

J/M/J
Advent and Christmas Seasons

Even our most informed Catholics are having a big problem trying to live out the Church's liturgical season. Advent is the approximate four weeks before Christmas, a time that faithful Catholics should be preparing for the coming of Christ our Savior. However, this puts Advent at the exact time of the year when merchants, trying to sell as much of their merchandise as possible, are saturating the airways with *Here Comes Santa Clause* and *Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer*. Now, who wants to think of Advent when Santa is coming to town? I think we are all aware that the secular world is winning the battle over the hearts and minds of God's people. But why?

Why is the world winning the battle?

For starters, the worldly secular society is in it for the money, and money is a powerful incentive to go the extra mile to sell your product. The worldly have a distinct advantage. Let's face it, buying stuff is lots of fun for most people. If it were not, people would not go into debt year after year, buying things, knowing that there will be financial consequences to suffer.

Throughout Advent, we Catholics (at least most of us) are like all the rest of Americans, busy buying things for our loved ones and friends. Things that, in many cases, we do not need and, most likely, cannot afford to buy. Nevertheless, we just say, "What the heck! It's Christmas, a time for giving. After all, isn't this what Christmas is all about? Who wants to be an old Scrooge? And anyway, everyone else is doing it. I am not going to be some kind of odd ball at Christmas."

Now, let us consider the social pressures that even the most knowledgeable and informed Catholics go through during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Pressures that even our good priests and bishops are having trouble handling. We can compare it to walking up the stairs of a burning building, when everyone else is coming down to escape the flames. Get the picture? To the people rushing down the stairs, you can look completely ridiculous and, if you do not have a good reason for what you are doing, you will probably feel ridiculous yourself.

We must have good solid reasons behind our actions and the ability to explain them to friends and family if we are to succeed. Following Christ is no nonchalant endeavor. It is a life-long, counter-cultural, truth-seeking undertaking. And, it is difficult. However, the rewards are out of this world.

Advent & Christmas

One must understand that Advent is a liturgical season designated by the Church to prepare the faithful for the coming of Jesus Christ. The Advent season was never intended for Catholics to celebrate a worldly and materialistic mode of Christmas four weeks ahead of time.

How then, should a good Catholic confront the problem of Advent being at the same time as the merchants are launching their Christmas sales? The answer: *very thoughtfully and carefully*. Fanaticism rarely solves problems. This does not mean to do nothing and just go with the flow. However, sad to say, to go with the flow is what the vast majority of Catholics do. They conform to the very society that they deplore, and in doing so, make matters worse.

So what is a good Catholic to do? Sometimes it seems that old saying: "You are damned if you do, and you are damned if you don't"— applies perfectly in this situation.

Things we can do

There are things that parents can do, and I would say, must do to reverse this problem. The first thing is to limit the amount of shopping in Advent, especially with the children. Yes, this will be hard. However, if you study up on the beautiful customs such as the one concerning the Jesse tree, you will find it will make things a great deal easier. If you check our web site, you can download free of charge a book with many Advent customs. Remember, we must know what our faith is all about if we are to pass it onto

our children.

Our children, from an early age, must learn and understand the reason for the Advent season. If they do not understand then they will likely look with scorn upon anything religious you promote. We all need reasons to do what is good and so do our children. If our children are taught to enjoy the many Advent customs, they will be able to better understand what Christmas is all about. Children must understand that Advent is a time to prepare ourselves spiritually for the birth of Christ. If this can be accomplished, the living out of the Advent season will be quite easy and enjoyable. If, however, parents continually bring the children into the malls with all the festivities, they will be undermining all their efforts at home concerning the proper living out of the Advent season. Now this does not mean that the children cannot go shopping during Advent. It just means shopping must be limited as much as possible. This goes for the parents as well.

