

Our Lady of Lourdes is a pilgrim church coming to know the Kingdom of God by being Christ to the world

Our Lady of Lourdes

Catholic Church

December 2017

Advent—Hope towards Christmas

Each year, I have noticed more and more Christmas Creep. It used to be mostly related to shopping, as stores brought out Christmas related items earlier and earlier each year, but it appears that Christmas Creep is taking a deeper hold on society beyond the retail realm. Much of the secular world seemingly has been celebrating Christmas since at least Thanksgiving. We are already used to radio stations switching to all Christmas music by early November. This year, beyond the radio stations, and the commercials telling us it is the holiday season, I saw a Christmas display and lights in somebody's yard on November 16. What I also noticed was that nearly all of the early arriving holiday decorations I saw in people's yards, as well as commercial and civic decorations, had nothing to do with our Catholic Christian understanding of Christmas. There were wintery scenes, snowmen, Santa, reindeer, and even penguins in yards, and numerous commercials suggesting that purchases bring the magic of Christmas, but very little to do with Jesus's birth.

I would suggest that this earlier and earlier embrace of Christmas might have something to do with the current state of affairs in our society and world: people are searching for something to feel good about. As followers of Christ, we have a different perspective of when the Christmas season begins, but we are hardly immune from struggling with these times. At a recent reflection on the Advent readings led by Jesuit priest Roc O'Connor, he asked those in attendance how they were feeling about things these days. There was an overwhelming sense of distress and anxiety amongst those who responded. Between wars, mass shootings, poverty, terrorism, and the state of politics and society, the sense was one of disgust, darkness, and despair. Fr. O'Connor mentioned that he thought it was the most hopeless period he had lived through.

Advent, which marks the start of the new liturgical year, is our time of preparation for Christmas and the coming of Emmanuel, which means "God with us." As we prepare for Jesus' coming, we prepare to remember the birth of Jesus, the incarnation. We also prepare to invite Jesus into our lives today. Finally, we prepare for Jesus's return at the end of time. Advent began on Sunday, December 3, and continues until Christmas Eve. So how do we avoid putting the cart before the horse, celebrating Christmas so early that we are tired of Christmas carols by the time it actually arrives? How can we prepare ourselves during Advent for Jesus' coming? How can we turn to God, not things, in our search for hope and answers?

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The Gospel on the First Sunday of Advent says we are to *Be watchful! Be alert!* Pope Francis has some ideas on how to do this in an address he gave on the First Sunday of Advent:

The person that takes heed is one that, in the noise of the world, doesn't let himself be overwhelmed by distraction or by superficiality, but lives in a full and aware way, with concern first of all for others. With this attitude, we are aware of the tears and the needs of our neighbor and we can also grasp his human and spiritual capacities and qualities. The person that heeds then turns also to the world, trying to counter the indifference and cruelty in it, and rejoicing over the treasures of beauty that also exist and are guarded. It's about having a look of understanding either to recognize the miseries and poverties of individuals and societies or to recognize the richness hidden in little everyday things, precisely there, where the Lord has placed us.

Let us take Pope Francis' words to heart this Advent as well as Fr. Bill's suggestion in a recent homily that we might be watchful and alert for Christ this Advent by asking ourselves and reflecting on this question each day: where did I encounter Christ today?

I wish you all a fruitful Advent.

Steve Szymanski
Director of Child Ministries

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