Living out the words "Thy Kingdom Come"

Do you remember New Year's Eve, 1999? It was a very uneventful evening for me. I had dinner at McDonalds, and stayed home and watched some of the celebrations around the world.

However, what I do remember from that year was that there was a live webcam set up in Jerusalem. I believe it was on the Mount of Olives. And this was not to watch fireworks, but because a group of dedicated people were out there waiting for Jesus to return, and wanted to make sure that the world would have access to this event.

Needless to say, Jesus did not return that night as He ascended. And I really don't think a webcam will be necessary to witness this event. But with the big millennial celebrations, there was concern about the world ending. Never mind the fact that the calendar only dates back to Pope Gregory XIII, which replaced the Julian calendar, and is just a date. And of course you might remember the concern over all the computers crashing with Y2K, which turned out to be no big deal at all.

The world will end one day, that's a fact. It could be a meteor. It could be when the sun collapses and turns into a red giant consuming our planet. Or some type of catastrophe. All things come to an end, but God is forever, and we do believe God will return to earth one day.

This is the theme we've had throughout our readings this past month and it continues this week as Advent begins. The Church invites us to think about how we are living our lives, and how do we prepare for the moment when Jesus will return and we will stand before God? Advent invites us to have the proper kind of preparation, and to bring hope and love into the world as the way to live out the words "Thy Kingdom Come."

Expecting Jesus to return or the end of the world is nothing new; cultures and people have done this up and down through the ages. Even just a few years ago you may remember the "Save the Date: Jesus is Coming" billboards all over where someone claimed to know the date of Jesus returning. Those days came and went.

Rather than focusing on trying to figure out the date, maybe we can focus on how to prepare for that by bringing God into this world here and now through our words and actions. And what a great time of year to do just that.

As we put up the lights and trees and start Christmas shopping, and inevitably go to more gatherings, we can also think about ways to help people see God through us year round. Here's some things to consider:

1) As you go through the Christmas card list, consider writing a few words in the card to people as a way to personalize them and let them know you really care about them.

2) While you're at it, once the card is sent, maybe make an effort to call or visit people,

especially elderly relatives or those who may have very few people to visit them.

3) Consider volunteering at a nursing home or as a Communion homebound visitor. I know a husband-wife team who play guitar and sing at nursing homes and in all of my parishes have had people volunteer as ministers to the homebound where they talk with people and that human connection matters so much.

4) Try to get in more time with loved ones with real conversations. One thing you notice with Jesus in the Gospels is there is so often this personal encounter; the woman at the well, or Jesus talking to Peter after the resurrection - there's no distractions, just a focus on one another. Emails and texts are great but there's no substitute for time spent with people.

5) If you are harboring grudges or frustrations at people in families, try to work through them. We say and do things without thinking and it's so easy to harbor resentment, or for camps to form within families. Time is a precious commodity, there's no need to waste it being angry or waiting to be "proven right."

6) Rarely will someone say, when asked "how are you feeling," that they are hurting or lonely. Look for opportunities. Maybe someone needs some help shoveling snow, or getting a ride to Mass, or just someone to talk to.

7) Never be afraid to talk about your faith. Notice the word "Christmas" has "Christ" in it? We do not need to be so fearful of offending that we perpetually say "Happy Holidays" and make no mention of what Christmas is all about, namely God loving us to become one of us and give us hope and love. So look for opportunities to talk about your faith throughout your life. Be an apologist - someone who knows the faith and isn't afraid to discuss it. Emphasize to the kids coming to Mass and praying with them. What a great gift it is to help people have a relationship with Christ!

8) Be thankful for the gifts and blessings you have that aren't under trees. As I wrote last week, there's so much to be thankful for, and as I celebrate the season I see so many people who bring hope and love into my life; my family; the people I work with; parishioners; my beloved dogs Kirby and now Emmett; the blessings of the world.

9) Be an "entrepreneur." By this, what I mean is don't just complain about the world and want to get out of it or hope Jesus comes back. Jesus gave you and me a job - after the ascension the apostles are told to go and baptize and make disciples of all the nations and to stop staring at the sky but to get to work. Good advice!

10) Never forget what a great gift you are to so many people. Through your actions and words, you make a difference. So keep trying to do that better. We all have good days and bad days, but the healthy Christian looks at their life and says "how can I become an even better person?" As I've shared before, I've yet to have a funeral Mass where someone talks about a Christmas gift from their loved one. But rather they've shared so many stories about growing up and being with the people and the simple moments that

left such an impact.

I hope you have a great Advent season. It's a festive time of year where we think about how God came once, and will come again, but also think about how He can come into the lives of so many every day when we truly live out our commission to be disciples to all the nations.

God bless!

Fr. Paul