



# Relationship with GOD

## More than Just SUNDAY

### Experiencing Advent Deeply, for Busy People

**T**he challenge of entering Advent, or of entering into any religious experience, these days is that we are often very busy. We may feel bad that we don't have time, but it is true, we just don't have time. The result is that our experience of Advent is four Sunday Masses, which begin with lighting a new candle in the Advent wreath and the rest of it may just pass around us, without any real effect.

#### A Proposal for a New Way to Experience Advent This Year

There are two things that are critical for a new way to experience Advent: desire and focus.

**Desire:** The powerful advantage of Advent is that it offers us light in the midst of darkness, hope in the midst of despair, liberty in the midst of captivity, and peace in the midst of war or conflict. The key to a grace-filled Advent is to begin by identifying where I am experiencing darkness, despair, captivity and war. Recognizing our own unique version of these struggles is the first grace of Advent. We can't say "Come, Lord Jesus" with any real meaning unless we have a felt experience of what it is we need. Once we experience our need, then the desire can formulate in our heart to ask for what we need.

**Focus:** How do we do this first step, if we don't have time? We do it by focusing our attention whenever we can, especially during the "background" times of our day. These are the in between times – in the shower, getting dressed, walking down stairs, getting coffee, driving to work, walking down the hall, doing laundry, shopping, preparing a meal, walking from one meeting to another, heading home from work, getting ready for bed. In these

very brief times, there is something in our minds. Sometimes, we are "day dreaming" or our minds are wandering. At other times, we are thinking about what we have to do, or we are full of anxiety about something coming up, or perhaps we are "replaying" a memory or imagining a future conversation. Whatever is going on in our minds and hearts during those "background" times can easily be refocused. It takes a little practice and some discipline, but it works.

**The First Week of Advent:** Our days of the first week can be transformed if we decide – consciously choose, with a deep desire – to use the background times of each day to explore where I am in spiritual need. We can use the images of Advent to help ourselves explore "darkness," for example. Darkness can include any discouragement, disappointment, frustration and any limits I'm experiencing. It might be struggles in my primary relationships or feelings of self-doubt. It might be struggles at work that tend to dominate my life and hurt my family relationships. It might be repeated struggles with temptations and sin that have become patterns in my life and embarrass me, while I can't foresee any hope of change.

**Don't Rush – First Things First:** It is important not to skip this first step. There might be Christmas decorations in the shopping malls or Christmas parties to go to, but the first step we need to experience is to slow down and begin at the beginning. If we are to have a deep religious experience that allows us to celebrate the Incarnation – in the past and its meaning for me today – then we have to first taste the depth of our longing for a Savior. Until we feel our need for a Savior, we are at risk of missing gifts of the Season of Advent altogether.

**Step Two – Longing and Anticipation:** Once we experience our deep desire for Light and Hope, Liberty and Peace, we can start to pray with deep longing and anticipation. Longing is an expression of how much we want something. Anticipation is an expression of how much we expect it to become a reality. Of course, the prayers and readings of Advent are all about offering us these graces. The expression of promise and expectant hope can feed our desires.

**Toward Christmas Joy:** Christmas will be totally different, after this kind of deep Advent journey. We can't help but experience real joy for having prepared to be renewed in the gift of life that comes to us through Jesus. We will sing, "Oh Come All Ye Faithful, Joyful and Triumphant," with a much deeper meaning for us. When there is more light than darkness, more freedom than addiction, more hope than discouragement, more peace than conflict, we have much reason to rejoice at such a gift. Putting the meaning back into Christmas is reason enough to give Advent a new chance this year, in the midst of our busy lives.

*Taken from Praying Advent, on Creighton University's Online Ministries web site:*

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