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At what price our Souls?

Pastoral Reflection for Advent / Christmas 2019

+ William Crean, Bishop of Cloyne

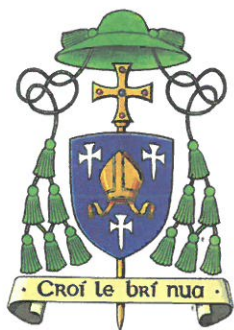
My friends,

Since mid-October we are subjected to the “Spirit of Christmas” through the creeping promotions of bargains. From a commercial point of view, it is understandable for those in business to get out there early with view to maximising the opportunity of the Christmas market - but at what price? There are indications that more and more people are finding it overpowering and overwhelming. It is a source of concern that we are now in a similar situation as we were in the days of the Celtic Tiger and we all know where that madness led us to.

Advent / Christmas is a wonderful time and it is right and fitting to celebrate its blessings. We all pay homage to the “real spirit of Christmas” which is the crib scene in Bethlehem and what that represents to Christian believers. We aspire to respect its extraordinary mystery of the divine / human encounter in the Infant Jesus through the faith and trust of Mary and Joseph. Advent time is anticipation time, expectation time. At first our carol singing brings that waiting in a spirit of joy. By Christmas we frequently are exhausted and worn down by the endless repetition. That is when our deeper spiritual preparation becomes so essential.

This time coming up to Christmas has taken on a frenetic spirit because our desire for a genuine celebration is exploited by a commercial dynamic that is overwhelming. We risk being sucked into its vortex unless we, conscious of its power, resist with the tried and tested spiritual resources of our faith.

For adults especially parents of young families this is a testing time. It is every parents desire to ensure the happiness of their children. The temptation is to give them everything they want rather than what they need. The most precious gift a parent can give their children is their time and attention. When it comes to the other gifts simply make sure you will not be paying for them long after Christmas. Try hard to keep to a budget. It pays in the long term. Consider too the impact our packaging has on the environment.



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For young and not so young anytime spent in spiritual preparation will be well rewarded. Fewer of us are gathering together in prayer yet our churches still speak to us of God's presence in our lives and His spirit dwelling in our hearts. Time spent in silent prayer in a sacred place affords us the opportunity to review life as this year draws to a close. This time may be marked by a deep sense of gratitude for the blessings or indeed may afford the opportunity to visit and review some difficult even traumatic experience of the last year or so

Advent / pre-Christmas is a hope filled time. It is a "begin again" time. The hope comes from believing that we need not be prisoners of our past failures and mistakes. Rather this season of hope moves us, from any darkness that enshrouds us, toward the light of a new beginning. It is important for us to listen to the rhythm at the heart of our lives and to appreciate that we are not alone. The great miracle at the centre of Advent / Christmas is that we find life and joy when we reach beyond our own need and preoccupation to be concerned about those around us especially those in the greatest need.

St. Paul writing to the Christians in Colossae said:

"The Father... has taken us out of the power of darkness and created a space for us in the Kingdom of the Son that he loves and in him we gain our freedom and the forgiveness of our sins" (Col. 1:2-4)

For us to accept this gift this Advent

- Spend some time in silent prayer in a sacred space
- Review the year past and give thanks for the blessings
- Ask forgiveness for failures and the grace to begin again

With prayerful good wishes for Advent preparation and Christmas celebration.

+ *Dom. Pecan*

Bishop of Cloyne