

Homily for the Second Sunday of Advent
(Scriptures for today's liturgy)

Advent is my favorite season of the whole liturgical year,
and I try to "keep Advent" as a time of preparation
and do what I can not to celebrate Christmas before it gets here.
But with the whole world "going Christmas" around us
- it's not easy!

Haul out the holly!

Put up the tree before my spirits fall again!

*Fill up the stockings, I may be rushing things but -
deck the halls again now:*

'Cause we need a little Christmas, right this very minute:

candles in the window, carols at the spinet -

*Yes, we need a little Christmas, right this very minute,
we need a little Christmas - now!*

I know I'm supposed to wait, but waiting isn't always easy.

It's not easy for children - and it's not easy for many adults.

Even if you're only waiting for Christmas to be *OVER* - it's not easy!

And yes, I've started writing my "what I want for Christmas letter"
- but I don't write to Santa Claus, I go right to the top - to God!

Here's my draft on my trusty yellow pad...

Dear God,

I need a little Christmas

and I'm not sure I can wait for December 25 to arrive.

I don't mean to be impatient,

but I need a little Christmas "right this very minute,"

- just like the song says!

So, here's what I want for Christmas...

My country is at war, Lord,

and my nation's leaders are preparing

to send even more men and women overseas.

One thing I'm sure our world needs is peace -

and we need it sooner than later

- even "right this very minute"!

We need an end to war, to violence and terrorism

and we need to know how to find peace that lasts,

how to find the peace that only you can give.

That's why we need Christmas so much:

because it's your birthday

and you're the Prince of Peace.

My Church needs a little Christmas, too, Lord.

*We need wisdom about many things,
we need the wisdom of the visitors from the east
who searched you out when you were born.
We need the light that guided them.
We need the wisdom and light to find you
when we are confused or angry or mistrustful.
And we need to be wise enough and courageous enough
to know when to speak, and when to be silent;
when to act, and when to be still.
We need a little light from the Christmas star, Lord,
and it can't come too soon or burn too bright...*

*Lord, I'm the pastor of a Catholic parish
- well, I guess you know that!
And I know so many people in my parish
who "need a little Christmas."
They are alone and lonely
and need the company shepherds and angels
to lead them to the intimacy of friendship with you.
They are grieving the loss of loved ones
and they need the strong support Joseph offered to Mary,
and the gentle comfort Mary offered to you, her child.
My grieving parishioners and I need you to lean on
when decorations and gifts seem not enough
to hold us up through this season.
Even in our loss and our grief
"we need a little Christmas..."*

*And there are parents in my parish, Lord,
worried about their children, Lord,
and hoping that the journey they're on
will be as safe as the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.
And some families and marriages in my parish, Lord,
are much in need of the simplest gifts Christmas can bring:
mercy, forgiveness and healing.
They "need a little Christmas" to protect them
from the sharp edges families can sometimes have,
even - and especially - at this time of the year.*

*And I know, Lord,
that my Christmas wish-list may seem selfish.
I know that millions of people around the world
live in the same poverty in which you were born
and so many of them don't even have the shelter of a stable...
The poor, Jesus.. those especially loved by you.
I know that you and those in need wait for us,
who in so many ways have so much more than we need:
you wait for us to share our bounty with those who have nothing*

*and to change structures that keep the poor, poor
and the rich, richer...*

*"We need a little Christmas" to remind us
that it's your birthday, Lord,
and it isn't all about what we're going to get
but rather, it's all about what we need to give.*

*"We need a little Christmas," Lord,
and we need it sooner than later...
We need the innocence of a newborn child
to show us the way to make and keep peace...
We need the love of a mother
to wipe the tears from our eyes...
We need the justice of a king
to restore the rights of the oppressed...*

Lord, we need a little Christmas...

Well, that's my draft so far.
I have until the 25th to finish it
and there's still a few weeks before we'll be singing
Silent Night, Joy to the World and *O, Little Town of Bethlehem*.
It's certainly not too early, though,
and it might be just the right time
to remember that Bethlehem means "house of bread."
How fitting that Jesus of the Eucharist
should be born in a town called "house of bread."
How fitting that we gathered as church and in a church,
itself a "house of bread."
How fitting that we will come to this table
to be nourished by the Bread of Life,
to receive the life of the One who was born in Bethlehem.
Pray with me that we will be nourished to see
that Jesus is already born,
here, today, "right this very minute"
in our prayer, in the Eucharist, in our hearts and in our lives.
*We need a little Christmas,
right this very minute,
we need a little Christmas - now...*

- Rev. Austin H. Fleming