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Archbishop Malzaire's Advent Message

Let Us Beat Our Swords into Ploughshare this Advent

Dear brothers and Sisters in Christ, welcome to the new Liturgical Year commencing on this First Sunday of Advent. Advent signifies preparation. For us Christians, it is preparation for the commemoration of the greatest event of human history - the birthday of our Blessed Lord. Since its happening more than 2000 years ago, all human history is viewed from His perspective; either 'Before Christ' (BC) or in the year of our Lord, 'Anno Domini' (AD). Therefore, our preparation of such a significant commemoration is no small charge. It ranks beyond any life-changing event. In that way it offers the measure to which we are to rise. It is not without reason that Jesus, in presenting the purpose of his earthly mission, said in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly."

As we begin this Advent journey towards Christmas, a journey which gives meaning to our lives, I invite each of us to ask ourselves whether we have been able to enjoy the abundance which Christ came to bring. If not, what are the issues today which prevents us from enjoying such fullness? Then, having identified these issues, what better time to contemplate an adjustment, or a redress, than this season of Advent?

We all will agree that one of the scourges plaguing our local communities today and with which our people are preoccupied, is the senseless and *violent crime*. What ought we to do to bring about the much-needed change? It is a situation that must be approached from the root. Evidence has shown that a vicious cycle always ensues in an environment of wrongdoing. It begins with greed; this then translates into the desire to get rich quickly with little effort, followed by the need to defend the unmerited gains, the result being brute force, the seemingly easiest or quickest way. This substantially describes the philosophy of the gang wars and the drug trade currently pervading our beloved country.

Brothers and sisters, this Advent, do we have the courage to play our role, little though it may be, to alleviate the present situation? There is a Kwéyòl proverb which says: *Si y pas ni sitiwèz, y pas ni vòlè*, meaning, "If there is no enabler there is no thief." This situation in our country certainly did not fall from the sky. Notwithstanding those who are removed from this life innocently, among us are parents, guardians, friends, siblings, and neighbours, who are aware of the less-than-wholesome company our sons and daughters, wards, friends, brothers, and sisters keep, the ingredient largely responsible for the present situation. However, because of personal benefits being derived from such, we choose to maintain the status quo and then wonder why things have escalated this much.

We all know that guns, no matter how numerous, will never solve human problems. We are often reminded that "evil begets evil," and "those who live by the sword will perish by the sword." Our task is to see that our society does not continue to escalate into an unceasing battle ground that leads to unnecessary and senseless deaths. For us Christians, the only true weapon for the battle against the evil of the world is that offered by the one whose birth we prepare to celebrate. Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians, gives us a viable approach. He says:

*“Stand your ground, with **truth** buckled round your waist, and **integrity** for a breastplate, wearing for shoes on your feet the **eagerness to spread the gospel of peace** and always carrying the **shield of faith** so that you can use it to put out the burning arrows of the evil one. And then you must accept **salvation** from God to be your helmet and receive the word of God from the Spirit to use as a sword” (Eph. 6:14-17).*

The prophet Isaiah, too, in the First Reading of this First Sunday of Advent, expresses his wish for Judah and Jerusalem. He says:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths” (Is 2:3).

Then, he goes on to describe the character of those who will obediently follow this path:

“These will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles. Nation will not lift sword against nation, there will be no more training for war”(Is. 2:4).

This, my dear friends, is my prayer for this Advent season, as we prepare to celebrate the coming of the *Prince of Peace*. Let us all strive to be true ambassadors of that *peace* by our words, actions, and decisions. Amen!