christ,

The voice of the prophet Isaiah opens the season of Advent for us as he cries out to the Lord, "Oh that you rend the heavens and come down!" His vision is very dramatic with creation convulsing at the near approach of God, with "mountains quaking before you while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for" (Isaiah 63). God indeed fulfills this expectation in a wondrous way much beyond our imagination by taking on our flesh through the Blessed Virgin Mary. So beautiful and sublime, the Virgin conceiving Her divine Son through the power of the Holy Spirit! "Drop down dew from above, you heavens," calls out Isaiah, "and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened and bring forth a Savior" (Isaiah 45). Jesus is both from above--by the power of the Holy Spirit--and below--by the human flesh of Mary. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. That same dew (*the Holy Spirit*) descends upon the altar at Mass as the bread and wine are transformed into the Living Christ!

The lights of the *Advent Candles* mark our path through these weeks as we journey together towards Christmas. This is a spiritual time for us to contemplate deeply the gift of our salvation that God has wrought through Jesus Christ. The Advent scriptures proclaim that God is neither silent nor indifferent to our need to be rescued from sin, injustice and fear. Rather, God shows the *strength of his arm* in coming to deliver us.

In the midst of the anguish of this world, let our voices together cry out to Him this Advent for the peace proclaimed by the Christmas Angels as they sang their Gloria over the stable cave of Jesus' birth. And yet Christmas festivity has been canceled in Bethlehem square this year. In solidarity with the Christians who are suffering in Gaza during this war in the Holy Land, the municipality has decided that there will be no traditional tree or festive lighting this year, but rather a sober spirit during this most distressing time. May our hearts be moved to make room for the sorrows of others, so as not to be preoccupied with just our own festivities. Let us take time for the strong spiritual exercises of our faith! As always, I recommend taking some time for *Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament* (Tuesdays at St. Peter), Rosary, and attending daily Masses as your time allows.



This year, I also propose that we intensify our prayer during the last 9 Days leading up to Christmas. This is a very traditional practice in many cultures. For example, the beautiful *Posadas Song* and devotion in the Mexican culture, and *Simbang Gabi* in the Filipino culture, which is a devotional, nine-day series of Masses in the early morning. In that same spirit, I have arranged that all of our scheduled Masses from *December 17-25* will be dedicated as our *Christmas Novena of Masses* to pray for your intentions. If you would like your own intentions to be included in this Novena, all you have to do is write them down on the slip provided here in this letter and put them in the envelope provided, then either mail it to us or drop it in the offertory basket at Mass. I will be the only one to read them, so that I will know what the intentions are for all those 9 days of Masses! I invite you to join your own intense prayer and devotion as much as you can. Resolve on an Advent plan!

Very importantly, I strongly encourage you to make a sincere *sacramental confession* before Christmas. One excellent opportunity will take place on *December 13* at 6:30 PM for an Advent Penance Service at St. Peter where a number of priests will be available. Watch the bulletin for other special times as well.

Finally, I would like to recommend to you our celebration of *Our Lady of Guadalupe* that will take place at St. Peter on *December 9* as part of our regular 4:30 pm Saturday Mass. A traditional Mexican meal will be provided for all afterwards in our fellowship hall. Through this extraordinary appearance of the Virgin Mary in Mexico in 1531, the Mother of God left us a most stunning miracle that remains with us to this day on the tilma of St. Juan Diego--the image of Herself that we venerate. She promises to cover with Her Motherly warmth and protection those who seek Her.

May these days of Advent lead us to a Christmas of Joy!

Sincerely in Christ Jesus,

Rev. William Pifher

