

2022-12-DEC-ADVENT/CHRISTMAS #1

KNIGHTS' CHAPLAIN'S CORNER DEC 22 ADVENT/CHRISTMAS #1

ADVENT SEASON INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these pages is to help you understand and live the meaning and structure of the ADVENT season, its spirituality and the pastoral activities and celebrations of this season.

1. Brief History

In the third century (the 300s) of our era, Christians began to celebrate the coming of the Lord among us. At that time, it was a new celebration because before that, only the Lord's Day, EASTER, not only the annual day of Easter but every SUNDAY, was celebrated.

The celebration of CHRISTMAS was to recognize the anniversary of the coming of the Lord and an occasion to fight the pagan festivals (celebrated on December 25 in Rome and for the Egyptians on January 6) by proclaiming the faith of the Church in the incarnation and birth of Jesus.

Once the date of the celebration of the birth of the Lord was fixed, Advent became a time of preparation. This custom of preparation that had its origin in Galicia and Hispania was in the seventh century to Rome, thus giving birth to this liturgical time, which today we call ADVENT.

Suffice these few facts of history as an introduction to this brief reflection.

2. Theme and Structure of Advent

The celebration of Advent lasts 4 weeks that are divided into two stages. During the Advent season, the coming of the Lord is contemplated in two aspects: the ESCATOLOGICAL coming and the HISTORICAL coming.

The first stage begins on the first Sunday of Advent and ends on December 16. In the first stage the coming of the Lord is contemplated in its two dimensions, believers are invited to prepare themselves to meet the Lord and receive him in their concrete existence. There is a continuity with the themes that were already present from the last weeks of ordinary time and the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe. Those weeks celebrate the eschatological coming of Christ, that is, his return in glory and majesty.

The second stage focuses on the historical coming of the Lord; it is like a "holy week" that prepares us for the Christmas celebrations. From December 17, the liturgy without totally forgetting the eschatological nuances characteristic of the Advent season, focuses instead on the preparation for Christmas.

It should be noted, because of their rich content, very typical of these days, the antiphons for the evangelical canticle from the Office of the Hours (called "Oh" antiphons) are very important. The dense biblical content of the "Oh" antiphons lends itself very well to enriching our Advent prayer.

The most important point about the meaning of Advent is the coming of the Lord. The Lord will come and therefore we must be prepared; one cannot receive the Lord in any way, a preparation is required. This preparation is the conversion of the heart which produces joy, happiness, hope, and prayer. The time of

Advent is the time of HOPE, of putting into practice this virtue that with faith and love constitutes the fabric of spiritual life.

Advent differs from Lent. Advent it is not directly penitential. It would be a mistake to think of Advent as a Lenten season that precedes Christmas.

The readings of this season guide us in the two dimensions of the coming of the Lord already indicated above, in the first readings the messianic prophets are heard, especially Isaiah, announcing the Savior and the beginning of new and definitive times; in the gospel we hear the Lord's exhortations to vigilance and text of the Infancy narratives.

This sense of hope & yearning for the definitive new times is expressed in the liturgy by the suppression during the advent season of the festive symbols (flowers, Glory, decorations). This lack will highlight the fuller festive expression that will only have its height of joy when the Lord is with his people in Christmas.

3. How to live it as a family?

The time of Advent comes in our aid to teach us again to have HOPE.

Let us live Advent as a renewal of the coming of Christ in each member of the family. To live the Advent season is to prepare for Christmas through FORGIVENESS, SACRIFICE, ENCOUNTER, and LOVE. The two great figures that come to our aid in Advent are Saint John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary.

The first cries out in the wilderness of our lives to straighten-out our ways and to turn to the Lord. A first response to the Advent season is a good celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Another would be to imitate it in austerity, an austerity that leads to generosity and solidarity. Would you be able to sacrifice yourself and expenses on yourself, in this Advent season, to share more with those who do not have enough? The Virgin Mary, on the other hand, teaches us that true happiness consists in doing the will of God, even if we do not understand it. She takes us by the hand and encourages us to welcome the Good News of the Lord's arrival.

It is impossible to talk about Advent today without talking about Christmas and its whole framework in popular culture and popular religiosity. During this time, the family is subjected to a bombardment by the media that tries to provoke unreal needs in everyone and especially in children, needs to buy things, Consumerism.

