

December 4, 2008

Advent Devotional

By Tom Pappalardo

Scripture: I Thessalonians 3:1-13 (NIV)

So when **we could stand it no longer**, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, so you well know. For this reason, when **I could stand it no longer**, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all of our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. **How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?** Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and bold in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Devotional:

The Apostle Paul uses the phrase "could stand it no longer" in his letter to the members of the church at Thessalonica as a reference as to how he longed to hear that they continued to follow Christ faithfully. Reading it you can almost feel the interest and love he had for this group of new believers. He was worried about their continued faith even in the midst of the persecution he was experiencing.

It was not his current persecution that occupied his thoughts and prayers. It was the ongoing vitality and faith of the new Christians in Thessalonica. The fact that they stood firm in their faith was his encouragement and he rejoiced that together they shared in the joy of God's presence.

Too often, those who we share our faith with, even those who sit around us each and every Sunday in church are no more familiar to us than the strangers we encounter in our daily life. We are too busy or too preoccupied with our own worries to encourage them and to inquire about their walk with the Lord. Obviously, it takes time to build a relationship with another believer and I am not advocating becoming an insincere busybody who inquires and pokes around into other's lives. However, like Paul, we are called to invest our lives in others; to care for them as friends, to pray for them and to encourage them to continue to pursue their walk with Jesus.

Advent is a season in which we prepare to celebrate God himself actively "intruding" into our lives as the Christ child. During this time of preparation let us find someone in our circle of acquaintances that we can encourage, befriend and rejoice with during the coming year. The richness of a new friendship, like the one Paul describes, not only blesses our new friend, it will also bring new joy to our own life and serve to encourage us to follow the Christ and "stand firm" in Him.

Prayer:

Our dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for loving us enough to intrude into our lives through the birth of your son, Jesus Christ. His birth, life, death and resurrection brought new life to us. Help us during this advent season to reach out in friendship, encouragement and caring to those around us who call you Lord and seek to follow you more closely. In turn, Lord, bring other believers in to our life who will encourage us in the same way as the road before us becomes uncertain and full of challenge. We pray in the name of your son, our savior, Jesus Christ.