



Simla Chandigarh Diocese

Bishop's House, P.O. Box No: 709, Sector 19-A Chandigarh - 160 019, INDIA.

† Ignatius L. Mascarenhas
Bishop of Simla-Chandigarh

TEL: 0172-2775777, 2773777
FAX: 0172-2781630
EMAIL: bpignatius@gmail.com

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Advent Pastoral Letter – December 2023

To All the Lay Faithful, Religious and Clergy of Simla-Chandigarh Diocese

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

As reported on November 29 in the Indian media, the entire nation sat glued to TV news channels, as the great tunnel escape of 41 Workers, who for 400 Hours with many Twists, Turns, made their escape from inside the, Uttarkashi's collapsed Silkyara tunnel. As the rescue teams were drilling from three different directions, the workers went through 17 days of confinement, they adapted, recomposed themselves and collaborated for the greater good of all. They kept watch, were alert and cooperated in their rescue from the tunnel.

When the big drilling machines failed, the final breakthrough in the Tunnel escape, came after rat-miners (specialised-workers) manually dug the last stretch to finally reach the entombed workers, it was as if God had come to their rescue. These rat-miners reminded everyone *"that no tunnel is too difficult to emerge from"* as they uplifted the spirits of every Indian citizen. They remind us that in the journey of life, no task is impossible when our actions and prayers are collaborative and collective.

TODAY December 3, we begin another inward journey, in the season of Advent we prepare for Christ's coming. On the 1st Sunday of Advent in the Gospel of Mark, the Lord exhorts us to, vigilance as we await the day of his Second Coming. *"Be watch full! Be alert! You not know when the time will come"*. When we hear such warnings, Christ's return might seem to loom as a threat, the prospect of his suddenly appearing causing us to live in a state of some fear. Received in faith, these Advent essentials makes us eager to be with the Lord, much as a bridegroom and bride count the days to their wedding, or to all friends look forward to the moment they will meet again for after many years. We are being told: *"keep your eyes open! You will not want to miss this!"*

But the graces of Advent, do not only give us a readiness to welcome Jesus at the end of time. Here and now, we gain greater sensitivity to the countless ways Christ appears before us: all the little providential "returns of Christ" that come each day through the duties of our vocation and the circumstances of our life. *"In a certain sense Lord always wants to come,"* Pope Benedict XVI once said *"he knocks at the door of our hearts: are you willing to give me your flesh, your time, your life? This is the voice of the Lord who also wants to enter our time, he wants to enter human life to us." He seeks a "living dwelling place in our personal lives."*

Hence in Advent, we watch for the Lord of the house. We watch for him in those we serve, in our work, enough struggles, in a prayer, and ultimately, in our death. And, as we strive to go faithfully about our task, we believe that even now he strengthens our tired souls, raising our eyes to the joy set before us: behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

We pray: *Heavenly Father, your promise that those who watch for your son will not be disappointed. Strengthen my courage and inflame my heart to desire more and more as final coming.*

I wish you a Holy Christmas and a Blessed New Year 2024.

This Advent Pastoral Letter is to be read out or its contents to be explained in Hindi or Punjabi in all Churches on 1st or 2nd Sunday of Advent.

Given on Friday 01.12.2023 at the Bishop's House, Chandigarh.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

† Ignatius L. Mascarenhas
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SOME GENTLE REMINDERS:

1. Clergy recollection for the month of December 2023 is being organised at the deanery level, I request the Denes to organise this.
2. The Christmas Civic Reception is being held on 19 December 2023 at the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Chandigarh.
3. The annual Christmas get-together for Priests -Religious to be organised in the deanery at a convenient time.