



I suppose that statement needs some major clarification, but first I want to ask a question: Have you ever gone into a situation with a certain set of expectations, only to find your expectations totally blown away or turned upside down? I know I have. A few weeks ago I had one of those moments...which ties back to my first statement.

It was a typical Sunday night; I had gone to Mass in the morning, hung out with friends and did some homework in the afternoon, and was planning on going to the adoration chapel to have a holy hour in the evening. At least I was going to...until, towards the end of an extended dinner in the cafeteria, I heard the name “Jacques Philippe”. Being a huge fan of this very holy man, my ears and eyes instantly turned down the table, where a few friends were sitting.

“Wait, what about Jacques Philippe?”

“Oh, we were just saying how we’re going to a Holy Hour with him.”

“WHAT? HE’S IN CHARLOTTE?!? WHEN ARE YOU GOING?!?!”

“Oh, yeah, he’s in Charlotte, and we’re leaving in about 10 minutes.”

Of course I inquired if I could come, and they graciously agreed. And so, 10 minutes later, I hopped in the car and drove across town to go listen to a Holy Hour...given by Jacques Philippe.

We arrived to the church, and after a minute or two of running around the building trying to figure out where to go in, we made it inside. Then Jacques rose to speak...and for a moment I was extremely confused to hear him start speaking in French! When you read “Interior Freedom” or “Time with God” in English, you forget that Jacques Philippe is

very French! But my confusion was soon put to rest when the nun standing next to him began translating the French, of which I could make out a few choppy words, to the English that my ears are familiar with.

His reflection was amazing to say the least. He spoke about the gaze of Christ, and how living constantly under that gaze is what brings us true freedom and peace. I was so thankful that it was exactly what I needed to hear at the moment. But as I sat in silence meditation after he finished speaking, it wasn't the only part of the evening that left me in awe.

When I headed to dinner that evening, I was expecting to have a "normal" hour with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. But what I got...was a moment of letting go of control, spontaneously jumping in a car with 3 other girls to drive 40 minutes across Charlotte, and encountering Jesus in a very real way, under the disguise of a holy brother speaking French.

This experience makes me think about Advent, and the journey of Our Lady and Joseph to Bethlehem. Of all the famous journeys throughout history, few have as many expectations blown away or turned upside down as Mary and Joseph's long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

I don't think this holy couple was expecting to find Bethlehem so crowded, and inn after inn full to the brim. I don't think the innkeeper expected that this ordinary looking woman who he directed to the cave held the Messiah of Israel within her. I don't think Mary was expecting to give birth in a cave. I definitely don't think the Holy Family expected the first people to come see the Christ child to be shepherds. And who could possibly expect to receive a visit and extravagant gifts from astronomer-kings of a distant, foreign land? No wonder the gospel mentions several times Mary "pondering these things in her heart"...

I think it IS possible for us to have many expectations in this time of Advent and Christmas. We have lists for sending Christmas cards, lists of which Christmas parties are where and on what nights, lists for cookies to bake, lists for gifts to buy, lists of who is coming for dinner, and the list goes on. For the most part, we expect Advent and Christmas to progress according to our lists, according to our expectations.

But with all those lists, with all those expectations...is there room for God to work?

If we become so focused on making sure things go "as planned", then we might miss the quiet invitations God gives us. We might not realize that he's asking us to write a Christmas note to that friend who we haven't talked to for a while but have heard that he or she is struggling. We might not realize that, as we drive from one shopping center to the other, he might be asking us to stop by the church and make an extra visit to the Eucharist. We might not catch that, amidst the nights of fancy parties and family get-

together, he might be asking us to take an evening to visit a nursing home and talk to someone who won't get any visits from family this Christmas.

God has a way of turning our expectations upside down, and asking us to make more room in our hearts for his work. But if you think about it...isn't *THAT* the whole point of Advent? To make room for the Christ Child to enter our hearts, to come into our lives in a new and real way?

The next time you look at one of your Christmas lists, or go through your Advent expectations, stop for a moment and ask God, "What would YOU like to add or change on this list?"

His answer may indeed require us to make more room in our schedules and our hearts, but I promise that it will prepare you more for Christ's coming than you might expect.