

An Invitation to Hope

Advent invites us to hope. The message of hope speaks to all who wait in darkness, giving them strength to endure in difficult times. In the Hebrew Scriptures the people trust their God to save them. The New Testament reveals the fullness of all that has been promised. The prophets' words and the angels' messages promise the grand vision of salvation.

What a vision it is—a merciful God who is present to all people. The Gospel of Luke assures us that *“the tender mercy of our God, by which the daybreak from on high will visit us, will shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow, and guide our feet in the path of peace.”* Those who struggle in darkness will see the light and walk in peace. To people who are broken and downtrodden, Jesus offers comfort and rest. Those who accept the invitation to hope find solace.

Yet experience tells us that personal struggles do not miraculously disappear. How does one enter into the invitation to hope, when our world still bears the signs of humanity—sickness, sin, death and toil? In these words Vaclav Havel offers a new vision of hope – one that can be understood in light of the human experience: *“Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same thing as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success. ... 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.”* This vision of hope endures despite the weight of life and offers hope to those in our health care ministry.

Hope assures us of God’s presence with us, regardless of how life turns out. Hope sustains us through difficult times. The single parent who struggles to make ends meet; the patient diagnosed with terminal illness; the health care executive faced with difficult decisions during tumultuous times—all can benefit from this invitation to hope. As we enter this holy season, may we accept God’s invitation to hope and reflect on what it means in our lives, in our world and in our ministry.

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