



THE PASTOR'S POST

WAITING FOR THE LIGHT!

This week, Seminarian Nick offers a wonderful reflection for these days of Advent!

Nick

The university where I studied theology was known for its incredible amount of diversity. Many of the classrooms where my lectures were held were filled from wall to wall with seminarians and sisters from almost every continent and background you could think of. Behind me sat a small contingent of Scandinavians, with many of them from Finland and Norway. I very quickly befriended one the seminarians, Matthias, during our many coffee breaks and study hours. Matthias is from a small village named Kolari, in the farthest northern reaches of Finland. Not exactly a bustling city! Finland is home to only 8 Catholic churches, meaning Matthias and his family would drive over 3 hours to the nearest parish to practice their faith. Matthias grew up within his family tradition of raising huskies and reindeer on the family farm alongside his father. I often would joke with Matthias, asking him if Kris Kringle was a lousy neighbor or not.

As Matthias would often share, growing up in this winter wonderland, though, often had its drawbacks. He told me that for about 3 months of the year, his village wouldn't see sunlight because of how far north it is. One day in mid-November the sun would set and wouldn't rise again until late February. During those months, the people of Inari would live in cold darkness, with temperatures often dropping well below -30 F. Brrrrr! That's military-grade cold!

One day, I asked Matthias how his family and friends handled these long periods of darkness. I said, "It must be so isolating to live without the sun for so long." I will never forget his response. He said with a smile, "We try not to focus too much on the dark, everyone only talks about the day when the sunlight will come." What a response! It shocked me how much the spirit of

great expectation was so present in Matthias' community. They did not let the darkness shake them, knowing confidently that it would eventually come to an end. They had hope in their hearts! The whole community had its eyes set on the coming sunlight that would change their everyday lives completely.

If only we could have a little more of this spirit when we encounter the great darkness that is often around us! This darkness can take many forms for each of us, but we know it when we see it. There is darkness in the world, in our country, and so often in our own hearts. The greatest lesson I took from this small encounter with Matthias is that darkness is not permanent when we know the light is coming. I'm so often fooled into believing that the darkness of uncertainty, doubt, and disappointment is permanent in my life. But wow does God have a plan. Just have a look at what the prophet Jeremiah tells us this weekend: "Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever."

Maybe this Advent season we can remember just a little more that this darkness does not have the last word. Maybe we can focus more on the day when the light will come, the child Jesus. It is this Jesus who brings an end to the darkness we so often find ourselves in, it is this Jesus who conquers all things, and it is this Jesus who holds our lives in his healing hands. The Advent wreath we light in our homes and in our parish is a reminder of the incredible reality.

I pray that this Advent can be for us a time of great hope and expectation for a future of light this small child offers us. I pray that celebrating the coming of our Savior might be a time when our hearts are filled with just a bit more hope that the Lord is a great light for the darkness that so often seems unending.