

From the P.A.'s Desk

Christmas Art and Environment:

PARISHIONERS NEEDED to decorate for Christmas: Thursday, December 22 @ anytime during the day or evening- Trees, lights, wreaths, naivety set-up, liturgical colors and greenery. If you can help, even for an hour, let me know. As the new person here, I'll need your help, please.

Advent:

Advent comes from the Latin word for "arrival" or "coming." It is a time to remember Christ's birth in Bethlehem, but more importantly, It also anticipates his Second Coming at the end of time. The Season of Advent also inaugurates the entire liturgical year. The General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar, issued by the Holy See in March 1969 as a result of the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, offers this description of the season: "Advent has a twofold character; as a season to prepare us for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and **joyful** expectation." Roman practice from the twelfth century, codified by Trent and enhanced by the greatly enriched lectionary of Vatican Council II, combines these different emphases. The violet vestments (with rose as an option on the third or "Gaudete" (Joyful) Sunday) and the preaching of John the Baptist bespeak the penitential aspect which invites the people to reform. The First Sunday of Advent is clearly centered on the Lord's Second Coming, and the Preface used at Mass until December 16 emphasizes this theme. The Gloria is omitted, as during Lent, but for a somewhat different reason, as the official commentary on the revised Calendar notes: "So that on Christmas night the song of the angels may ring out anew in all its freshness." On the other hand, there is a clear note of joyful expectation: The Alleluia is retained before the Gospel. There has been no mandatory Advent fast since the 1917 Code of Canon Law. During this first period of Advent, the readings from the prophet Isaiah continually speak of God's visitation, consolation and redemption of His people, while the corresponding Gospel selections portray Christ as the fulfillment of the prophetic promises.

Advent and New Beginnings:

As the Church's "New Year," Advent is a perfect time to start over again. We leave the past behind us and start anew to embrace the vision God has for us in Jesus. A member from the Evangelization Team suggested that we encourage parishioners to invite alienated and inactive Catholic members of their family over to their house for dinner, as a way to reach out to them with the special intention of asking them to return to the faith. Whatever they are angry about, either the Church or even with God, please invite them to give us another chance. We want to listen to them and address their concerns.

Along the same lines, I've ordered a bunch of post cards inviting people to come back and worship with us on Sundays. Rather than mail them to everyone in our zip code area, if you'd take a few or ten home with you, you can give them out to people you know. It's a wonderful way to evangelize without having to say too much. The postcard simply reads: "If you been away from the church, or have drifted away from it; if you've been hurt by the church or are

confused or angry because of your Catholic experience, please consider this invitation to come and join us for Mass.”

A Prayer for the person who is alienated: “KNOWN” Prayer

I know you. I created you. I am creating you. I have loved you from your mother’s womb. Some maybe have fled – you know who you are – from my love. But I love you nevertheless and not-the-less and, however far someone flees, it is I who follows them, and will never finally let them go. I accept you as you are. You are forgiven. I know all your sufferings. I have always known them. For beyond your understanding, when you suffer, I suffer. I also know all the little tricks by which someone tries to hide from messy life that one sometimes create for themselves and others. But you are beautiful. You are beautiful because you yourself, in the unique one that only you are, reflect already something of the beauty of my holiness in a way that shall never end. You are beautiful also because I, and I alone, see the beauty you shall become. Through the transforming power of my love you shall become perfectly beautiful. You shall become perfectly beautiful in a uniquely irreplaceable way, which neither you nor I will work out alone. For you and I shall work it out together.

Rite of Welcome:

Next Sunday you will witness an ancient rite in the Catholic Church designed for those in the Catechumenate (RCIA) who desire to continue preparing for the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation at the next Easter Vigil. **The Rite of Welcome** is also called the **Rite of Acceptance**, and it’s a ritual that makes them officially “catechumens” or those undergoing instruction to become Catholic. Following the Gospel, five people will be called forward by name. During the ritual, we as a community of faith will pray for their continued conversion in the faith, ask God to continue to walk with them, show our encouragement and support, and end with a beautiful gesture called the **“Signing of the Senses”** in which we make the sign of the cross over various parts of their bodies: head, eyes, ears, mouth, heart, and feet. At the end of the signing, we say the words: “We place you entirely under the sign of Christ’s cross... Almighty God, by the cross and resurrection of your Son you have given life to your people. Your servants have received the sign of the cross; make them living proof of its saving power and help them to persevere in the footsteps of Christ. We ask this through Christ our Lord.”

This year we have a family seeking to be baptized; Aaron the father, and his two daughters, Sydney and Natalie. Aaron’s wife Breanna is already Catholic. We will also have two baptized Christians make a Profession of Faith with us and be Confirmed and welcomed to the Eucharistic table; Alan who was baptized Lutheran, and Terry who was baptized Methodist. All five of these newcomers to the Catholic Faith have found something special at St. Vincent de Paul Parish, and let us all pray that God will continue the good work in them and bring it to completion.

Later during Lent they will celebrate another beautiful ritual called Purification and Enlightenment, and they will journey down to the Cathedral to be greeted and welcomed by the Shepherd of our Diocese, Bishop Cistone.