

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

The Season of Adventure

I'm old enough to remember when "The Holidays" didn't really begin until after Thanksgiving. Santa's arrival, in the Macy's parade, signaled the start of the Christmas shopping season.

Nowadays, it starts before Halloween.

If this keeps up, we will be decking the malls and dragging out the reindeer sometime before Labor Day.

I'm also old enough to remember when shovels were used to remove snow—not mail order catalogs. We are buried under them in October and November. Trees are being martyred for the sake of Neiman-Marcus.

Is something wrong here?

Yes. I think so. And it goes beyond the crass commercialism of Christmas.

This Sunday we begin the liturgical season of Advent—the final four weeks before Christmas. It is a period of expectation and hope, of watching and waiting. We mourn in lonely exile here. Come, O come, Emmanuel. God, be with us.

But it is hard to find the soul of this sacred season when we have been bumping into poinsettias and twinkling elves since Columbus Day. A popular carol calls this "the most wonderful time of the year." It is that, of course—but for reasons we easily forget.

The word "advent" comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning arrival. The arrival we await, of course, is that of the Messiah. Significantly, the same Latin root gives us the word "adventure." Which, as Webster's defines it, means "an undertaking involving danger and unknown risks."

Isn't that, fundamentally, the nature of Christianity?

At Baptism, each of us embarks on an "undertaking involving danger and unknown risks." It is true for anyone who seeks to live the Gospel. Certainly, it was true of the One who came to proclaim it. For Jesus, Christmas Day was more than the culmination of the first Advent. It was the start of the most dangerous and most risky undertaking in human history. The question to ponder this season is: How can we best honor that undertaking?

For Advent, it is customary for Catholics to light candles, say prayers or fold open the windows of the Advent calendar. Wreaths go on the door, packages go in the back of the closet and a star is placed atop a tree. It can be a time of great beauty, and excitement.

It can also be a time of wonder. Secrets are unwrapped. Cold nights are filled with colored stars. The soul waits for redemption. The heart fills with hope. Something is about to happen. Someone is about to arrive. God *will* be with us.

Seen that way, the season of *advent* is very much the season of *adventure*. Let's seize it. Embrace it. Savor the possibilities. Take part in this glorious "undertaking involving danger and risk"—the undertaking of loving unconditionally, of sacrificing greatly, of praying deeply.

That could be the greatest gift each of us gives this holiday season. It needs no wrapping, no ribbons.

And it will last long after the poinsettias have dried up and the twinkling elves have burned out.

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