Advent Season By Dr. John Smarrelli Jr., President, Christian Brothers University

As we come to the completion of the 2011 calendar year, I found myself reflecting on a most interesting political climate, particularly in Washington, DC. Over the past year, there has been so much talk of the debt that the United States owes and how we are going to cut programs to reduce that debt or maybe raise taxes to bring in more revenue to pay the debt. The complexities of these discussions make a simple solution difficult to comprehend, and the ideologies of the political parties seem to make compromise very difficult. If we take a global perspective, we hear of many countries across the world, particularly in Europe, who are also concerned about a debt that may cause them to default. I am sure that the discussions will continue throughout 2012 about how to best deal with this situation, and with an election on the horizon, the rhetoric will become magnified. We constantly hear concerns that we cannot place this debt on the backs of our grandchildren and must resolve our situation immediately.

So during this Advent season, what is the relevance of the concept of debt in our relationship with God, (and I am not writing about the debt most of us will accrue as we try to pay for our Christmas presents)? Prior to their original sin, Adam and Eve were not in debt to God but in fact enjoyed an abundance of material and spiritual goods. However, after they sinned, they created a debt with God that was so significant, that it has been passed on to each of us even today in the form of original sin. God realized that Adam and Eve’s debt could not be resolved by human actions alone, but required a most powerful action that the world up to that time had never seen. God chose to send his only Son Jesus Christ to come to earth as a human being to provide us a way to not only repay that original debt, but to provide us with a model by which we live our lives. The sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation allow us to erase that original debt that was inherited by us from Adam and Eve. If we ask to be forgiven, we can also free ourselves of our debt that accrues with God as a result of our sinful actions. The story of Jesus’ coming to earth includes his birth that we celebrate later this month, his life which provides us with a model to live our lives, and unfortunately his suffering and death to pay the ultimate price for our sins. His resurrection and interactions with his disciples after his resurrection set the stage for how we can free ourselves from this debt that we accrue with God by our sins throughout our lives.

If only the economists and politicians across the world could find a way to absolve the world of the financial debt we have accrued. For in Jesus, there are no Republicans, no Democrats, no Tea Parties nor Occupiers. In Jesus is a savior who understands that there are times in our lives when our spiritual assets move into the red. Unlike our seeming inability to solve our current financial issues, through his taking the form of human, Jesus has given us a clear path to spiritual prosperity. As we approach the celebration of the birth of this child who has freed us from our ultimate burden of sin, let us exude the confidence of John the Baptist who...
proclaimed:

“One mightier than I is coming after me.
I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.
I have baptized you with water;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”

As we celebrate this Advent season, remember the ultimate blessing...“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8) Best wishes to you and those dear to you for a blessed Christmas and happy New Year!