No fun for the children

If things are done right, the fun will not be gone. It will just be distributed properly. In fact, if the world really knew how to make people happy, we would not have all the violence, depression, and suicides that take place during the Christmas season. The secular world is a master deceiver. It convinces us that God and His Church are out of date. Nevertheless, just look around. Who are the more fulfilled people? Who are the truly happy people? Is it not those who are sincerely trying to serve God? Do we see the Godly people committing suicide? No, they are too busy serving God by caring for His people. A truly Godly person is one who is concerned with others. Often we confuse the Godly with those who go to church. The Godly person's faith goes far beyond just going to church. It goes beyond self, and this is where they get their joy and happiness. Others Lord, yes, others, let this my motto be; more for others less for me.

Watch what you do and say

Good people can do and say things that are not practical and sometimes outright foolish. I remember a motivational speaker talking about using inside language on outside people. What he was referring to was a woman who asked him if he was "into the word." He came to understand that the lady was asking if he read the Bible. As Catholics, we need to be clear on what we believe and the way we express it. We need to avoid sarcastic sounding cliches that confuse people. Sharing our beliefs in a simple and respectful way will be the most beneficial way to enlighten family and friends to the beauty of the Catholic faith.

Christmas can be an extremely joyous event when we understand Advent and its purpose. If we celebrate Christmas during Advent, we will be tired of Christmas before it gets here. However when Advent is lived out properly, Christmas will have more meaning. Otherwise by the time Christmas gets here we will be like the secular world, ready to throw the tree and everything else associated with Christmas out the house.

The Christmas season starts December 25th, and continues through January 6th. So, if we conform to the world, we end up with all our Christmas parties in Advent and nothing Christmas during the season of Christmas. Is there any wonder many folks believe that Christmas has lost its meaning? The meaning of Christmas has never changed—we have. We live in a time when people cannot wait. They must acquire or experience everything now. We do this with most everything, even with the marital act. One is, or should be shocked at the number of people who live together before marriage. God and His Church get in their way here too, but who cares? The materialistic world is and always will be at odds with God and His Church. All those, who think them- selves wise in their embrace of the world, will lose much in the end.

Watch your criticism

Criticism of those who do not follow the liturgical seasons is likely to cause much hard feelings and resentment. Here again, how can you teach your children that following the world is bad, then act like there is nothing wrong when family and friends are having a great time celebrating Christmas in Advent? **No one said it would be easy.** Remember Christ was ridiculed and hung on a cross, yet he was faithful, and we

must be faithful also.

Here is one way to handle this situation. First of all, always have sympathy for those who are not doing what you think they should. This is just Christian charity. Mention to your child that many people either were never taught or they just do not understand, and that we should pray for them. You might remind them that you yourself at one time did not do the things you are doing now. It is also important to inform them that there is no sin involved. Then when the time is right, you need to explain that though there is no sin involved, the situation created by not doing the right things, will most certainly lead people into serious moral problems, and that is why you asked that they pray for them. If our children are taught to understand the danger we put ourselves into when we go against the loving guidance of Holy Mother Church, they will better understand the concept of Godly living.

We can create a problem

It is extremely important that we go about this logically. Although we do not want to be judgmental in our effort to explain these things to our children, we certainly do not want to cause our children to feel that everyone else is having fun and they are being deprived. This could be worse than if you just scrapped the whole thing and went along with the world. Remember, if the children are unhappy, you are probably doing something wrong. That is why it is important for parents to be serious about what they are undertaking and that they know the purpose behind Advent. Remember that a half-hearted effort is often worse than going along to get along. There can be no substitute for dedication to God and family.

For those who wish to live the liturgical life of the Church at home more fully, we have a booklet that contains many Advent and Christmas customs. The booklet, ***Bringing Advent Home***, may be purchased through Fatima Family Apostolate for \$10.00 plus shipping and handling. As a bonus, you will receive a free audio tape or CD containing all the Scripture readings and instructions necessary for the Jesse tree.

Call ***1-800-213-5541*** or write
Fatima Family Apostolate
P.O. Box 269
Hanceville, AL 35077

Another option would be to click onto ***christianfamilyoutreach.com*** and download the book ***free*** of charge. We ***strongly*** encourage families with small children to take advantage of this opportunity.

This book would be an excellent gift, a gift that could have a far-reaching effect on the lives of countless generations.