



At the daily Mass at the Casa Santa Marta, **Pope Francis describes Advent as a good opportunity to understand more fully the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and to cultivate a personal relationship with the Son of God.**

The time of Advent has three dimensions: the past, the future, and the present. In his homily, Pope Francis recalled that **Advent**, which began on Sunday, **is a good time “for purifying the spirit, for making the faith grow with this purification.”** The Pope was reflecting on the day’s Gospel reading (Mt 8:5-11), which recounts the meeting at Capernaum between Jesus and the centurion who asked him to heal his servant. Even today, he explained, it can happen that faith can become a habit for us; we can get used to it, forgetting its “liveliness.” When the faith becomes a habit, he said, “we lose that strength of the faith, that newness of the faith that is always renewed.”

Christmas must not become worldly.

Pope Francis emphasised that the first dimension of Advent is the past, “the purification of memory”: We have to remember that Christmas is not about the birth of a Christmas tree, but about the birth of Jesus Christ:

The Lord is born, the Redeemer who has come to save us. Yes, it is a celebration... [but] we always face the danger, we will always have within us the temptation to make Christmas mundane, worldly... When the celebration stops being about contemplation—a beautiful family celebration with Jesus at the centre—it begins to be a worldly celebration: all about shopping, presents, this and that... and the Lord remains there, forgotten. Even in our own life: yes, He is born, at Bethlehem, but [then what?].... Advent is [a time] for purifying the memory of this time past, of that dimension.

Purifying hope

The Pope continued, saying Advent also serves to “purify hope,” preparing us “for the definitive encounter with the Lord”:

Because the Lord who came then will return! He will return! He will return to ask us: “How did your life go?” It will be a personal encounter. We have a personal encounter with the Lord, today, in the Eucharist; we cannot have such a personal with the Christmas of 2000 years ago: we have the memorial of that. But when He will return, we will have that personal encounter. It is purifying hope.

The Lord knocks at our heart

Finally, Pope Francis invited everyone to cultivate the daily dimension of the faith, despite so many cares and worries, taking “custody” of our own “interior home.” Our God, in fact, is the “God of surprises,” and Christians must constantly discern what the heavenly Father is saying to us today:

The third dimension is more daily: purifying our watchfulness. Vigilance and prayer are two words for Advent: Because historically the Lord came in Bethlehem; and He will come, at the end of the world and also at the end of our individual lives. But every day, every moment, He comes into our hearts, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.