



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Advent sets the stage for Christmas Joy

When you enter your parish Church any time during the four weeks of Advent, it is one of the very few places in which you will not hear Christmas music. The Christmas season begins the evening of December 24th, not on Black Friday or the day after Halloween. Advent has a feeling and purpose all its own. It is a time of preparation in which your internal preparation is more important than presents, decorations and baking. Setting aside time for quiet reflection will allow you to ponder important questions such as: What does it mean for the world that the Son of God has entered into it? What does it mean that Christ has entered your life? It is essential to recognize that you won't celebrate Christmas very well if you don't reflect and pray about these things, if you do not hunger for Christ's presence, if His birth is not a gift greater for you than any other.

I first came to recognize the need for interior preparation in the season of Advent during a family celebration on Christmas Day. Interestingly enough, it was a year in which I received a larger amount of gifts than usual. And I received a pair of boots that I had wanted for months. After our family completed opening our presents, I noticed a real emptiness in my heart. These feelings were significant enough that I started to ponder, over many days, the true meaning of Christmas and how the things of the world do not satisfy the longing of our hearts. (After a short time, I didn't even like the boots.)

What does it mean for the world that the Son of God has entered into it?

When Adam and Eve freely chose against God, they separated themselves from Him. God did not abandon our first parents but promised to send His Son as our Savior, to reunite us with our Heavenly Father in a relationship of love. This is made possible through Christ's Incarnation, Death and Resurrection. During Advent, you want to remember the incredible gift of the Christ Child and how life is different for each and every person since Our Lord's victory over Satan, sin and death.

What does it mean that Christ has entered your life?

Each person is personally sinful and needs a Savior. If you are honest you must admit that you can be selfish, insensitive, lazy, greedy, ungrateful, shallow, uncommitted, spiteful...and the list can continue. You are reminded of the "bad news" of your personal sin so that you appreciate the magnificence of the "good news" of a cure. This is to prepare you for Christmas that is really the joyful "counterpoint" to sin. Advent sets the stage for Christmas joy by reminding you of the harmful effects of sin in your life. After your preparation during Advent, on Christmas you will have a deeper understand of the words at Mass: Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord!"

Jesus is your Savior, and therefore you are able to overcome the temptations of Satan, habits of personal sin and eternal death by cooperating with God's grace won for you by Christ on the Cross. Jesus loves you so much that He gave His life for you so that you can be united with Him in Sacraments and prayer, and forever in Heaven. Therefore, you are not alone; Christ is with you. In prayer, He enlightens, strengthens and frees you so that you can live a life of joy and peace, even amidst trials and difficulties. This is true for every single person who accepts the love of God.

How do you hunger for Christ's presence?

Life is hectic and you have many things that vie for your attention. Even if you are too busy or exhausted from all that you desire to accomplish during this season, you can ask the Holy Spirit to give you a hunger for Christ's presence and He will answer that prayer. Planning the specified time for prayer each day is important; otherwise it can so easily fall by the wayside.

continued on back >>



DIocese of LA CROSSE, WI

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Making a good confession during the season of Advent is something you don't want to miss. Your burden of guilt and the weight of sin will be taken away, which leads to healing and interior freedom. This cleansing from sin allows more room in your heart for the Christ Child. You can also fast from TV programs or desserts or other things that you like a little too much, which really don't satisfy your heart. Fasting helps increase our hunger for Christ.

Please know that it is not too late to begin the internal preparation for the coming of the Christ Child! In these days, prepare your heart so that the birth of the Christ Child coming as your Savior is your greatest gift on Christmas Day.

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