The celebration of the birth of the Lord (Christmas) and the time of preparation (Advent) so beloved by popular religiosity, still so much a part of our modern culture, despite so many abuses of consumerism, is not the prime Christian celebration. It is a celebration that can only see its origins in Easter, in the Resurrection. But the celebration of Advent and Christmas contain, even in their complex history, an impeccable theology and a dense spirituality.

But in popular culture, Christmas is still a very heartfelt time, a sentimental celebration – in our current culture, even more so than Easter. The richness of the liturgical celebration has produced this culture of Christmas. Of course, certain bad aspects exist such as excessive consumerism and the coldness a Christmas where the center of the celebration has been forgotten (the Christ child). In many places, the meaning of the feast has been transformed, twisted, distorted and turned upside down. The Christians of the fourth century were able to Christianize a pagan festival, but for many "modern Christians" the Christian holiday has been paganized or secularized in the popular culture.

As far as the relationship between Easter and Christmas, we can remember these aspects:

- * Christmas is the beginning of the Easter sacrament, which includes the incarnation of the Son of God both inseparable from each other in the confession of faith.
- * Christmas is the beginning of Redemption, since the Son takes part in human nature, in which he will be able to consummate his passion and his resurrection will be effective and perpetual according to the flesh.
- * In the glorified Christ there is always present the salvific mystery of his birth, the reality of the assumed flesh of the Virgin Mary, the mystery of divine condescension and the teardrop of salvation,
- * In the antiphons the "today Christ is born" may resonate, because the current TODAY He has become the eternal presence of the Word, the Christ.

Christmas is the most popular Christian holiday, the most intensely lived celebration of the year. However, all pastoral and family effort will be of little help to Christians, through all the folk traditions, distorted traditions, and twisted customs, if they do not come to grasp with the true mystery of God who becomes man.

DECOMERCIALIZING the time of Advent and Christmas is necessary in our days. The two most important Christmas holidays (Christmas and the Epiphany) and the whole Advent/Christmas season, is infected with the "laws and customs" of the consumerism.

This will not take away from the feast what it has as far as feelings and emotions. But should guide all towards an deep, authentic Christian celebration, beyond the layers of greetings, partying, the special food, the champagne, the gifts, the 3 Kings, the cards, the sweets, the hot chocolate, rum toddies, egg nog, and etc.

Therefore the Christian family prepares to commemorate the arrival of the Redeemer by fostering **HOPE, SACRIFICE, LOVE, FORGIVENESS, SERVICE, and ENCOUNTER**. The ornaments, the tree, the lights, and the little balls of color are in the house. But in the Christian home there has to be a MANGER scene. It must occupy a visible place in the home to keep in mind what we celebrate these days: the Son of God comes to live our life, shown to all by the light of the star, accompanied by Mary and Joseph, visited by simple pastors, worshiped by wise men from distant lands, and announced in song by angels. The Son of God made man, a small and weak child, is the Light for the whole humanity.

The manger/nativity scene can be set-up a few days before Christmas. The time of Advent is signified by the Advent wreath. In each house the candles of the crown should be lit progressively every Sunday, with a proclamation of the reading of the Gospel of the day and some prayers for the coming of the Lord.

Above all, taking into consideration the way the world celebrates the month of December, there should be a profound, visible difference in the way in which the Christian family prepares to receive Christmas by living the Advent season and how the family celebrates the Christmas season itself.

4. The symbols of Advent

The Advent liturgy helps us understand how the Church wants us to live this time of preparation.

The use of the color of purple, the omission of the Glory, the absence of flowers on the altar, gives us the sense of austerity, of sacrifice in preparation, for the "eschatological coming" - the emphasis on the coming of Christ at the end of the world seen during the first two weeks of Advent. While in the last weeks, we are told about the expectation of the Old Testament and of Mary for the birth of Christ, according to the flesh.

The Advent wreath also has a rich symbolism: it is a green crown (color of hope) with four candles (symbolizing the 4 Sundays of Advent). Every Sunday, one more candle is lit. It is the light (Christ) that is approaching. When the four candles are lit, Christmas arrives.

5. The characters of Advent

The Advent season presents three characters that help us prepare for the Christmas holidays.

ISAIAH is the prophet of Advent. In his words resounds the echo of the great hope that will comfort the chosen people in difficult and transcendental times. In his attitude and his words, the waiting, the coming of the King Messiah is manifested. He announces a hope for all time. In our times it is necessary to contemplate the figure of Isaiah and listen to his message that tells us that all is not lost, because the faithful God in whom we believe, does not abandon his people, but on the contrary, brings salvation.



JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE PRECURSOR, is another of the characters of Advent; in his person and his words, he sums up all of prior history of salvation presented in the Old Testament, he prepares the ways of the Lord, invites us to conversion, salvation, and points to Christ among men. John's call to conversion has great relevance today, his invitation is very important. In order to receive the Lord, we must change our mentalities and practices that engender bad actions, habits, and customs in order to meet with Christ. The encounter with Christ calls us to an inner change (conversion).



MARIA, THE MOTHER OF THE LORD is the third character of Advent. In her, the Hebrew hope for a messiah culminates and acquires a wonderful dimension. Mary awaits the Lord by cooperating in the work of redemption. Advent is the Marian liturgical month. During this season, Mary appears in the biblical texts especially in the last week. Her attitude of trust and active hope is a role model for all.



SPECIAL INDICATIONES FOR THE ADVENT SEASON

Within the different Christian traditions there are many spiritually enriching practices which vary with ethnic origin, nationality, and church. Here is a brief list of suggestions. We will be examining more traditions and practices over the next few weeks.

- a) The time of Advent is characterized by AUSTERITY.
- b) Glory is NOT sung during Advent
- c) PURPLE is the color used for priestly ornaments and other decorations
- d) No flowers are placed on the altar. (This will highlight more the festive joy of Christmas with its white ornaments and flower arrangements. While it is not proper to place flowers, it is appropriate to place plants inside the presbytery.)
- e) Banners and other printed material should carry expressions such as: "Come, Lord Jesus", "We await your arrival", or " Let us prepare the ways of the Lord".
- f) It is advisable to light the candles of the Advent wreath each Sunday.
- g) It is worth highlighting the beginning of the new liturgical year & a new cycle of liturgical readings, with a procession and presentation of the Word on the First Sunday of Advent.
- h) The blessings of the crèches is done during one of the Christmas masses in the

church at mass time or by appointment in the homes; this is NOT done during Advent or outside of Christmas time

- i) Each family according to its own custom can take its crèche (image of Baby Jesus or Jesus, Mary and Joseph) to the church for a blessing or you can request the presence of the presbyter or the deacon in the home where he can preside over a family celebration
- j) A penitential celebration should be scheduled during Advent.

Now a days it is necessary to DECOMERCIALIZE the time of Advent and Christmas because the two most important Christmas holidays (Christmas and the Epiphany) and the entire Advent/Christmas season, have been infected by the consumer society's "laws & customs".

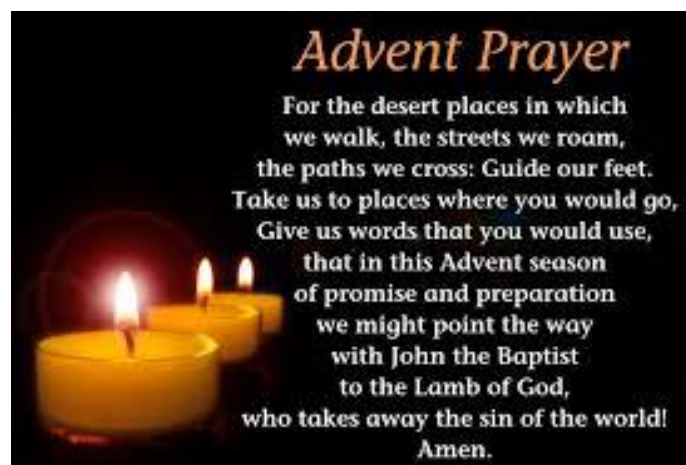
This does not take away from the sense of celebration and the feelings and emotions associated with the Advent/Christmas season. Rather, it is important to guide all of this season towards an authentic, deep Christian celebration, beyond all the layers of cultural add-ons to this season like: of greetings, carol singing, visits, egg nog, rum toddies, presents, champagne, the 3 Kings, the cards, the parties, sweet cakes, cookies, hot chocolates, turkey, pies, and etc. The Christian family prepares to commemorate the arrival of Christ the Redeemer by developing a sense of waiting and expectation in HOPE, SACRIFICE, LOVE, FORGIVENESS, and ENCOUNTER.

ADVENT:

AUSTERITY

FAST, PRAYER, & ALMS/CHARITY

CONVERSION, HOPE, FORGIVENESS, JOY



peace & all that is good. friar Chris

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