

Living the Spirit
Advent Continues

Many of you may feel as I do at this time of year. We become a bit stressed by the multiplicity of activities demanding our attention. It is true that we make ourselves vulnerable to our own traditions and expectations. It would be great to think that all this has to do with celebrating Christmas. Of course, some of it does. Yet, the real celebration of Christmas for a believing Catholic does not require this flurry of activity.

We can readily agree that there simply must be more spirituality in our observance of Advent. Advent is the time when we prepare for our rejoicing that Christ was born our Savior. We will spend much time thinking of others, for there is bound to be those we love and who love us. We manage to tell them so by sending a greeting with an expression of our good wishes. As a priest I feel compelled to add a blessing, hoping that it will be welcomed as better than the formal words like “Merry Christmas” and “Happy New Year.” I always hope that those who send me greetings do so with a silent prayer that God will bless me in the best way possible.

In our time Advent and Christmas have become merged, with much anticipation of what once was reserved for Christmas day and that wonderful week until New Year’s day. In some cultures all the gift giving is delayed until after the feast. Looking for a good time for this they settled on the Epiphany. There the giving of gifts took on some kind of meaning – an imitation of the Magi who came with gifts to adore the Infant Savior.

Recently I came across an outdated copy of *The Catholic Digest*. There was a great article in it about how to make these holidays memorable. I will not comment on all the suggestions, but here are a few.

Examine what the holidays mean to you – take time to think about this, even if you think you simply cannot afford the time. I hope that you will find meaning not in mere thoughts, but in people. We can all try to *place Christmas in the context of our loved ones*, including God, Mary, Joseph, our guardian angel and those who are already informally saints in eternal life. Of course, Christmas will mean contact with present loved ones, as best we can make contact. It should be a time for saying what we otherwise do not say. [By this I mean more than “Merry Christmas!”]

Think if there is someone with whom you have a poor relationship. At least, say a prayer for that someone. *A change of heart does all of us good.*

Do follow some traditional activity – sing a carol, read a Christmas story. This is best done with the children, if possible. But even others will enjoy the comradeship. *Retell some of your memories* – take a chance that this will not bore others as much as you may think. *When you get up on Christmas day, stop and tell God all the reasons -- or at least a few – why you are glad to be alive* on His wonderful day. If you can, do the same the next day!

Most of the year we try to hold our emotions in great control. But, what day or time is better for weeping if you feel like weeping, and laughing if you feel like laughing. Just don't make a scene – or make others think you have gone off your rocker, as the idiom goes. Finally, to end this list, *be a better friend*, one who is present to others.

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Despite being busy about many things, many find time during these days to read old favorites. Many, too, enjoy the regular TV offerings. [I admit that I like to watch the Papal Christmas Masses on EWTN, as they bring me back to my days in Rome.] I suggest that there are many excellent things to read, or if this is not possible, programs to watch on television. Some entertainment will help raise your spirits. If you can, find some moments of real happiness, or at least as much happiness you can manage. I expect to read again *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens. I always feel young again as I observe Scrooge change from a miser to a believer in goodness. If you can find a moment or two of silence, take advantage of it. Silence works wonders!

Since the purpose of these inserts is to give you a glance into the life of at least one priest – me – let me share some of my many thoughts. On the spiritual level, I find the Advent/Christmas themes to be a time for revisiting of the past. So many years have gone by since I first had to think of what to preach on Christmas. I ask myself if it can be sixty years since my first Christmas as a priest. I was then engaged in the activities at Allentown Central and at St. Mary's in Catasauqua. I admit I have had the same thoughts, more or less over the years.

I embrace the same theme. I see in Advent and in Christmas a continuity. The Old Testament gave way to the New. The prophecy of Isaiah comes to a fulfillment. The Baptist brings us to a Christ-centered reminder of what the good news is all about, just as we are about to think of an earlier beginning. Advent begins with a sense of eternity, of the world yet to come, of the coming yet to be. We reflect on the actual birth of Jesus. I recall how Bishop Sheen described the Babe as "Omnipotence in swaddling clothes." Omnipotence – what He can do and will do for us even as what He has already done proves His power, a power of Love. So, I dare to ask Him to use His power to give me and the world peace.

I hope that once again I will make Jesus the center of this holy time – this time of life. I know that it will be a time for great thanksgiving, if I make it so. Dare I ask that you do what you can to make these days a holy time for you? Let us go to a spiritual Bethlehem and in that place within our hearts make room for His coming. Let us know that He has already come. He blends the past, the present and the future. He is all of this to each of us. Meanwhile, listen to the advice of the carol: "*Venite adoremus*; Come, let us adore Him, CHRIST, THE LORD!"

The next insert will be a Christmas message. However, it is not too early for me to wish you a blessed and happy Christmas. As I offer Mass I will add your intentions to my own. If you should have a spare prayer, I would be grateful if you said it for me.

+ *May God bless you, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

God love you always!

Monsignor David Morrison

December 15, 2013

We continue to pray: Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus, Come!