



Prayer Changes Things

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 internal preparation which is more important than presents and decorations. 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 our lives? We won't celebrate Christmas very well if we don't reflect and pray about these things, if we do not hunger for Christ's presence, if His birth is not a gift greater for us 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. 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.

When Adam and Eve freely chose against God, they separated them-

selves 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, we want to remember the incredible gift of the Christ Child and how life is different for us since Our Lord's victory over Satan, sin and death.

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

Jesus is our Savior, and therefore we are able to overcome the temptations of Satan, habits of personal sin and eternal death by cooperating with God's grace won for us by Christ on the Cross. Jesus loves us so much that He gave His life for each person so that we can be united with Him in the Sacraments and prayer, and forever in Heaven. Therefore, we are not alone; Christ is

with us. In prayer, He enlightens, strengthens and frees us so that we 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.

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

Making a good confession during the season of Advent is something we don't want to miss. Our 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 our heart for the Christ Child. We can also fast from TV programs or desserts or other things that we like a little too much, which really don't satisfy our 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.

By Ann Lankford

