

Brother Visitor's Letter

Dear Lasallians,

The liturgical season of Advent is a time when the Church invites us to take time out in preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus, yet, as many of you are all too aware, that is often much easier said than done! In her book of Advent reflections, Delia Smith tells of her experience of arriving in Church to celebrate midnight Mass, so tired and exhausted with Christmas preparations that she was in no mood to celebrate anything! I am sure that this is an experience that resonates with many, particularly those of you who are working parents inevitably immersed in the multifarious activities associated with the celebration of Christmas in family, and all of this usually on the back of frantic end-of-term activities. It is a time of the year when there is often little time for reflection, little time for allowing "*our souls to catch up with our bodies*", as we get caught up in frenetic activity. The overall effect is reminiscent of the intended consequences of Pharaoh's actions, recorded in the Book of Exodus, when, on hearing that Moses had brought the good news to the Hebrew slaves that God was about to set them free, he increased their work load with the admonition: "*make them work harder so that they have no time to listen*".

This points to the self-evident truth that "*good news*" can sometimes be lost under the weight of daily cares, to say nothing of the impact on it of global and national tragedies nightly played out on our television screens. Hence, it is in that context that the call to "*stay alert*", made in the Gospel for the first Sunday in Advent, makes sense. It is not that we have to be alert to the coming of the Lord in some hypothetical future but rather that we are alert to his actual presence in the many circumstances of our lives today. That we are not always sensitive to these moments of grace was acknowledged by the Founder in the challenge, applicable to all of us, found in his reflection for Christmas Eve: "*...For how long has Jesus been presenting himself to you and knocking at the door of your heart, in order to make his dwelling within you, and you have not wanted to receive him...*"

Perhaps, then, our best preparation for this year's celebration of the birth of Jesus could be to try to be more sensitive to these moments of grace as they daily present themselves to us in our pre-Christmas preoccupations. These grace-filled moments, as William Bausch reminds us, are "*quietly seeding love and pushing back the darkness*" and are manifested in events and people who by their actions, attitudes or outlook on life unconsciously challenge us to reflect on what is best in being human.

Another Lasallian way of saying this is to try to filter our daily experiences through the eyes of faith so as to be more aware of God who is present and active in our lives. As ever in Lasallian spirituality, this is not so much about personal sanctification as about effectiveness in ministry since by so "*disposing our own hearts in this way*" we are better disposed to "*to prepare the hearts of others for the coming of Jesus Christ*".



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