Restore the Roots

Cultivating Your Domestic Church A Liturgical Living Initiative of St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral, La Crosse, WI Vol. 4 Advent



Advent

The beginning of Advent marks the start of the new Church year. The liturgical season of Advent is a time to prepare our hearts and home for the coming of Jesus. While we typically see Advent as a time to prepare for Christmas and the birth of baby Jesus, we must also remember that this season is also a preparation for Jesus' second coming at the end of time. This is why Advent is traditionally seen as a “Mini Lent” with an emphasis on fasting, prayer and almsgiving. This issue of Restore the Roots will help us to step back, pray and prepare for the season of Christmas as well as eternal life.

In our culture, Christmas celebrations have replaced Advent preparations. There are festivities everywhere but very little concern with the state of our souls. We have become so accustomed to celebrating during Advent that we often don’t remember to prepare ourselves for Jesus. It’s time to reclaim Advent! This Christmas, what will be our gift to Jesus? A frazzled, unprepared self? Or an open heart and clean soul? Below are a few things you can try avoiding during Advent to enter wholly into this season of preparation. This will allow us to give ourselves to Jesus in an entirely new way and to be steeped in the gift of the birth of Christ!

Noise: Advent is a season of prayerful anticipation of the coming of Christ. This year make an effort to keep Christmas music or movies for the Christmas season. Also, leave room in your day for quiet; limit time listening to podcasts or music and stay off your phone.

Decorating: Instead of a decorating blitz the day after Thanksgiving, wait to put your Christmas decor up. Think of the decorations as a lead up to Christmas. Decorate slowly throughout Advent, or choose a feast day close to Christmas. Then leave it all up until Epiphany or the Baptism!

Christmas Shopping: Try to complete most of your gift shopping before Advent starts. You will be able to focus on prayers, practices and preparation by staying out of the chaos of Christmas marketing. If you do have to shop, try to keep it minimal and efficient.

Parties: Companies and families tend to host Christmas parties during Advent. Go, and have fun. However, if you are planning a gathering, try to wait until the Christmas season for your party. Allow yourself and others to prepare in Advent and then celebrate during Christmas.

Choose your own ‘Advent’ure!

On the next pages there are various practices for Advent. These are meant to help you enter prayerfully and deeply into the season. Don't worry about doing them all; choose what looks interesting and what you think would add to your spiritual life. Maybe it's only one thing. Do one thing well, not all things poorly. Don't overwhelm yourself; that's the opposite of what Advent is truly about.

Start by looking for swaps. Do your kids write letters to Santa? Write a letter to Jesus instead. Do you do a big decorating day? Pick a feast day closer to Christmas to do your decorating. Find things that you already do and switch those out to allow yourself to remain prayerfully in the season.

Next, choose a spiritual activity for you and/or your family. Get an Advent devotional for yourself. Do the Jesse tree as a family. Maybe the St. Andrew Novena will fit nicely on your drive to work or school. Tie these practices to something you do everyday, like dinner or bedtime. Most importantly, make a plan to go to confession.

Finally, look for ways to be quiet. Turn off music and TV. Put down the phone. While this is typically a very busy season, look for ways to be less distracted and spend time listening to God.

Advent has many small, yet powerful traditions you can incorporate into your daily life. These simple practices will help prepare your heart and soul for Jesus!

Advent Reflections from the Popes

Dear brothers and sisters,

We celebrate this Mass on the eve of the day on which the Church commemorates Saint Andrew, Apostle. At the same time, we begin Advent, the season for preparing ourselves to experience anew at Christmas the mystery of Jesus, the Son of God, “begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father”, as solemnly declared 1700 years ago by the Fathers gathered at the Council of Nicaea.

In this context, the first reading (Is 2:1-5) of today’s Mass comes from one of the most beautiful passages in the book of the prophet Isaiah, where the invitation resounds, beckoning all peoples to ascend the mountain of the Lord (v. 3), a place of light and peace. I would like, then, to meditate together on what it means to be part of the Church by reflecting on some of the images presented in this text.

