



Simla Chandigarh Diocese

Bishop's House, P.O. Box No: 709, Sector 19-A Chandigarh - 160 019, INDIA.

† **Ignatius L. Mascarenhas**

Bishop of Simla-Chandigarh

TEL: 0172-2775777, 2773777

FAX: 0172-2781630

EMAIL: bpignatius@gmail.com

Advent Pastoral Letter – December 2017

To All the Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of Simla-Chandigarh Diocese

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

"Be watchful! Be alert!" - December

Last Sunday, which was the last of the liturgical year, we celebrated the feast of Christ the King. This Sunday marks the beginning of a new year (Year B, to be precise) in the Church's liturgical calendar. We in India will face the new year 2018 as the Church will do across the world – not with a sigh of relief, but with confidence and hope that the Lord Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, is Emmanuel- God with us, and hence the battle is already won.

In one of the most beautiful prayers in Scripture (Luke 1:67-79), one that the Church calls the *Benedictus*, named after the first word of the prayer in Latin: We read, *"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, He has come to his people and set them free...."* From as someone has described our society and peopleHurried, Scattered, Stuffed, Forgetful, Busy, Behind, and Broke.

Pope Francis not very long ago said, *"We are moving in a so-called 'liquid society,' which is without fixed points, scattered, deprived of solid and stable reference points, a culture of the ephemeral (-fleeting), of the use-and-dispose."* Yes it can be quite depressing, disheartening, discouraging and demoralising to watch the news and what's coming on the social media these days. Our world seems to be increasing in hatred, intolerance, discrimination, and over-stimulated greed and ego. The gap between the rich and poor is widening and random, senseless violence is an everyday occurrence.

We are being called in this season of Advent to *forge a new vision where our passion for the Rule of Jesus Christ and his values becomes a flame through which the rest of the world can see a better way to love and live.*

There is a Gospel character Zechariah to help us reflect and a pray.

You may remember that he is the father of John the Baptist and the husband of Elizabeth. Scripture tells us that he was of the priestly tribe (Levites) and, both he and Elizabeth were upright people (Luke 1:5-6).

In Luke chapter 1:8-22, we learn that Zechariah, while doing his priestly duty at the temple was visited by Gabriel, the Archangel. The Angel announces the birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah doubts and Gabriel makes him voiceless until after the birth.

After the birth, when all the relatives want to name the baby Zechariah, after his father, Zechariah makes clear that his name is John. At that moment his tongue is loosed and he begins praising the Lord (Luke 1:57-66). The canticle ends: *"In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace."*



It's good to note at this point that one of the priestly duties was to keep the candles lit in front of the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. It's no coincidence or accident that we light candles each Sunday of Advent. The imagery of light is found in many places in our Advent scripture readings. In particular, from Isaiah, *"a people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...."* (Isaiah 9:2). What does light do? It guides; it points the way; it scatters the darkness. We are aware there are some areas of darkness in us and in people who are in darkness. Many of us have gone through periods of darkness ourselves. Some of you may be going through a period of darkness right now. Advent announces the light that is to come. Not only is Advent a time to reflect on the Light that is to come (and that has already come), but it is an opportunity for us to be light in a world that is so often in darkness.

This is what we are called to live during Advent:

- Struggle so that the darkness does not prevent us from living as children of the Light.
- Allow ourselves to listen to the calls of our brothers and sisters and helping them come out of the darkness.
- Do everything we can in order to dispel the darkness that surrounds us.
- Not fall in the temptation of obscuring the Light that one day, 2000 years ago, became man so that all could walk in His Light.

This is the light of the sentinel that keeps watch. The light that allows us to stay awake and alert, as we wait for the dawn that is to come. This is the Light that guides us towards Christmas.

Some questions for your personal reflection:

1. What darkness is there in my life / in the life of my loved ones?
2. How can I come out of the darkness?
3. How can I help others come out of their darkness?

Let us Pray:

Lord Jesus today we have found in you, O Son of God, our one medicine. We, and the whole world, will not find salvation or peace unless we go back to encounter you in your WORD and afresh in the manger of Bethlehem. Amen.

I wish you a Holy Christmas and a Blessed New Year 2018.

This Advent Pastoral Letter is to be read out or its contents to be explained in Hindi or Punjabi in all Churches on 1st or 2nd Sunday of Advent.

Given on Friday 01st December 2017 at the Bishop's House, Chandigarh.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+Ignatius L. Mascarenhas
Bishop of Simla Chandigarh

