

PRAYING through ADVENT and CHRISTMAS

Generations of Faith

November 14 and 17, 2010

SESSION FOCUS: This *Responding in Prayer* session explores the manner in which we are taught to pray during Advent and Christmas seasons. In her consent to the angel Gabriel, Mary models for us the way to humbly respond in prayer to God's initiative in our lives when she says, "let it be with me according to your word" (*Luke 31:38*). Referring to the Cantic of Mary, or the Magnificat, the *Catechism* states, "Before the incarnation of the Son of God, and before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, her prayer cooperates in a unique way with the Father's plan of loving kindness..." (CCC, 2617).

BACKGROUND READING:

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 552-526, 1095, 2617-2622

U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults: pgs. 238, 503, 461-95, 523-524

Rediscovering Catholicism by Matthew Kelly: Chapters 12 & 13
(To read ahead for our January session, "We Believe in the Church", read Chapters 1 – 5.)

FAMILY/GROUP LEARNING EXPERIENCES

“Praying through Advent and Christmas”

- **Take time out for a discussion about how you would prepare if you knew that a special guest was coming to your house for Christmas. Emphasize such things as, making room, cleaning up and getting ready for the guest. Then, discuss what family members can do during the season of Advent to spiritually prepare for the coming of Jesus. What thoughts or actions need to be cleaned up?**
- **Write the name of each family or group member on a small piece of paper. Fold these papers and place them in a bowl. At mealtime, ask each family member to pick a name. For the next week, secretly do something extra for the person whose name you picked, such as putting away toys, taking on a chore, or treating the person kindly. At the end of the week, reveal the name you selected. If you choose your own name, be extra nice to everyone!**
- **Using the “Advent and Christmas Placemat Sample” and the “Praying Scripture through Advent” (inserts in your home kit), pray around your Advent wreath. It is one of our most popular Advent rituals. When we light the Advent candles, we are reminded of the promise of the coming of Jesus, who is the Light of the World. The circle of the wreath reminds us that Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Each week, we light another candle, and as the light grows, so does our anticipation of Jesus’ birth. We rejoice in Jesus, who pierces the darkness of sin by the light of His love.**
- **Participate in the Advent custom called “Preparing the Manger”. It is the practice of preparing a soft bedding in the manger for the Christ Child by using little wisps of straw as tokens of prayer and good works performed through the Advent season. Every night each child or family member is allowed to put in the crib one straw for each act of devotion, good work, or**

sacrifice performed. So, the Christ Child, coming on Christmas Day, finds an ample supply of tender straw to keep Him warm and to soften the hardness of the manger's boards. This practice originated in France.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT ADVENT?

- **IT IS A SEASON FOR WAITING, WATCHING AND HOPING.** We spend four weeks preparing our hearts to celebrate the first coming of Christ at Christmas, anticipating his second coming at the end of time, and recognizing his presence among us now.
- **IT IS A TIME TO BE STILL AND KNOW.** Meditation is an appropriate form of prayer for Advent, a season that calls us to set aside time from our busy, noisy world in order to spend time listening to God. Saint John of the Cross, whose feast is celebrated on December 14, greatly enriched the Church's heritage of prayer. He emphasized the importance of removing obstacles that keep us from God's love - a fitting spirituality for Advent.
- **IT IS A TIME TO PRAY.** Advent shows us that prayer is a good tool to both *prepare* for an event, and to simply *wait*. Through prayer, we can turn our waiting from an experience of anxiety and frustration to one of hoping and believing. Our prayers during Advent are intended to mesh with our daily lives and show us how to integrate meaningful prayer into our daily routine.
- **IT IS A TIME TO BE HUMBLE AND TRUST.** Trust and humility are hallmarks of the manner in which we are taught to pray during the Advent and Christmas seasons. The prayers of Mary, Elizabeth,

Zechariah, and Simeon, as recorded in the early part of the Gospel according to Luke, show us four essential qualities for a good prayer life: love of neighbor, recognition of God's love for us, and obedience to God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM *REDISCOVERING CATHOLICISM BY MATTHEW KELLY*

Matthew says, "Every journey toward something is a journey away from something. If we need to turn back to God at this moment in our lives, we also need to turn away from whatever has led us away from God. Maybe some people have led you to stray from God, perhaps possessions have distracted you from the straight and narrow road, or maybe pleasures have seduced you into walking a wayward path. Whatever has distracted you, it is important to realize that you cannot journey to a new place and at the same time stay where you are. Are you willing to turn back to God?" (pg. 161)

Question: (The last sentence of Matthew's quote.)

Matthew says, "Everything should be weighed with the journey in mind and the goal in sight. The question that should be a consistent part of our inner dialogue is, "Will what I am about to do help me become the-best-version-of-myself?" (pg. 163)

Question: (The last sentence of Matthew's quote.)

Matthew says, "The mysteries of grace can never be adequately described in cold words on cold pages. They must be experienced. So if you haven't been to Reconciliation for a while, maybe now is your time. Perhaps it has been ten years, or twenty years, maybe even longer. 'Do not be afraid' (Matthew 14:27). Bring the sins of your life, and place them at the feet of a priest who, in the sacrament of Reconciliation, sits in for Jesus. Do not think of it as confessing your sins to a priest. Think of it as confessing your sins to Christ alive in that priest." (pg. 169)

Question: What is keeping you from receiving the grace and healing that Reconciliation can bring?