The first image is that of the mountain “established as the highest of the mountains” (Is 2:2). It reminds us that the fruits of God’s action in our lives are a gift not only for us, but for everyone. Zion is a city set on the mountain and symbol of a community reborn in fidelity. Its beauty is a beacon of light for men and women from every place, and serves as a reminder that the joy of goodness is contagious. The lives of many saints confirm this. Saint Peter meets Jesus thanks to the enthusiasm of his brother Andrew (Jn 1:40-42), who was led to the Lord, along with the Apostle John, by John the Baptist’s zeal. Saint Augustine, centuries later, comes to Christ thanks to the ardent preaching of Saint Ambrose and there are many similar examples.

The second image that comes to us from the prophet Isaiah is that of a world in which peace reigns. This is how he describes it: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Is 2:4). How urgent this call is for us today! How great the need for peace, unity and reconciliation around us, within us and among us! What can our contribution be in response?

Dear friends, let us make these values our resolutions for the season of Advent and even more so for our personal and communal life. We journey as if on a bridge that connects earth to Heaven, a bridge that the Lord has built for us. Let us always keep our eyes fixed on both shores, so that we may love God and our brothers and sisters with all our hearts in order to journey together and find ourselves one day united in the house of the Father.

Homily of Pope Leo XIV Saturday, 29 November 2025

Blessing of an Advent Wreath



All make the Sign of the Cross.

Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

Reader: (Isaiah 9:1-2 &-6)

“But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: “Lord our God, we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ: He is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, He is the wisdom that teaches and guides us, He is the Savior of every nation.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ’s promise to bring us salvation. May He come quickly and not delay. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Then light the first candle.

Feast of St. Nicholas

There are some wonderful traditions for the feast of St. Nicholas. One of the most popular customs is to leave shoes out for St. Nick on his feast, Dec. 6. Some families even hang stockings. If your family has a tradition of stockings for Christmas, this year try it on St. Nick's day instead. Then talk about the story of St. Nick and the connection to Santa. A simple swap to bring a saint to the season!

Straw for Jesus

A beautiful way to reinforce kindness and good deeds for kids is *Straw for Jesus*. This tradition is perfect for the whole family. Make a manger (a box is fine) and some "hay" (strips of paper or bits of yarn) and place it in a prominent location: near the Advent wreath, on the dinner table or under your tree if it is up. Anytime someone does a good deed, a piece of straw is placed into the manger, making a soft place for Jesus on Christmas. These acts are more than just a nice thought, they truly serve Jesus.

Advent Book Countdown

If you have a number of Christmas books that focus on the birth of Christ, a good Christian message, or good deeds, use them as an Advent book countdown for your kids. Bring out one new book each day and sit down to read it to them. Maybe re-read some of the favorites from the previous days. If you have time, you can even wrap enough books for each day of Advent and number them, so they have a new one to open each day!

Advent Music

It's difficult to prepare your heart for Jesus' coming when all you hear is about how Jesus is already here! Advent music is different. It speaks of preparation and longing for Christ's coming. This year, try listening to Advent music instead. We have recommendations listed in the resources. One simple option is to listen to Handel's *Messiah*, especially part 1.

Editors: Msgr. Richard Gilles, Natalie Elskamp and Sam Elskamp. Special thanks to all the contributing writers. No part of this may be edited, copied or distributed without the express permission of the editors. Want to bring Restore the Roots to your parish? Email us! RestoretheRootsLAX@gmail.com

Jesse Tree

The name of the Jesse Tree comes from the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1 "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a branch shall rise up out of his root". Each day a Bible story is read and an ornament is placed onto the tree. Each ornament represents a person from Salvation history who was waiting for the Messiah, much like now when we are waiting for the second coming of Jesus. You can find Jesse Tree plans online (find some in the resources), with scripture readings for each day, and sometimes printable ornaments. We have a few books listed on the resources page that have the reading, reflection, often a prayer and ornaments. Even if you don't have children, getting a Jesse tree plan to read for your daily devotions is a wonderful spiritual practice.

