

The Light of Advent

By The Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, Bishop of Brownsville

"To you, o Lord, I lift up my soul... no one who hopes in you is put to shame." (Psalm 25: 1, 3)

With these words taken from Psalm 25, the Church sings the entrance song for the Holy Eucharist the first Sunday of Advent. In some sense, the text states the main theme for the entire liturgical year. In particular, these words direct us to the main theme of the Advent season. It all has to do with the lively hope that God desires to instill within our hearts.

The theme for the whole year: We travel the paths of life, and the key questions of life arise from this reality. How should we walk, and where are we going? Sometimes the path is dark and there are no signs to guide us. Sometimes the path gets difficult and we find obstacles. There is no lack of such obstacles in our days. The economic crisis affects our best hopes for our children; the aggressiveness of the evils that afflict our communities, such as for example, drugs and violence, continue to threaten us on all sides; the lack of respect for human rights cruelly affects the most innocent. Sometimes even Christians experience a profound discouragement, as if we were in danger of losing our hope.

The liturgy of the Holy Church offers us the light of Advent for the whole year, and for our entire lifetimes. *To you, Lord, I lift my soul.* God does not forget his people; the almighty and merciful God invites us to lift our souls to Him. This means that we should walk the joys and the sorrows of life in communion with Him. We must not rely just on our own strength. God hears us. But, do we truly seek for his support?

God Himself inspires the psalmist, and us, with the desire to lift up our souls. The soul is made capable of receiving this support in the very act of asking God for it. How, then, should we walk the path of life? We walk in life with our eyes fixed on the God who made heaven and earth. It is the Lord who inspires the good deeds we seek to do, and He directs the course of time. He encourages us with spirit of fortitude and generosity to walk our life's path.

Message for the entire Advent season: Contemplating how God has drawn near to his people, we realize that we do not walk alone in life. The readings of the Mass during Advent lift our hopes in the God who responds to our needs. The prophets announced in advance that God would come soon to save us. Every part of the spiritual atmosphere of Advent serves this purpose: to focus on the answer that God gives to our petitions. Jesus Christ our Lord, the Son of God who became man to live among us, is the answer God gives to the prayers we offer to Him as we walk our path of life. All that is needed by every person, every family and every

community, for us to make straight our steps towards peace and justice is present in the admirable person of the Son of God.

Do we want our children to achieve a better life? Then, they need to get to know Christ personally, so that the light of his Gospel smoothes their hearts with virtues of justice, generosity, and zeal to live honestly, so that they do not conform themselves to the greed, self-importance and envy that dominate the world. Do we want to live in a world where the rights of the unborn, the immigrants, and the elderly are respected? Then we must seek the spirit of Christ. He himself tells us: "*what you did for one of these least ones, you did it for me*" (cf. Mt 25: 31-46). If we respond to the grace that invites us to contemplate Christ, (that is to say, if we *lift up our souls*) we will obtain a still deeper grace of courage and strength for the path of life.

St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans 5: 5 "*hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*" What is expressed by Saint Paul's teachings is the same truth expressed by the psalmist when he says: *no one who hopes in you is put to shame.* Hope breathes in an atmosphere of love. We do not lose hope because we know, with the certainty of faith, that God loves us. The hope we have in Christ, who came for the first time through the mystery of his Incarnation, continues to grow with the coming of Christ through the grace of the Gospel and the sacraments; and this hope directs our steps as pilgrims walking to meet the Christ who will come at the end of time.

During these days, we have the treasured custom of hanging colorful lights on the trees in our yards, and on the sides of our houses. These are like external signs of welcoming the Child Jesus. At the same time may these lights be living signs of faith, hope, and love, (the brilliant lights of the soul), announcing the Christmas feasts which are drawing near. May you and all your loved ones have a lively love in your hearts in order that you never lose hope in the God who loves us so much. My deep desire is that Advent be for everyone a time of grace to prepare for our Lord Jesus Christ the welcoming that He desires and that He deserves.

Amen.