



Metropolitan Archbishop of Izmir

LETTER OF THE ARCHBISHOP AT THE BEGINNING OF ADVENT

Come, house of Jacob!

Let us walk in the light of the Lord. (Is 2:5)

What did the prophet Isaiah hope for when he wrote these words? What do we hope for at the beginning of this Advent season which signifies our journey towards the mystery of the Incarnation? The prophet expresses the hope that one day humanity will find its way to God. He expresses faith in the faithfulness of God.

The Jews were very proud of their faith; they loved with all their heart their nation bound to the religion. And at a certain point they lost everything. They were forced to go into exile. Decades of exile taught them humility, perseverance and hope. The prophets confirmed them in the faith in one God, they taught them to be faithful to God and to the Law. Isaiah, the prophet of the exile, announced salvation to them: "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.'" (Is 2:2-3). The people of Israel will return to its land, they will taste the faithfulness of the Lord; but they will have to accept that salvation is not limited only to Israel, salvation is for all the peoples of the earth. Salvation is offered to the rich and the poor, to the noble and the small; to the wise and the simple; to all!

The church is made up of different peoples, it is present in different cultures; but only one liturgy is celebrated in different languages. The Advent that we celebrate cannot bring us to salvation, to the Savior of Bethlehem, if we think that our faith is a privilege to be kept for ourselves.

One of the main truths of Christmas is the invitation to share. You will share your joy in your families, and the Church will share its joy by celebrating the liturgy in faith, to give thanks to God for the gift of the Savior. It remains for us to understand that the true sharing of the Church is the sharing of what is most precious: and that is our faith, our capacity to be the church open to all.

We have been invited by Pope Francis to the synodal process, which means reciprocal listening, participation and mission. In this mutual listening, we are invited to share our joy, our concerns, and to make our church the space in which there will be room for everyone.

The cultural traditions that we observe, that help us to live our faith, especially the faith of the incarnation of the Son of God, are beautiful and important. They are part of our memory, and they remind us of the contents of the faith; but they are not sufficient to make our faith alive in the confrontation with the present time. In exile, prophet Isaiah invites his people: "Come, house of Jacob! Let us walk in the light of the Lord."

The evangelist John reports the words of Jesus: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8:12)



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First of all, we must discover the fullness of light in Christ, who is the reflection of the essence of the Father; Jesus is the revelation of the mystery of God, who is the Trinity of love. Faith in Jesus allows us to be imbued with the light of Christ, in the conviction that only by being in Christ and faithful to his call can we live a happy and meaningful life, and that means being light in this world.

If Christ is the light of the world, we are nourished by his light; if he is the light of our lives, we too will be luminous, enlightened and strong in faith, love and hope. It is essential to follow him, to be in a permanent life relationship with him and to imitate him.

We have received an immeasurable grace: faith as a relationship with God and baptism, which vitally links us to the redemptive work of Christ. That is why our task in this world is also to bear witness to the light, or rather to reflect the light of Christ the Redeemer to all those who are in darkness.

Let the light of Christ shine through us! This is what St. John Henry Newman asks in his prayer, prayed daily by St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta: *“Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine, so to shine as to be a light to others.”*

Advent season has begun; it is a time when the nights grow longer and the sun wakes late. The dawn masses that were once a custom in the countryside are a beautiful metaphor for Advent. With their lamps, people went to mass in the snow in the early morning, when it was still dark; thus, they prepared themselves in prayer to live the mystery of Christmas. The Magi walked following the star that shone for them until it stopped over the Child in Bethlehem, where the the Son of God – was laying in the misery. Let us also make shine our light as we proceed to the cave of the mystery of God, so that the path of our life, which we are given to walk, may be marked by the light of hope for ourselves and for others.

Izmir 27 November 2022

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