

There was a popular song in the mid-60's that I am sure many will remember:

*To everything turn, turn, turn ... there is a season ... turn, turn, turn... and a time for every purpose under heaven.*

The seasons of life:

Life offers us a WINTER that shows itself in barrenness, starkness, a harshness in which signs of life are missing ... there is a winter in the 'world news' of these times ... the religious persecution of innocent people; the refugee crisis and the ensuing question of 'compassion vs. security'; families separated through war and violence; the complex problems with immigration; the attacks in Paris; the terrorists ... what will they do next? Displaced peoples, abductions, hostages, killing... These words are all too familiar to us these days ... life offers us a winter that instills not only cold ... but fear and terror.

Life offers us a SPRINGTIME that shows itself in new life - when we feel some hope, get glimpses that life will be better, that things can be different ... life offers us a springtime when we do not despair of peace; when we do not allow hatred and revenge to enter our hearts; when political leaders express compassion for the humanitarian needs of foreigners, and refugees are well-received ... life offers us a springtime when we hear that aid workers are making a difference in people's lives; when we allow ourselves to be encouraged by the words and example of Pope Francis and how he continues to move forward with hope - not giving way to discouragement or fear.

Life offers us a SUMMER that shows itself in times when we can just 'be' ... rest ... relax, enjoy ... when we celebrate a Thanksgiving meal together with family and friends, when we live life as in the past ... shopping for Christmas gifts, planning who and how we will celebrate the holydays and vacation time ... when we cook and bake and decorate and exchange gifts. Life offers us a summer when we have time to enjoy and to catch our breath.

Life offers us an AUTUMN that shows itself in opportunities to change, to grow. Nothing is static, life moves on, life changes constantly and so do we. We let go of what is old and no longer life-giving for us. We realize that

hearing the gospel of Jesus makes us look into our own hearts and see where we are not who we are called to be...and we begin to make changes. This is autumn. . . when we change our thinking, our attitudes, our opinions, our priorities, our behaviors. Why? Because when we hear the gospel of Jesus we are called to make a difference ... and that will always involve a change in us.

We are familiar with the four seasons ... and with the seasons of life ... the seasons come and go ... and the pattern is repeated. About this time every year we enter the season of Advent. It shows itself in the ambience of our church; the change of colors, the songs, the scripture readings and prayers. In a way it is nothing new ... first Advent, then Christmas ... we do this every year... but lest it become too familiar – let us be reminded of WHO Advent is about... this season is about the Lord Jesus. How shall we celebrate Him?

Maybe this year... I can be a little bit more generous with my time for the Lord. I can make an effort to give Him – not just my left-over time – when I have nothing else to do, but give Him my best time for prayer ... when I can open my heart to Him with full attention – and focus on my relationship with Him.

Maybe this year ... I can be a little bit more generous in giving to other people – by doing random acts of kindness, by forgiving and letting go of a past hurt, by addressing an addiction that I have, or giving life's essentials to those who go without.

Will I strive for a little more goodness in my life this Advent? Being a little more God-centered? Being a little more other-centered? If I live my life in such a way – can I believe this will have far-reaching effects – beyond my individual life? How can this be? Pope Francis has made so clear that all creation is interconnected ... indeed all people are connected – *“Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures.”* (LS 92)

Can I believe that the way I live my life – will make a difference for my sisters and brothers in Pleasant Hill, in Paris and among the millions of people we now call refugees? Can I see my life as so inter-connected that I can be a blessing for people half a world away?