

Pastor's letter

November 29, 2009

Dear parishioner,

Today, the first Sunday of Advent, starts off the new liturgical year. Every year, the Advent season prepares us for the great solemnity of Christmas. This is a meaningful time, for every Christian, to undertake a spiritual journey leading not only to Christmas but to the whole year ahead. The Lord invites us to live it in faith and in prayer. It is this aspect that I would like to address in today's letter- *PRAYER*.

This Gospel upsets me somewhat. There are dreadful images of people contemplating suicide. Jesus declares that when we start noticing these signs around us and within us, then that it is the moment we should lift our head to the sky for God's help. He says: "*Be alert at all the times, praying...*" (Luke 21. 36) Jesus uses very strong terms to introduce the situation of humanity, He speaks of anguish, anxiety, sin, death, fear, upsetting... (Luke 21. 25-26). They are bad but perhaps they don't refer in particular to the end of the world, but to the actual situation of humanity, with all its forms of negativity, provoked by sin polluting all human relationships- with God, with ourselves, with others and with the cosmos.

Generally, it is not my habit to speak in negative terms. I usually take problems with a certain optimism, hoping in God's help. Sometimes though, when the human being loses his sense of reason, it is difficult to remain positive. It seems that evil and sin rule the world, and personal interest and egoism prevail over the common good. Thus, in certain moments, it is easy to lose hope of seeing a beautiful world one in a near future.

Off and on I have happened to hear people saying: "You priests speak a lot about God, that He has come and that He will come again: a God that said, "Love one another"! But where is that love? Where is that God of whom you speak?" Yes, it is true! As I said above, believing that the love of God is present on the Earth is not always easy. True enough, it is not easy to think about God who has come and who will come again. It is natural to wonder, to ask ourselves, "How? Where? When will God come again?" If you allow me, I would like to try to offer an answer to these questions.

Certainly, you know better than I that humanity appears to be completely absorbed in sin, and unable to free itself of it. It tries to rely exclusively on its strengths. Still, humanity needs help, it needs God, and it needs a Savior that our faith can call upon- Jesus, the Son of God. With the power of God, we can remove the evil that is in the world. In my opinion this is the only solution. Liberation from evil is possible, but it is necessary to believe that we can, that we need to be confident in Him. We need to look to Him trusting: "*...stand up and raise your heads...*" (Luke 21. 28)

Maybe someone, right this moment, is thinking, "Wow, Father Luciano still believes in these things! He still believes that Jesus has come to save humanity. These are things for children!" Perhaps, this is the great mistake that we, adults, make. We don't believe

anymore in the good and simple greatness of God. We don't believe anymore that great problems can be solved with the strength of love. We don't believe anymore in our ability to solve our problems by imploring God's assistance. We don't believe that by lifting our heads to Him, one day, we can see a better world.

At the beginning of this letter I said that I would speak about prayer, and I will do it, but not by writing about it in length. Truth is, we cannot write the true prayer, we can just live it.

In the readings today, the theme that prevails is our preparation for the arrival of the Lord. In the Gospel, as I mentioned beforehand, Jesus invites us to be careful and to pray for the arrival of the Lord. In the second reading, Saint Paul gives us a very practical example on how to live the teachings of Jesus. *"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may He so strengthen your heads in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His Saints."* (1Thessalonians 3. 12) In short, Saint Paul tells us that the prayer of which Jesus speaks is very simple and beautiful to live, not boring, as someone would sustain. Saint Paul tells us to make our prayer alive, to give a soul to our prayer, to love one another.

Living the prayer strengthens us in a spiritual way, it gives us faith and wait for Him, He who has already come and He, who will come again.

I would like to better explain this concept with an example, an interesting episode that happened to me not many years ago.

A few days before Christmas, a young family invited me for dinner. There was Jody, John and their 8 year-old daughter, Sarah. Jody was pregnant with their second child, Mark. I recall John preparing the Christmas tree and Sarah helping him. At a certain moment, Sarah asked her father why they were preparing the Christmas tree and the Manger. John answered, "Because we are waiting for Baby Jesus!" Sarah, a little bit confused, replied: "Every day Mom tells me that Jesus is here, among us, every moment, why are we waiting for Him now?" At this point, Jody turned to her and said, "Sarah, you know that in my womb there is Mark. He is here with us but we are waiting for him. Every day we speak to him. Yesterday we bought new clothes for him. We are waiting for February to come quickly so we can see Mark and finally embrace him. Mark is here, we don't see him yet, but we know that one day we will be together with him and we can play with him. So, it is with Jesus, the same. He has already come, and He is here among us every day, but we wait for the day when we will see Him with our eyes and we can embrace Him."

This example, that apparently seems a story for children, makes us understand how much the Mystery of God is great and simple, but to be able to understand it He asks us to attend Him with the great prayer of Brotherly Love.

Peace, Father Luciano