

Dear Friends,

After the Lord's Prayer at Mass, the priest always speaks these words:

*"Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."*

This is, in my opinion, a perfect Advent prayer: one that we might want to commit to memory, or say at least once each day during this wonderful season. I would like to suggest that either before a meal, or after a meal, or at some point during the day you say the Lord's Prayer out loud and follow it with these words. This prayer is so germane to what we are experiencing in our lives today.

How many of us today are more concerned about stuff we cannot control in the world? How would we describe our level of anxiety right now? Are we more worried about how bad things are in our world than we are hopeful about what our lives really are as children of God?

I did not go out shopping on Black Friday but I was listening to a friend describe the negativity she experienced at several stores. People in the lines were rude, almost mean as they went out to do their Christmas shopping. Is the giving of gifts supposed to be this stressful? Is the kindness of sharing something beautiful with a loved one supposed to cause this much stress in our lives? I can see why Mary and Joseph would have been overwhelmed by what they were going through as they prepared to welcome the birth of Jesus and I am sure their journey was filled with anxiety we can't even begin to imagine. So why are we so stressed out standing in line at a store the day after Thanksgiving?

Maybe all this "Christmas Angst" is a symptom of a severe spiritual malady. Perhaps we have lost the meaning of Advent. Instead of taking time to pray we want to be the first to get the best deal at the store.

Instead of preparing our souls to celebrate the incarnation we are working overtime to decorate Christmas trees, put up lights around the house and fill as much space as we can with sleighs and reindeer. At an even deeper level, we are, perhaps, more concerned with personal gratification and material want than we are with the reality of Jesus' coming again in glory.

We are all looking forward to celebrating Christmas, but preparing ourselves spiritually to celebrate the birth of Christ and to welcome him when he comes in glory takes an effort that we would rather avoid because we just don't want to think about those things. Unfortunately, paying attention to all the commercialization of Christmas and refusing to take time to pray always causes an anxiety that tells us we can't wait for Christmas to be over.

So, I offer you this wonderful prayer that is spoken every time we go to Mass. We are given these four weeks of Advent to help prepare us for a joyful reality beyond any gift under the tree. God has come into the world to be one like us in all things but sin so that we might know the gift of eternal life in God's kingdom. Jesus, the Son of God, the light of the world, is going to come again so that we might be with him forever. But how do we wait for that moment? Do we wait in fearful anxiety? If we do, we will miss the moment entirely. If we can wait in joyful hope, then we will discover the true meaning and beauty of Christmas. Pay attention to Advent, it is one of the most important times of our liturgical year.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel