

First Week of Advent

FOR THE family

LIGHT

aiting is hard. Whether it's standing in line at an amusement park or holding out for a sweet treat, while we anxiously await our turn, we often find that the waiting takes more time than being on the ride or eating the ice-cream cone.

And yet, even though this is the case, we still will say that the ride was *amazing* and *worth it*. The two-minute thrill of the roller coaster, with our shrieks of excitement, the wind blowing through our hair, and the butterfly feeling in our stomachs, makes us forget how long we stood in the snaking line.

Advent is a lot like waiting in line. It's never easy, but it's well worth the wait for Christmas. Yes, the gifts and celebrations and special traditions are always much-anticipated points of excitement, but they aren't *the* special focus of this season.

As we light the first Advent candle on our wreaths, let us remember that this is our time to focus on waiting for someone special—and learning to wait well. Although our Savior's coming on Christmas Day sounds far off, in just a few short weeks, Christ will be here! How are you going to prepare during this time?



Challenge of the Week

As you get ready to say your prayers at bedtime, think about how you can better wait for Christ. Try writing a list of ideas that will help you throughout Advent, and ask God to help you work on these things so that you can grow in excitement for Christ's coming.



Songs of the Week

"Glory" (Matt Maher) / "Like the Dawning" (Advent Hymn by Fr. Frederick W. Faber) / "Alma Redemptoris Mater"



Prayer

O Lord, who bestowed on us your Son, keep our steps faithfully pointed toward you and our path right. This Advent, draw us closer to your glory, will, and way. Help us to illuminate the struggles that we may face during this time of anticipation so that we may better delight and rejoice in your coming. We ask this in your name, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.



Words of Wisdom

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them, has light shined. ... You have increased [the nation's] joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil."

(Isajah 9:2-3 RSV-2CE)

"For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)."

(Ephesians 5:8-9 RSV-2CE)

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AWAKE

"It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand." (Romans 13:11–12)

hen we find ourselves in situations where we are forced to wait, we often fall into familiar patterns of thought. Sometimes we think we're just wasting our lives, waiting for God to begin a new chapter so that our lives can "really" start. Sometimes, when our longing becomes too uncomfortable or unbearable, we want to check out for a moment and numb ourselves to the pain. How many times have we turned on our phones, thinking we just need to "disengage" for a while, to lose ourselves in some thoughtless screen time? Sometimes we'll turn to a comfort book or movie and think, "I just need to escape to another world for a while." But by giving in to escapism, something is lost in the world we escape from.

A Dominican sister once told me that the sisters love to have movie nights, but only in moderation and only to consciously engage with a work of art and then return to real life with a fuller understanding. They intentionally avoid any mind-numbing binge-watching. We shouldn't engage with art with the intention to escape life. Even when we are waiting and longing, the present moment still matters. God is still speaking to us, still giving us opportunities to grow closer to him.

St. Augustine says that God uses these periods of waiting to work upon the soul. He writes, "God, by deferring our hope, stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the mind; by stretching, makes it more capacious." Sometimes, though, the stretching is uncomfortable. We would rather stay the same size; remain within the same, comfortable parameters; and have God fit whatever he has in store for us into the present moment. But God does not abandon us in these moments of waiting. He doesn't ask that we do nothing and surrender ourselves to boredom. Instead, he gives us gifts and charisms through which we can actively engage with the world around us and serve others.

Sometimes, after we get what we were waiting for, we regret the way we waited. We think, "If only I'd known everything would work out so well, I would've waited more cheerfully, more patiently, more generously." Rather than setting ourselves up for this regret, we should be receptive to the sacrament of the present moment.

We don't want to sleepwalk through life, to spend our lives dreaming of what could be and ignoring what is. As St. Paul tells us, it is now the time to "awake from sleep" and

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"put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11, 12). We should ask ourselves what God is trying to do with this present moment. We should listen to the promptings of the still, small voice gently suggesting that we should go to daily Mass, go to confession, volunteer a bit of our time to help others. It is time to awaken.

For Your Prayer

Today, when you unconsciously pick up your phone and start scrolling or zone out in other ways, redirect your mind and choose to consciously engage with the moment. Ask God what he would rather have you do, and give that moment to him.

JOURNAL QUESTION

Consider the present moment from a new perspective. Are there matters you have been unconsciously dismissing as unimportant? What are some small signs of God at work in the present that you may have overlooked?

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SHELTER

"May peace be within your walls, prosperity in your buildings."

(Psalm 122:7)

ne of the most basic human needs is shelter. When storms come—and we know they will—we want to be ready, to be shielded within secure walls that cannot be shaken. In addition to shelter from the elements, we often seek shelter and stability when our lives feel storm-tossed. As much as a home is a blessing, sometimes it seems like a tempest is raging within it, and we cannot find peace.

I imagine that the faithful centurion from today's Gospel felt this way. His plea to Jesus sounds urgent: "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully" (Matthew 8:6). He places his suffering before Jesus, revealing his heart to him. There is no peace within his walls; the storm rages within his house, and now he seeks refuge in Jesus.

Perhaps we doubt that God wants to be bothered with the trivialities of our lives. Perhaps we think the storms of our daily existence are insignificant in God's eyes. Perhaps we feel unworthy, like the centurion, to have God come into our homes and get so closely involved. But Jesus *wants* us to run to him during such spiritual squalls.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us not only that God wants to give us shelter but that his glory consists in providing it. He says, "For over all, the LORD's glory will be shelter and protection: shade from the parching heat of day, refuge and cover from storm and rain" (Isaiah 4:6). In the Gospel