

DOLOROSA

CHRISTMAS EDITION

ADVENT 2017



The Season of Joyful Preparation

Based on a talk given by Father Paul Krug
to the Sodality of the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart
in Round Top, NY

The First Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of a new liturgical year in the Church. As the new calendar year begins on January 1, so does the new ecclesiastical year begin with the First Sunday of Advent.

As we begin the new Church year, we also begin the joyful time of preparing to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Our Divine Savior. While it is true that Advent, like Lent, is a penitential season, it is nonetheless a season of joy. This is because during Advent we prepare to celebrate the most joyful event in the history of the world; during Lent, we prepare to commemorate the most sorrowful event of all time.

To understand just how joyful the occasion of Our Lord's birth was for the entire world, we have to go back to the very beginning. To make a long history short: God created the world and everything in it; Adam and Eve fell; mankind was doomed to an eternity in hell; God had mercy and devised, as it were, a plan to rescue us; His immense love for us moved Him to send His Son to ransom us; the Son of God accomplished this by His incarnation, birth, passion,

and death. In brief, that is why the birth of the Son of God is the most joyful moment in the annals of human history, for by it, we have a chance to obtain eternal happiness.

Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means "coming" or "arrival." Holy Mother Church thus gives this name to the season preceding Christmas to remind us to prepare well for the anniversary of Christ's first coming at Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago.

Over the course of the next few weeks, then, the Church directs our thoughts to the birth of Christ. In fact, according to certain Catholic authors, the four weeks of Advent correspond to the 4,000 years that the world waited and prepared for the coming of Our Divine Savior. That period from the fall of Adam and Eve to the birth of Christ was, so to speak, the first Advent. Like those men and women of old who prepared for the coming of Christ with prayer and penance, we, too, should strive to use to our advantage what little time we have before Christmas.

While it is true that Advent, like Lent, is a penitential season, it is nonetheless a season of joy. This is because during Advent we prepare to celebrate the most joyful event in the history of the world . . .



Many years ago, a certain priest related a true story about how two children prepared for Christmas. The names of the children were Bobby and Mary. One day, as the priest explained it, the children's mother noticed that Bobby and Mary were behaving much better than usual. It was not, however, the ordinary kind of good behavior that children typically practice just before Christmas to avoid missing out on presents; this good behavior was far more astonishing.

Mother noticed that Bobby and Mary prayed a little longer in the morning and evening. They studied their catechism more earnestly and even without being told to do so. They helped their mother wash the dishes and do other household chores with smiles on their faces. Even during their lunch hour at school, they hurried over to the church to spend a few moments with Our Lord.

The children's mother, however, was not the only one to notice this change in conduct; their teacher Sister Charlotte was amazed as well. She noticed it had all started at the beginning of Advent, nor had it lessened in any degree. So, Sister decided to ask the children the reason for such a drastic change. Bobby and Mary stuttered and stammered for a moment and cast shy glances at each other. Finally, they confessed, "We are knitting a sweater for Baby Jesus."

Taking their words literally, Sister Charlotte was not quite sure what knitting a sweater had to do with their change of conduct. She was quite impressed that the mere knitting had transformed these two children into angels so quickly. Yet, on the other hand, she was not so sure that these two children could actually be knitting a sweater themselves. Bobby was a typical eight-year-old who loved football and pranks, and Mary was only seven. Despite this, Sister Charlotte decided to let it go and knew that in the end she would get to the bottom of it.

She did not have to wait long, however, as the mystery behind the children's sudden good

behavior was cleared up on Christmas Eve. On that day, the doorbell of the convent rang multiple times. It was Bobby and Mary, and they asked to see Sister Charlotte.

"Sister!" they exclaimed when they saw her, "we have just finished knitting the sweater for Jesus. Here it is!" With that, they handed Sister an envelope with the Holy Name written on it.

"Please put our gift near the crib for us, Sister," the children asked. Sister Charlotte smiled and agreed to do so. Bobby and Mary then joyfully thanked her, wished her Merry Christmas, and turning, they scampered down the street.

Sister opened the envelope. Inside, she found a little note scribbled in pencil and addressed to the Baby Jesus. It read:

Dear Baby Jesus, here is something we hope will keep You warm. During Advent, we prayed 1,000 Our Fathers and made many sacrifices. We tried to be especially good all the time. Each prayer and each sacrifice is a stitch in the sweater we promised You. We hope You like it. Love, Bobby and Mary.

These two young children got it right. In their simplicity, they truly understood what Advent is all about—preparing our hearts by preparing a gift for the birthday of Our Divine Redeemer. We must take their example to heart and use the remainder of Advent to make a gift for Christ.

—Giovanni Battista Salvi (Il Sassoferrato), *Madonna and Child*.



We live in a world that does prepare for Christmas. There is a problem, however, with the world's preparation: it is not for the birth of Christ, rather it is for a mere holiday celebration—a holiday which for so many is utterly devoid of the reason we truly celebrate Christmas. But still, the world does prepare—and does so very well.

It is indeed sad to say, but nonetheless true, that, at times, the people of the world prepare far better to celebrate the holiday, than Catholics do to celebrate the holy day. That may sound a bit trite, but there is much truth in it. Our Divine Savior spoke truly when He said, “The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light” (Luke 16:8). What Our Lord means by this, as Father Charles J. Callan, O.P., explains in *The Four Gospels*, is that people of the world are far more shrewd, zealous, and diligent in their worldly pursuits than the faithful are in their spiritual ones (354).