If you plan to use ornaments, you can use the paper ones, make them out of clay or felt, or you can also purchase them. (Be careful, there are many different versions of the Jesse Tree, so be sure the symbols match yours.) The tree can be anything; a small Christmas tree, or a stick from the yard. You can even stick the ornaments to the wall in the shape of a tree.



Letters to Jesus

Are your children used to writing letters to Santa? Have them write a letter to Jesus this year. They can still write what presents they would like to receive for Christmas, but have them start by writing what they are grateful for this year and thank Jesus for those gifts. Have them put this out for the feast of St. Nicholas on Dec. 6th. If time doesn't allow, have them put it with your Nativity set.

Important Days in Advent







November 30 - St. Andrew
December 6 - St. Nicholas
December 8 - Immaculate Conception
December 12 - Our Lady of Guadalupe
December 13 - St. Lucy
December 13 - Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete)

All the resources mentioned (and more!) are available on the Cathedral website or by scanning this QR code

Advent Wreath 

There are many symbols of our faith in the Advent wreath. The circle of the wreath, with no beginning or end, symbolizes God's eternal nature. The wreath is traditionally made out of evergreens which hold their green color long after they are cut. When looking at these we remember the immortality of our souls. If you decorate your wreath with seeds, berries, or pinecones, they represent new life and resurrection.

Do you have an Advent wreath? Do you have candles ready? If you don't have one, you can easily make your own. Cut a few evergreen branches and arrange them in a circle on a large plate. Add some candles in glass votive holders and berries if you have them. If you have younger kids, let them make their own a wreath out of green playdough and birthday candles. Or use your child's hand traced on green paper, glued into a wreath shape and then add 3 purple strips and 1 pink strip for candles. They can "light" the candles each week with a paper flame!

Nativity Set 

If you don't have a nativity scene, get one this year. As a way to prepare your heart for Christmas, set it up bit-by-bit throughout the days of Advent. Always save baby Jesus for Christmas! You could even set Mary and Joseph out in a far corner and have them journey towards the set throughout the season. If your set has three kings, save them to put out on Epiphany.

Decorations

Think of your preparing your house like you prepare your heart. Typically, we don't decide to do something big and then do it all at once. Try decorating your house little by little. A few decorations one day, the tree up another, lights on one day and ornaments the next week. Or if you like decorating all at once, decorate close to Christmas. Pick some of the big feast days to do these preparations. Why? It is hard to focus your mind on prayerful preparation when your house says, "The celebration is here!" If you prefer having decorations up, why not try advent decor? Purple lights on your tree, empty Nativities, Advent symbols and greenery. Even a purple kitchen towel!

Secret St. Nick

This is a great way to encourage meaningful gifts between members of your family. At the beginning of Advent, have every member of your family randomly pick a name. Throughout the season, do little acts of kindness for that person, but keep it secret! Do one of their chores, make a lunch, leave a note, make their bed, or leave them a treat; something little! For Christmas, make sure to give that person something special. This could be something homemade, store-bought, or even a coupon book for use throughout the year. It doesn't need to be expensive but should be truly heartfelt. Exchange these special gifts during a time set aside from other presents on Christmas.

Other Ideas for Advent

- Send cards to nursing home residents or those who are homebound
- Pray for a different person each day of Advent
- Offer to watch young kids so parents can go out for a date or get shopping done
- Visit an elderly neighbor
- Wear purple during Advent, and pink on the third Sunday
- Donate or volunteer at a local food bank, soup kitchen or warming center
- **Go to confession!**

St. Andrew Novena



The St. Andrew Christmas Novena is prayed for 25 days, from the Feast day of St. Andrew (Nov. 30) until Dec. 24. This simple yet powerful prayer is said 15 times a day and only takes three to five minutes. This could be recited in one sitting or spread through the day. It is believed that whoever prays the St. Andrew Christmas novena will obtain the favor requested.

St. Andrew Novena Prayer

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, O my God, to hear my prayers and grant my desires through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of His blessed Mother. Amen