



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 2015

Secular “Advent”

By Janel Esker

Today begins the Christian Advent season, but secular “Advent” began before Halloween, when stores hung Christmas decorations and encouraged us to buy our gifts early. Secular Advent is bright, cheery, and vibrant, while Christian Advent is more serious and reflective—dark colors, quiet music, and some somber readings.

Today we hear more about the end times. Advent isn’t only about Jesus’ coming at Christmas—it’s also about his coming at the end of time. The descriptions of the end-times signs are dramatic and frightening. However, Jesus claims that at the exact time these terrifying things are happening, our redemption is near. The moment things

look the worst is also the moment salvation and hope are closest.

That may seem hard to believe when you’re living with terror or fear. But look at Mary, who found herself an unwed mother in a culture that sometimes executed such women. She must have felt terrified, but hope and redemption entered the world through her pregnancy and Jesus’ birth.

When Jesus died on the cross, all hope seemed lost, but through his suffering came life for the world. God draws nearest, bringing salvation, when we experience moments of hopelessness and despair.

Secular Advent declares everything to be happy and joyful, but sadness, anxiety, and fear don’t instantly disappear just because the holly and wreaths are out. Jesus reminds us to stay awake for God’s healing actions precisely when we feel most hopeless or anxious.

God moves in unexpected ways and will be found where we least expect—in our most broken places. †

Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 33:14–16

“I will make a just shoot spring up for David; he shall do what is right and just.”

1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2

“May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.”

Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness.”

A Word From Pope Francis

We are losing this capacity, this wisdom of playing with our children. The economic situation pushes us to this, to lose this. Please, spend time with our children! ... And within this context is also the issue of working Sundays, which concerns not only believers, but touches everyone, as an ethical choice....Having Sundays free from work—apart from necessary services—stands to confirm that the priority is not economic but human, gratuitousness, not business relationships but those of family, of friends, for believers the relationship with God and with the community.



—Address to the World of Labor and Industry, July 5, 2014

PRAYER

Lord, help me to slow down and become more aware of my rushing aimlessly from place to place. Quiet my mind and steady my heart that I may live in your presence throughout the day.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

Real Rejoicing

By Jeanne Hunt

The Christmas cards are unfinished, the cat knocked over the tree, breaking your favorite ornament, the neighbors left a gift and you had nothing for them, and at Mass you hear, “Rejoice! Rejoice!” Obviously the choir hasn’t been in your house!

Keeping Advent is one of the most difficult disciplines for the Catholic family. The world proclaims that the more you love someone, the more expensive the gift must be. The season itself seems to be manufactured with tinsel and gingerbread cookies. But the latest toys, hottest devices, most elaborate decorations, and designer outfits don’t bring lasting joy. Real rejoicing begins within us and comes from grace. It is like a little fire within us that must be encouraged, fueled, and protected. When we receive gifts from heaven, they are priceless.

This Advent, reconnect with your family and the real meaning of these sacred, waiting days. Look for a rebirth of Jesus Christ in your family and in your own life, remaining open to miracles and mystery. Be mindful of what is important, of what brings joy to others, and avoid everything that drains you. These are the days to turn off the TVs and smart devices, even the Christmas music, in order to provide more peace and intimacy in the car and at the supper table. It is time to pray, to spend an hour in adoration, to line



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What do I allow to overwhelm me and fill my heart with stress and anxiety?
- What gifts do I want my family and friends to receive this Christmas?

up for reconciliation. It is time to visit the lonely, rejected, and neglected ones. It’s time to guide the lost home and to encourage the despairing. When we open our calendars and rooms to those around us, there are no limits to the gifts awaiting us.

Family Fun

The candles of the Advent wreath are often associated with the virtues of hope, faith, joy, and peace. (Some churches may follow a different order or use love as an alternative or addition to the virtues.) Assign one virtue to each family member, who will serve as “detective” and representative for the season. (Younger members or larger families can pair up.) Then, when you gather to light the candle(s), go around the table, asking each person to share how he or she observed or expressed his or her virtue that day. As the season progresses, the whole family will benefit from a deeper awareness and appreciation of these gifts of God. Consider documenting or recording your findings as “evidence” and reminders to all nearby.

Have each family member select a figurine from the Nativity scene and scatter them around the room an equal distance from the manger. Each time a family member performs a good deed, charitable work, and/or sincere act of love, move that person’s figurine a step closer to the manger. No cheating! The first “person” to arrive at the manger wins a special small gift or privilege in honor of his or her bringing Christ’s presence to all.

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 30–December 5

Mon. St. Andrew:
Romans 10:9–18 / Matthew 4:18–22

Tue. Advent weekday:
Isaiah 11:1–10 / Luke 10:21–24

Wed. Advent weekday:
Isaiah 25:6–10 / Matthew 15:29–37

Thu. St. Francis Xavier:
Isaiah 26:1–6 / Matthew 7:21, 24–27

Fri. Advent weekday:
Isaiah 29:17–24 / Matthew 9:27–31

Sat. Advent weekday: *Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26 / Matthew 9:35—10:1, 5–8*