



Advent: A reminder that we are pilgrims

1. Introduction

We are now into the season of Advent. It is a time when we look back at the first coming of Christ and we prepare ourselves and wait expectantly for the second coming of Christ. Anselm Romb provides the following clear description of Advent. He writes that, “Advent is a pilgrimage, and the Bible is the travelog outlining God’s faithfulness to His journeying people. Advent summarises in four weeks the four thousand years during which the people of God, the Israelites, waited for the Saviour and Messiah. Through the patriarchs, prophets and kings, God called His people to national consciousness so as to provide the matrix of our salvation”

We are the New Israel because we have received the Sacrament of Baptism. Pope St. John Paul 2 in his first encyclical wrote, “The Church of the New Advent which is the Church constantly in preparation for the Lord’s coming, must be a Church of the Eucharist and of penance. Only with this spiritual perspective of its vitality and activity will it be a Church of divine mission, a Church in status missionis” (Redemptor Hominis, 20)

2. Looking back at the year 2020

As we look back at the year 2020, we can all admit that one great happening in our world has been the presence of the Covid-19 virus. The virus has greatly disturbed our lives. Many absolutes have been questioned and structures found in various communities have collapsed. What seemed secure and predictable has had to give in to what is insecure and unpredictable.

This unexpected visitor has reminded us that we do not have absolute control of everything that happens in our lives. We have been forced to journey into the unknown. We have been forced to ask questions about how to live in this extraordinary time. Pope Francis in his encyclical entitled, Fratelli Tutti - On Fraternity and Social Friendship writes of the presence of inequality, injustice, and breakdown in various communities. The great divides and differences are real in our world. We cannot undermine the presence of fear, doubts, hesitation, anxieties, and insecurities in all of us.

While it is true that for some the presence of the corona virus maybe a great inconvenience, there are many whose lives are at stake.

There are those who can easily isolate themselves and quarantine at their homes and preserve their lives, on the other hand there are those that have no homes and are the most vulnerable and have no safe places to go to.

Be that as it may, all of us have been invited to isolate ourselves when we feel not well or have been in situations that might bring danger to us. Some families have experienced hunger and thirst. We all have been forced to adjust our lives. We can speak of fatigue because we have been challenged to do things differently.

The current situation in which we find ourselves could lead to despair and giving up because the new normal is just too much. Pope Francis writes that we all must make sacrifices and respond to what he calls “solidarity which is a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion.”

3. The Season of Advent

The season of Advent is great reminder that we are pilgrims who are inspired with hope. We are a people given a remarkable gift of faith.

We have confidence in the saving power of God. As we wait and prepare ourselves to celebrate the first coming of Christ among us, we do so with gratitude. He took flesh upon Himself through the Incarnation of His Son. The great mystery of God’s humanity revealed to us and fulfilled in the womb of Mary is prolonged in the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist until He comes again.

Christ is the one who lights our way. Paul reminds us that Christ “Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). He is the way, the truth, and the life. Christ will not abandon us in our great need. He refreshes us when we are dominated by despair.

3.1 Our response to the gift of Advent

The season of Advent should disturb us. We are not just invited to prepare for the celebration of the first coming of Christ and wait for his second coming, we are also meant to make a difference in the lives of others.

We have received so many gifts from our generous God. It is important that just as we have received so many gifts, we too are to give back to God and others. We are to give:

- Celebrate the gift of repentance: Make time to make a special effort to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- The gifts of reconciliation. Seek ways of reconciling with those who have hurt us, or who we have hurt. Pope Francis makes the point that, “Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict, but is achieved in conflict, resolving it through dialogue and open, honest and patient negotiation” (Fratelli Tutti, 244).
- Celebrate the gift of kindness. It is worth repeating the message of Pope Francis. He writes that, “Kindness frees us from the cruelty at times infects human relationships, from anxiety that prevents us from thinking of others, from the frantic activity that forgets that others also have a right to be happy. Often nowadays we find neither the time nor the energy to stop and be kind to others, to say “excuse me”, “pardon me”, “thank you” (Fratelli Tutti, 224). Pope Francis reminds us of what we in our context call ‘Ubuntu’.

