

From the Family Ministry Office

Sister Lucy Kearney, SP

“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”

Response to Responsorial Psalm on the First Sunday of Advent.



For Christians all over the world, the season of Advent and Christmas is a time of waiting, preparing for, and celebrating the birth of the Prince of Peace. Advent is a time when we pause to remember Christ's first coming to us; a season when that remembrance directs our minds and hearts to Christ's second coming at the end of time. Through its liturgies, the season of Advent enables us to experience the mystery of salvation. It is a time of hope and expectation; a time to enjoy the presence of God in a special way.

How can we best live Advent and Christmas as a time of hope, expectation, and peace in this year of pandemic? All of us have experienced some degree of anxiety, doubt, loss, and uneasiness in 2020. Some are mourning the loss of loved ones; others are overwhelmed with the stress of unemployment; and all of us are dealing with social anxiety – the fear of

contracting the virus from others or, even worse, giving it to children, parents, grandparents, or friends. Who among us could have imagined when this year began that churches and schools would be closed for months and that, even when our churches did reopen, they would have such limited numbers in attendance? Whatever our personal experience of 2020 may be, it is helpful to keep rooted in our faith, remembering that Jesus came to bring us peace and that we are the witnesses of that peace and hope to all God's people.

Within the Advent/Christmas season is situated the Feast of the Holy Family, which focusses on hope, peace, and loving family relationships. Following are a few personal observations from the last few months that have reminded me of the importance of family life:

- the birth of a baby brought a bright light of love and joy to her parents, grandparents, and siblings that obliterated the anxiety of COVID-19;
- the loneliness of grandparents was alleviated by teenage grandchildren sharing their love through the magic of the Internet;
- the prayers of parents for their adult children serving in missionary countries and unable to get home were returned by those children who are likewise worried about the wellbeing of their parents.

In families everywhere, one of the most positive aspects of this unusual year has been the open and ardent expression of love and concern.

We all look forward to the day when our churches will be fully reopened and we can be together again. In the meantime, we are grateful for livestreamed Sunday and weekday Masses, and for online resources, such as reflection videos and First Friday devotions. For many, this year of isolation has provided more opportunity for prayer and reflection. Parishes are finding new ways to connect with shut-ins and to support foodbanks and local agencies which provide outreach to the homeless.

Yes, the celebration of the Advent and Christmas seasons may be different during this pandemic year, but we can still witness the peace that Jesus brought to the world if we have open minds, compassionate hearts, and a positive outlook.

My Christmas greeting to you is best expressed in the Gospel Acclamation for the Feast of the Holy Family:

“May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts; and the fulness of his message live within you.”