

Setting the tone for Advent and Christmas

Rev. Dennis G. Lewandowski

As the Advent season begins and the countdown to Christmas inevitably takes over people's lives, I hope all of us have a blessed Advent season and a joyful Christmas. With our younger generation of priests in mind, especially those who for the first time, will experience Advent and Christmas as a newly appointed pastor, here are some reflections that might help set the tone for this season.

Perhaps the first thing we should all ask ourselves as we begin Advent is: Am I prepared for the Incarnation? I am guessing some will say "maybe, or not sure". I surely believe that as faithful Christians we live preparing ourselves while waiting for the Lord to come again in glory.

I am also guessing that many experienced pastors will agree with me in thinking that this season is one of the busiest times of the year. For as much as we try not to, we fill our calendars with seasonal preparations, additional liturgy celebrations, reconciliation services, weddings, and pastoral visits to the sick and elderly. All these activities result in less personal time for a pastor to simply be still, listen, pray and re-energize. So, we need to remind ourselves to pause and just breath.

Nevertheless, we strive to ignite the flames of hope, peace, love and joy in the hearts and minds of the people we serve, and we trust God to do the rest. Pope Francis calls us to restore hope, founded on God's Word. "Let us allow ourselves, then, to teach hope, to faithfully await the coming of the Lord, and whatever desert we might have in our life will become a flowering garden."- *from Pope Francis', General Audience on December 7, 2016.*

Accepting the Lord's message and getting it through to others can be challenging during these busy times. A lot is going on in people's lives these days: shopping, putting up Christmas decorations, office parties, shopping, spending time with friends and relatives, and more shopping.

Conversely, some individuals and families, in our communities might be going through a difficult time for multiple reasons. Some folks are financially stressed, or suffering from a serious illness, or experiencing anxiety or depression brought on by the holidays. It is important that we pray for one another, especially for those who might be going through a difficult time.

Praying with the scriptures in hand always helps me find the Lord's guidance. Though it may seem almost impossible to get away from the busyness of the season, we should make an effort to stop whatever we are doing and take the time we need to get away

every day. I do this to nurture my commitment to learning all that I can about our God and being ready to share it.

We should also try to keep up with what is going on in the world and learn what is important to the people we serve. As a pastor of 32 years, I now know that keeping my community's needs in mind when preparing for homilies, empowers me to encourage people to remain hopeful as we prepare to celebrate our saviour's birth at Christmas.

I also know that it takes years of hands-on training to learn how to be a pastor to God's people. If you are a new pastor who would like a friendly ear, please feel free to contact me. Email: dlewandowski@theccsassociates.us

Father Dennis G. Lewandowski is a priest of the Diocese of Joliet, IL. Currently the pastor of a large corporate parish in Naperville, IL, he is known for facilitating a positive working environment and empowering others to grow. He has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Lewis University; a Master's in Divinity from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, and a Masters in Organizational Development from Loyola University Chicago.