Ubuntu is the most fundamental aspect of living with others. It is a way of life. A life of compassion, mercy, connection, and selflessness.

- What do we have that we can share with others who have less? As a member of the clergy I am always conscious of the privileges I have. In a way I belong to the ‘privileged class’ of people in this country. I will always have a roof over my head, I will always have some food in the house. There are also many things I have because I am a member of the clergy. I am disturbed by the poverty of so many people around me and I am compelled to share what I have with others.

- Advent Season is a privileged time to take a long pause, reflect and do some introspection on the various aspects of one’s life. It is a moment to ask a series of critical and provocative questions about one’s life. What does the Incarnation of Christ mean in the way I see my relationship with God, others, myself, and the whole of creation? How do we select a life of responsible consciousness in this difficult time of the pandemic?

What kind of images, symbols, stories and spiritualities that ground our life commitments? Can this season of Advent in 2020 inspire us to continue being active participants in the development of the Kingdom of God? Will this season come and go leaving us dominated by inertia and slow death? Do we clearly hear the warning, “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come” (Mark 13:33),

3.2 Advent is a season of counting our blessings: I stumbled upon this message: Count your blessings. You are blessed:

- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 20 million people around the world.
- If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people in the world.
- If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.
- If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world’s wealthy.
- If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.
- You are blessed in ways you may never even know.
(From ‘You are blessed’)

4. Conclusion

It is said that ‘familiarity breeds contempt.’ This can easily apply to the season of Advent. We may be familiar with this season because we have had so many seasons of Advent in the past. We may not be that inspired because we have been there. We can be familiar with the season and it can be predictable.

This season can mean taking time off from our jobs, schools are to close, the Christmas decorations are displayed in many shopping centres seducing us to visit the ‘cathedrals’ of commerce and spend our hard-earned funds. And so, we can go through this time of Advent without allowing this time to disturb us. The meaning of this season may be lost.

Let us pray with confidence and ask the Holy Virgin Mary to keep us awake during this season of Advent. Let us pray for the renewal of our hearts. May we through her intercession, experience the presence of Christ who refreshes us and gives meaning and direction to our pilgrimage.

+ **Abel Gabuza**

Coadjutor Archbishop



of Durban

CONFIRMATIONS 2021

All parishes that have submitted dates for Confirmation after Easter next year, please note the date and the celebrant will only be confirmed in the February 2021 Diocesan Bulletin.

CHANCERY CLOSED

Please be informed that the Chancery closes for the Christmas/New Year period on Friday 18 December 2020 and reopens on Monday 4 January 2021. While the Chancery opens on the 4th January a number of staff will still be on their annual leave and so the Chancery will operate on a skeleton staff for a couple of weeks.

If there are any emergencies priests are asked to contact their Dean who will then contact Father Brett Williams.

ECCESTIASTICAL RETURNS

Forms for the Ecclesiastical Returns for the year ending 31.12.2020 have been emailed to all parishes. Completed forms and parish returns for Baptism, Marriage and Confirmation must be forwarded to the Chancellor by 31 January 2021.

A Christmas Message with a difference

18th December 2020

Dear Archbishop Abel, Dear Fathers, Dear Deacons, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Way back in March when the State President declared the State of Disaster to give us time to implement the safety measures needed to slow down the spread of the Corona virus, we all believed that by summer when come summer, come the hot weather, the pandemic would be a thing of the past. We were so sure so confident that we accepted the hard lockdown without any protest. Once winter was over, so would the Covid-19 crisis. We believed this even as we said: “It will be a long while before life returns to normal”. Nonetheless we were confident Covid-19 would be behind us. The summer heat and all our safety protocols would have made certain of that.

Sad to say, we are at this very moment waking up to a very different reality. The second wave is upon us. The daily infections which had gone down to under 500 are now back up over 10 000 per day. What an unwanted Christmas, a new peak! And we haven’t even reached the middle of summer.

What does 2021 hold for us? This is where our faith in the goodness and mercy of God must lead us to let God’s grace guide us in reading the signs of the times.

