

Advent greetings from FIAMC

13 December 2014

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Dr John Lee

Dear Friends,

As the lyrics of the Bee Gee carol goes, "When I was small and Christmas trees were tall", I used to think that Advent was a time for feasting and presents. I really looked forward to Christmas Day when we were allowed to open our presents with bated breath and high expectations. I must confess that Boxing Day always seems like an anti-climax when I experienced a sense of disillusionment and sadness because we had to wait for 364 days to the next Christmas! As I grew older, I realised that feasting and presents were just manifestations of the commercialization of our society, and that the real meaning of Advent which is taken from the Greek word "Parousia" or The Lord is coming is to prepare us for the Second Coming of Christ. Advent is a special time for us to pray and contemplate with Mary as we prepare for Jesus to be born into our hearts. Eight years ago, my wife Priscilla and I with a few of our children and church friends decided to go to Cambodia to bring the Joy of Advent to some impoverished children in Cambodia following the example of Mary who was the first to bring Jesus, the Good News to the world. The unconditional acceptance and love of the "poor" so moved us that our annual family holiday is now spent in Cambodia. The feeling of happiness when we reach out to share Christ with others or what I call the "Joy of Service" cannot ever be fully described, it can only be experienced. The joy that I was vainly searching for in material things in my youth, I discovered in Jesus and now every day is Christmas.

This Advent as we celebrate Christmas with our love ones, let us spare a thought for the millions of victims of human trafficking a subject that is close to the heart of our beloved Holy Father Pope Francis. I first encountered human trafficking during one of our mission trips to an Indochina country where I was confronted with a case of child prostitution but did not then fully comprehend the enormity of the problem (which is conservatively estimated to affect at least 20 million victims annually). Subsequently I realize that trafficking exists in every society from the poor developing nations to the more advanced countries albeit in different forms. In talking to many people, I was faced with either ignorance or a profound sense of helplessness or resignation over what we as individuals can do to help the victims of what can be described as modern day slavery.

I believe from personal experience that there is much that we can do as individuals, organizations and as a Church to help the victims of human trafficking. The universality of the Catholic Church gives us the necessary framework and infrastructure to implement solutions. The first step would be to create awareness of the horrors of human trade. Imagine your anguish if one of your love ones was to be forced into selling a kidney or to work as a sex slave in a foreign land. We as individuals or as an organization should focus on prevention and rehabilitation of affected individuals rather than emphasize on enacting global legislation to eradicate human trafficking. I hope that this Advent, the Holy Spirit will inspire all of us to try to do our part to eradicate this scourge afflicting modern day society. No act is too small or meaningless. You can begin to change the world by restoring the dignity to one single violated individual. In Matt 25:40, Christ exhorts each and every one of us to bring the Good News to those who are suffering, "Whatever you do to the least of my sisters and brothers, you do it to me".

I would like to conclude this message with a prayer. Our loving Father, open our ears to hear and our eyes to see your quiet presence in our lives. Shape our lives with your transforming love so that we may be bearers of your Good News in our world.

As we await your coming in Glory during this Advent period, keep us vigilant and faithful knowing that you are with us always. We make

this prayer in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

May the peace and joy of the new born Christ be with you and your love ones this Christmas and always.

Yours in Christ,

John Lee