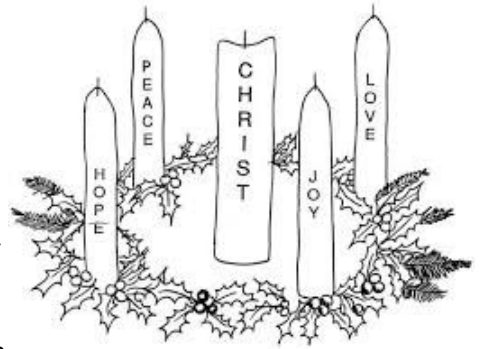


## Advent Vigilance

Dear People of Prince Edward Island,

Advent accentuates God's action in our midst. God is coming, the Advent of our God. The message of the scriptures during this season is: "What are *we* doing about it? What are *we* doing about the Advent of our God?" In Matthew's Gospel Jesus tells us to be vigilant! Stay awake! Be ready!



The quality of our vigilance will depend on whom we expect. If God is primarily and exclusively "judge" then our waiting will be filled with anxiety and fear. If God is the source of mercy and love in our lives, then our expectation of God's arrival will be very different. Our interior disposition will be hopeful and joyful. Here are a couple of examples of what I mean.

First, a few years ago Steven Spielberg produced a film entitled, "Saving Private Ryan". It is set during WWII. The story begins in a country farmhouse. A camera looks over the shoulder of a middle aged woman who peers out her kitchen window to see a car approaching. She grabs a towel, dries her hands and nervously goes to the front door. She takes a tentative step onto the front porch. From behind, the camera frames her shadow in the doorway. From a government car a uniformed officer emerges, the woman slowly crumples to the floor of the porch. Not a single word is spoken. But the mood is so clear that the audience knows the message that the officer bears. Death. She had been waiting for her four sons to return from the war in Europe. With this one visit the wait for three of her sons had come to an abrupt, tragic end. The remainder of the movie shows us the search to find and return safely, her fourth son. The mother's hope and vigilance of seeing at least one son return was ultimately fulfilled.

Second, a critically acclaimed Canadian novel by Jane Urquart, entitled "The Stone Carvers" tells of a young woman whose heart longs for the return of her fiancé from the fields of France in WWI. He never returns. But her dedication to his love in her life draws her to Vimy France. Here she disguises herself as a man in order to gain employment as a stone mason in the construction of Canadian War Memorial in Vimy. Longing hearts wait with dedication and joy and hope for those whom they love. For them, vigilance, hopeful waiting is not a moral duty nor a chore. It is a passion.

So it is for Christians who love the Lord. So it is for the Christian parish community that longs for God. In fact, the Greek root of the word, "parish", "paroikia" means "those who are in exile". Parishioners are exiles, their homeland is elsewhere; their homeland is the New Jerusalem, heaven. Exiles are hopeful and passionate about their return home. We cannot be passionate about our journey, our pilgrimage without the joyful expectation that one day we too shall arrive home to see the face of God.

Is it merely a dream to live in joyful hope about our union with God? Is Isaiah's prophecy of the days to come a dream?

*"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more."* Is. 2:4

We do dream of peace; we do dream of the Advent of our God. Both dreams are based on God's promises that were made irrevocably that holy night in Bethlehem more than two thousand years ago. They will be fulfilled because God is faithful to God's Word. Jesus' message of peace tells us that we must be vigilant, wakeful, even in the midst of violence, injustice, war, terrorism and the culture of death. So Advent stirs expectation, joy and hope for our earthly journey. The Coming of our God will bring about all these changes. And so we turn in joy and hope towards these days of Advent, filled with God's promise of new beginnings.

May these few weeks before Christmas provide for all Islanders the hope, the joy and the peace of the Advent of our God.

Bishop Richard Grecco