Two of the major signs of the times about which I have already spoken and written are the renewal of the Church and society by applying the insights of the Synods on Marriage and the Family and that on Young People, the Faith and Vocation Discernment.

Now I want to add another major sign of our times, which Pope Francis addresses in “Fratelli Tutti”. It is the Individualism, which makes each person the sole reference point of everything. This is producing a Culture of extreme Selfishness, which accounts for most of the social ills of our time.

To read the signs of the times accurately I propose that we use these three key documents written by Pope Francis to analyse our present day reality. They are Amoris Laetitia; Christus Vivit and Fratelli Tutti. These three supply us with the fundamental philosophy of life and attitude that we need to face up to, to control and eventually beat off the assault by Covid-19.

A most important step is to study very carefully Chapter Two of “Fratelli Tutti”, where Pope Francis challenges us to look closely at how we understand the lesson of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and especially how we respond to it. What the Holy Father focuses on is not so much the exemplary acts of the Good Samaritan, but the needs of “the Stranger on the road” and how we respond to them.

This is where the image of the “Stranger on the Road” is much more powerful. It forces us to examine ourselves, our core human values, as well as the basic principles, which shape and direct

our behaviour towards those in need. These are what will lead and guide us towards the Fraternity and Social Friendship.

Notice how the Pope appeals to our sense of human compassion and sympathy, rather than a sense of religious obligation. As I say this I am suddenly conscious of the parable to the Pharisee and the Tax Collector praying in the Temple - the one super conscious of his religious status, the other humbly aware of his sorry human condition.

What I find particularly challenging is that Pope Francis is calling us back to the most basic relations, which see us move from total dependency of the infant and child; the growing independence of adolescence and youth, until finally we are learning to use the independence of adulthood.

This is what the Stranger on the Road is challenging us to adopt as the measure of how we dispose ourselves to use what nature provides us with, as the concrete foundation on which to build the fraternity which our faith calls us to. Indeed, the parable seems to be warning us to move away from the belief that religious faith is enough to bring us to care for others. The opposite is more the case. Grace builds on nature, not on a vacuum. Grace does not, indeed, it cannot replace nature!

So as we approach Christmas my prayer and wish is that you will give each other the special present of seeing everyone as the Stranger on the Road, who needs your special consideration and care so that no one else is infected with Covid-19. That's the perfect building block for true fraternity and social friendship. Let us put others first.

Conclusion

Please remember what our President Ramaphosa urged us to do as we came 1: It is now in your hands. Yes! The hands. This Christmas, let that be our other especially the Stranger on the

Cyril
down to Level
future is in our
gift to each
Road!

May God bless and keep you and all Friends safe and in good health!

your Family and

Yours in Christ,

**+Wilfrid Cardinal Napier OFM
Archbishop of Durban**



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To all Church Leaders in KwaZulu-Natal

16th December 2020

Dear Church Leaders in Christ Jesus,

This has been a hard year for everyone, not least the Church Leaders who have had to bear extra emotional, mental and financial strain as they have tried valiantly to remain at the service of their communities.

As we draw to the end of 2020, we know that you and your people have had your endurance, capacity and even your faith stretched to new limits. Leading congregations in a time like this has required new levels of strength, hope and tenacity. For most of us the pressure, the anxiety and the weariness have been intense.

The **KZN COVID 19: Churches Respond** Project has meant that by God's grace we have been able to connect with many of you over these last 9 months – either in webinars, through LEANs or through relief actions of many kinds. Now as we reach mid-December, we would like to appreciate what you have done, using the words of our Lord Jesus himself:

“Well done good and faithful servants!”

Sad to say, the crisis is not over yet, so we have to **urge you and your people not to let your guard down; not to allow yourselves to believe we can all go back to normal!**

Please, please, urge your congregations to become even more vigilant. We also urge you to continue to pray for our frontline workers who are so courageously putting their lives on the line for us all. The thief - Coronavirus – is paying us a second visit!

Last week the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, advised by the experts, announced that a second wave of infections has hit our shores, causing Covid-19 numbers to rise alarmingly again. Last night President Ramaphosa pleaded with us urgently as he announced stricter measures which together with God's mercy, helped us through the first wave.