Matthew says: "...the actions of your life are determined by your last most *dominant* thought. To be Catholic means to be striving to become more like Jesus. If we are serious about being Catholic, we must then place our attention on Jesus and the ways we can apply His teachings to modern living." (pg. 179)

Question: What was your last most *dominant* thought? Was it Christ-like?

Matthew says: "If I live to be a hundred and speak and write for my whole life, I will never be able to emphasize enough how important silence is as an ingredient of the spiritual life. In A

Call to Joy I wrote, "You will learn more from an hour of silence than you can in a year from books." In *Mustard Seeds* I wrote, "It is in the Classroom of Silence that God bestows his wisdom on men and women." (pg. 181)

Question: How much time are you spending in the Classroom of Silence?

O Antiphons

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the Messiah who would come as Savior for the world. Isaiah had seven titles for the Messiah, and each title indicated a particular good that the Messiah would bring to the world. We celebrate these titles through the O Antiphons, which cover the period of Advent preparation known as the Octave before Christmas, December 17 - 23. Each day of the final week of Advent, we celebrate a different O Antiphon. Let's discover what they are.

O Antiphon #1 - To be prayed on December 17

"The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:2-3).

"O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation."

O Antiphon #2 - To be prayed on December 18

"...but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins" (Isaiah 11:4-5)

"O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free."

O Antiphon #3 - To be prayed on December 19

"A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1)

"On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11:10).

“O Flower of Jesse’s stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; that nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.”

O Antiphon #4 - To be prayed on December 20

“I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open” (Isaiah 22:22).

“His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and forevermore” (Isaiah 9:7).

“O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel controlling at you will the gate of Heaven: Come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people to freedom.”

O Antiphon #5 - To be prayed on December 21

“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” (Isaiah 9:1).

“O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”

O Antiphon #6 - To be prayed on December 22

“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 (Isaiah 9:6).

“He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4).

“O King of all the Nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of man, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.”

O Antiphon #7 - To be prayed on December 23

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

“O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God.”

(You could conclude your O Antiphon Prayers by singing "O Come Emmanuel.")

Praying Scripture through Advent

First Week of Advent

WAIT

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Isaiah 40:3-4</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>Psalms 69:1-3</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 1:4-9</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>2 Peter 3:11-14</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Titus 2:11-14</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>Psalms 130</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>1 Peter 1:13-16</i>

Third Week of Advent

REJOICE

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Philippians 3:4-6</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>Psalms 5:11-12</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Psalms 96:10-13</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>1 Chronicles 16:8-12</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Psalms 35:9-10</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>Psalms 13:5-6</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Psalms 40:16-17</i>

Second Week of Advent

HOPE

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Isaiah 65:17-20</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>James 5:7-8</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Romans 8:22-26</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Sirach 2:7-10</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Psalms 119:164-168</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>Romans 12:9-15</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Isaiah 25:8-10</i>

Fourth Week of Advent

BEHOLD

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Isaiah 55:6-7</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>John 14:18-19</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Psalms 34:7-19</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Romans 13:11-14</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Psalms 145:17-19</i>
<i>Friday</i>	<i>Isaiah 9:2, 6-7</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Luke 2:1-14</i>

The Real Story Behind “The Twelve Days of Christmas”

Most holiday revelers do not realize that the popular carol, “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” is actually a hidden catechism for Catholics. From 1558 to 1829 the Catholic Church was persecuted in England, making the transmission of the faith from one generation to the next exceedingly difficult. One solution was to veil the basic tenets of the faith in the symbols of a song. If caught, a Catholic could claim that it was merely an innocuous ditty, or even, if pushed, a Protestant catechism (since most of the song’s teachings were also shared by the Reformers.)

The meaning is as follows:

- My true love = God
- Me = every baptized person, the Church
- A Partridge in a pear tree = the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ
- Two Turtle Doves = The two parts of the Sacred Scriptures [Old and New Testaments]
- Three French Hens = The three theological virtues, given from God and poured into our hearts [Faith, Hope, and Charity]
- Four Calling Birds = The four Gospels/Evangelists [Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John]
- Five Golden Rings = The first five Books of the Old Testament, the “Pentateuch” [Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy]
- Six Geese a-laying = the six days of creation.
- Seven Swans a-Swimming – the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit [wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord] and also the seven sacraments of the Catholic faith [Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony].
- Eight Maids a-Milking = the eight Beatitudes [Matthew 5:3-12].
- Nine Ladies Dancing = the nine choirs of angels in ascending order [Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim].
- Ten Lords a-Leaping = The Ten Commandments
- Eleven Pipers Piping = The eleven faithful apostles [Simon Peter, James the Great, John, Simon (the Zealot), Jude (a.k.a. Thaddeus), Andrew, James the Less, Matthew, Phillip, Bartholomew, and Thomas].
- Twelve Drummers Drumming = The twelve articles of the Apostle’s Creed (1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; 2. And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; 3. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; 4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; 5. He descended into Hell; on the third day He rose from the dead; 6. He ascended into Heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father almighty; 7. From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead; 8. I believe in the Holy Spirit; 9. The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, 10. The forgiveness of sins; 11. The resurrection of the body; 12. And life everlasting. Amen.

The “Twelve Days of Christmas” is still an excellent expression of joy in the Incarnate Lord and a well-rounded summary of the life of Faith. And, by giving us something on which to meditate for each day, it is also an ideal way to spend the twelve days of Christmas. It even reminds us (by virtue of its history) of the cost many generations had to pay in order for us to receive the Good News we celebrate during this holy season.