



Lighting Advent Candles

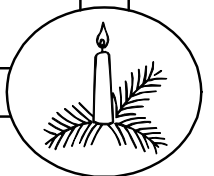
Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

<http://www.ronrolheiser.com/columnarchive/?id=245>

To light a candle is an act of hope

In the days of apartheid in South Africa, Christians there used to light candles and place them in windows as a sign to themselves and to others that they believed that some day this injustice would end. A candle burning in a window was a sign of hope and a political statement. The government didn't miss the message. It passed a law making it illegal to place a lit candle in a window, the offense being equal to owning a firearm, both considered equally dangerous. This eventually became a joke among the kids: "Our government is afraid of lit candles!"

They had reason to be! Lit candles, more than firearms, overthrew apartheid. Hope, not guns, is what ultimately transforms things. To light a candle as an act of hope is to say to yourself and to others that, despite anything that might be happening in the world, you are still nursing a vision of peace and unity based upon something beyond the present state of things and this hope is based upon deeper realities and powers than the world admits. To light a candle is to state publicly that you believe that what's real and what isn't is ultimately determined by powers and issues that go beyond what's seen on the evening news. To light a candle is an act of political defiance. It's also an act of hope.





What is Hope?

First of all, it's not wishful thinking. I can wish to win a lottery, but that wish, all by itself, contains no real power to make it happen. Second, hope is not just natural optimism, an upbeat temperament that always sees the bright side of things. An unwavering optimism about things can sometimes even be helpful, but it's no basis for hope, like wishful thinking it lacks the power to make its own dream come true. Finally, hope is not simply shrewd observation and common sense, the talent for sorting out the real from the fluff. Useful as this is, it's still not hope. Why not?

Because hope doesn't base itself upon a shrewd assessment of the empirical facts, but upon belief in a deeper set of realities: God's existence, God's power, God's goodness, and the promise that flows from that...

We light advent candles with just that in mind...we continue to light candles and hope anyway, not on the basis of a worsening or improving evening newscast, but because the deepest reality of all is that God exists...We light candles of hope because God, who is more real than anything else, has promised to establish a kingdom of love and peace on this earth and is gracious, forgiving, and powerful enough to do it.