For our Churches this is one of the most significant times in our faith Calendar. But as we did at Easter, so we must do now; we must make the sacrifices that the Covid19 safety protocols demand of us, especially for **the most vulnerable** in our communities!

Here are 5 highly effective practical steps that we strongly recommend to you:

1. Your congregations are surely feeling “Covid-weary” – so as Church Leaders you must keep them on the narrow path that leads to health and safety. This means that **masks, the washing of hands, sanitising and social distancing** must continue to be your frontline defense against the Coronavirus. Make sure everyone knows and follows the protocols – each congregation or service should have a safety compliance team to ensure this happens.
2. Where possible **move back online** to avoid large gatherings. Remember that we are not allowed more than 100 people indoors and 250 people outdoors (or a maximum of 50% of the venue capacity). Let us strictly apply what has been set by government, going even further if necessary, to avoid going back to a devastating level 5 lockdown!
3. You have an important pastoral role of preparing people for changes in the way they are used to celebrating **Christmas, funerals, weddings** and other religious occasions. Poorly prepared celebrations, especially after a difficult year can be extremely hard for people and result in them overlooking safety protocols.
4. Connect with those who are **most vulnerable** financially, psychologically, or emotionally, and in particular, child-headed homes, refugees, street dwellers who may be isolated at this time. Ensure that there is a pastoral plan in place for caring for them.
5. Do not pay attention to unhelpful and **misleading messages on social media**, especially those that spread fear, destroy hope and ignore our God-given duty to love and care for our neighbour.

Lastly we encourage you to take some time to rest! The needs are huge and are unlikely to abate in 2021! Remember burnt out clergy are not much help in this crisis. So, look after yourselves and your mental, physical and emotional health. Our province needs you now more than ever.

If you are struggling in any way please reach out for help, especially from the network of Church Leaders which has worked so well these past 9 months. (info@kzncc.org.za or lifeline: 0861 322 322)

In closing, on behalf of the KZN Covid-19: Churches Respond Steering Committee, the KZN Church Leaders Group and the KZNCC, we would like to extend prayers for grace and joy to all of you.

May the Peace of our Saviour King, the fortitude of the Holy Spirit and the warm embrace of the Father, bring you peace and joy at this special time!

Yours in faith in Jesus Christ,

+ *Wilfrid Cardinal Napier OFM*

+ **Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, OFM,**
Chairperson of the KwaZulu Natal Church Leaders Group

Nkosinathi Myaka

Bishop Nkosinathi Myaka,
Chairperson of the KZNCC

DIOCESAN DIARY

January 2021

9	Annual Celebration Montebello Congregation	
10	Confirmation Wentworth	Cardinal
	Confirmation Greytown	Archbishop
13	Seminarians Commission	
14	Seminarians Interviews	
15	Ntshongweni Committee	
16	St Joseph's Sodality, Kwa Mashu (KKU)	Archbishop
17	Confirmation St Anthony Pietermaritzburg	Cardinal
	Confirmation Wentworth	Archbishop
19 - 26	SACBC Admin Board/Plenary Session	
27 - 31	Home Leave	Archbishop
28	Napier Centre 4 Healing Meeting	Cardinal
31	Confirmation Clermont	Cardinal

February 2021

1	St Benedict School Opening Mass	Cardinal
5	Building Committee	
5	Confirmation Virginia	Archbishop
7	Confirmation Pinetown	Cardinal
	Confirmation Montebello	Archbishop
8	Chancery Meeting	
10	Opening of Judicial Year	
10 – 11	Diocesan Priests Business Meeting/Recollection	
12	DMI Review	
14	Confirmation Kwa Mashu (OLL)	Archbishop
15	Diaconate Board Meeting	
21	RCIA Rite of Election: Cathedral	Cardinal
	RCIA Rite of Election: Pinetown	Archbishop
22	Finance Board	
26	Napier Centre 4 Healing Meeting	Cardinal
28	RCIA Rite of Election: Pietermaritzburg	Cardinal

