

Advent, 2023

Dear Parishioners,

As I write to you today on the first day of December, I'm sure many of you, like me, are thinking: "I can't believe it's December already! It seems like we just ended our football season and the leaves were on the trees!"

One of the most common human experiences is that as we grow older, the time seems to go faster. As children, we couldn't WAIT until Christmas-it seems like it would NEVER arrive. By contrast, December often feels like riding in a high speed train, with so many sights and sounds whizzing by.

There is probably no other liturgical season that contrasts more with the season of the year that does Advent. The Message of Advent tells us to wait and prepare for the final coming of the Lord and also remembering with great affection and appreciation for his holy birth-his first coming. We are called to be joyful, because Jesus, who have given us everything we have and need, is coming soon-and is here already

By contrast, the message of the holiday season is often: Hurry up. Buy now. Order on line. Decorate. We are constantly bombarded with the idea that we need more... and more. This can create emotional ups and downs because like no other holiday, Christmas has to be perfect and everyone has to be happy.

Or could it be possible to hear Elizabeth's words to her cousin Mary..."Nothing is impossible with God". If we really believed in the words of Christ our Savior: "Seek first his kingdom and Righteousness, and everything else will be given to you." Belief in these words of Jesus are the key to understanding what happiness is: Finding the pearl of great price- and keeping that treasure in our hearts.

OK. But we know that this is easier said than done. So how do we achieve true happiness during this time of year? There are two simple ways:

1. Make time for prayer and stay focused. Use your little blue book or some kind of prayer booklet each day. Just for 15 minutes. Amid the busyness of December, your perspective will change. You will have greater peace, knowing that you gave yourself 15 minutes each day to be grateful, and joyful that Jesus is coming to meet you, and to talk to you. You will also be more in touch with what we really need.
2. Extend beyond yourself. Do your holiday plans include inviting someone that is outside your circle of family and friends? In this community of Carey, Ohio, there is a great tendency to leave outsiders or those recently arrived "outside of the circle "indefinitely. Nothing is impossible with God. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis is always encouraging us Catholics to invite and include everyone. It's not an impossible thing for us. It's interesting that Jesus' first visitors, the shepherds, were those most excluded from society.

You and your loved ones will be in the prayers of the friars during Advent.

Fr. Thomas Merrill, OFM Conv.
Rector & Pastor