

For many people Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, marks the beginning of the Christmas season. A period during which many of us tend to spend much energy preparing materially for a time of year that should have nothing to do with worldly goods and instead everything to do with spiritual growth. I'm referring to Advent, that time of year liturgically identified by the color purple, which began this past Sunday.

As Christians we enter Advent to prepare for not just the celebration of Christ's first coming into this world, but also for a period that looks ahead to His second coming. This means that Advent is very much about hope. Yes, hope seems in pretty short supply nowadays given the darkness of our world, and achieving this state of mind can appear awfully abstract and distant sometimes. But even the grimmest of situations can be transformed through hope.

If you're one of those souls who knows me well, then you know that I tend to be a bit of a pessimist, but that I am big on hope. I know, for some time that confused even me, until I read a quote some years ago from Vaclav Havel that says: *"Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."* Then I got it. (I was so happy to finally understand that seemingly contradictory piece of my personality…Phew!).

Anyway, I often say that I'd be nothing without faith. Well, let me tell you that I'd be nowhere without hope. Lost in limbo my friends. Because every now and then when certain circumstances have appeared to be insurmountable; when I have faced fear, failure, or loss, hope has transcended all. And I think this is one of the things that I love most about Advent. In my awareness of the season and its meaning, I'm injected with a boost of hope.

This season offers us so much, yet we fail to appreciate its true significance, as what should be a time of prayerful pondering is jarred by shopping and holiday preparation, becoming more a season of stress than a season of joy. But this can change if we make it a point to properly observe Advent, because that will help us realize more fully what the coming of Christ, and everything which that embodies, means in our lives.

And so I challenge all of us to place our hope in Jesus this Advent season and beyond, asking Him to grant us the spiritual grace that hope is, so that we can rise above all and live confidently with Him in our hearts until He comes again. Are you up for it? What will this season be about for you, black or purple?

God bless you.

Hope looks for the good in people instead of harping on the worst. Hope opens doors where despair closes them.

Hope discovers what can be done instead of grumbling about what cannot. Hope draws its power from a deep trust in God and the basic goodness of human nature.

Hope 'lights a candle' instead of 'cursing the darkness.' Hope regards problems, small or large, as opportunities.

Hope cherishes no illusions, nor does it yield to cynicism. Hope sets big goals and is not frustrated by repeated difficulties or setbacks.

Hope pushes ahead when it would be easy to quit. Hope puts up with modest gains, realizing that 'the longest journey starts with one step.'

Hope accepts misunderstandings as the price for serving the greater good of others. Hope is a good loser because it has the divine assurance of final victory.
~ Fr. James Keller, M.M

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