We see so many proofs of this at this time of year. How many stores begin setting up their displays for Christmas many months in advance? How many people go to great lengths, braving the cold and even the snow, to decorate their homes? How many are willing to dedicate hour upon hour to gift-shopping? It would seem for some who are determined to get the gifts they want, there is no store too far, no line too long, no hour too early or too late. Such is the dedication of the world. Although, moved by earthly concerns and material gain, they do plan ahead and get ready for Christmas, while, at times, Catholics—who should be moved by the love of God—forget to prepare their hearts. We could learn from the example of the world.

“The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light” (Luke 16:8).

As we begin the holy season of Advent, then, let us take these examples to heart—Bobby and Mary’s and the world’s. In fact, this is one of the few examples the world furnishes for our imitation—its determination to prepare well for Christmas. Let us put these two examples into practice by striving to foster a spirit of recollection and practice virtue to a greater degree.

Very simply, to foster recollection means to call frequently to mind the reason for Christmas—the Infant Jesus. To help with this, I have provided some Christmas reflections for you (see attached file). The purpose of these reflections is to aid you in your spiritual preparation by using your material



preparations—shopping, decorating, baking, etc. In other words, we can use the things with which we come into contact throughout the season to raise our minds and hearts to God by thinking about their connection with the true meaning of Christmas.

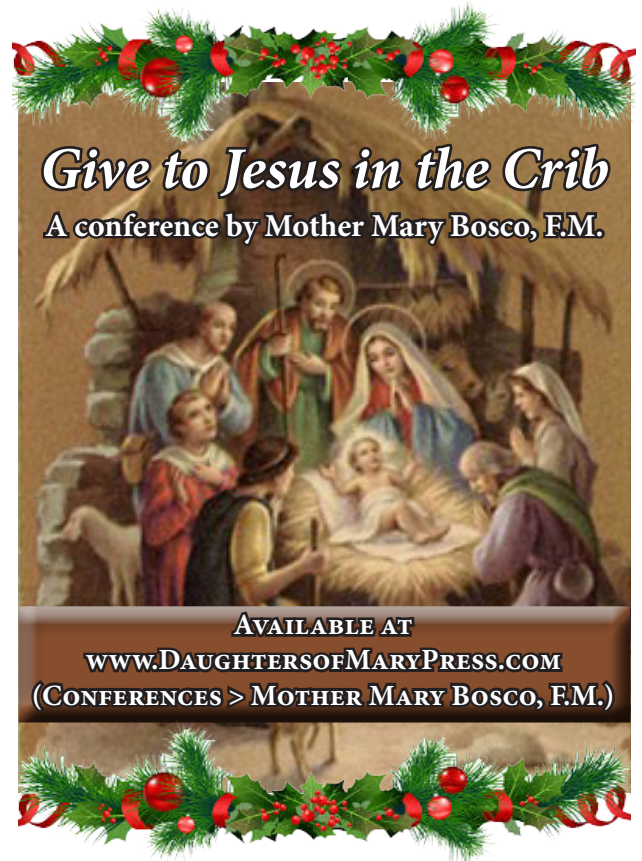
In addition to fostering a spirit of recollection, let us also prepare for Christmas by making a resolution—a resolution to overcome a certain sin or fault or to practice a particular virtue better. If, for instance, we have harbored anger and revenge in our hearts, let us strive to learn the virtues of the Sacred Heart and to ask Him to help us to be charitable, meek, and forgiving. If we have taken part in gossiping about our neighbor, let us make it a point to refrain from this uncharitable speech. If we have given in to impatience, let us work diligently on overcoming it. If we have been lax in the practice of our Faith, let us renew our fervor and devotion by being more faithful to our daily prayers and by a more devout attendance at Holy Mass. Whatever it is that is keeping us from God, that is what we must resolve to change this Advent—that is what we must make a specific and practical resolution to fix. If we make such a resolution and we stick with it, we can be sure, even though we may fail at times, that we are preparing well for Christmas.

To help with picking out a particular virtue to work on, I highly recommend that you listen to Mother Mary Bosco’s inspiring conference titled *Give to Jesus in the Crib*. This conference is available on CD or as an MP3 download at www.DaughtersofMaryPress.com. In the conference, Mother Mary Bosco recommends several virtues that are particularly appropriate for Advent, and she gives practical examples for each of

them. A little booklet that employs a few of Mother's ideas to serve as reminders of the conference and to help you give to the Christ Child with the practice of virtue is attached to the e-mail with this article.

Whatever it is that is keeping us from God, that is what we must resolve to change this Advent—that is what we must make a specific and practical resolution to fix.

As we prepare to celebrate the joyful birth of the Divine Infant, may we keep ever in mind that Our Lord delights in seeing us make external preparations for His birthday with decorating, shopping, gift-giving, and baking, but He delights all the more when He sees us also readying our hearts for Him. May we strive then to do this as a little gift for the Christ Child—to give Him a heart full of gratitude for His many blessings; a heart that is patient in midst of trials and difficulties; a heart that is kind and charitable towards others; a heart that is pure. This is the gift—the gift of our heart—that is worth more to the Divine Infant than all of the riches and things of this world, and it is the gift that only we can give Him.



—Thomas Kinkadee. *The Nativity*.

