

Insights in Liturgy

By DAVID E. NOWAK
Part II

Celebrating Advent

Advent balances the holiday season. It puts the lights and gifts into perspective as we watch with the Psalmist and sing, "Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation." (Ps. 85) Advent enables us to look at ourselves once again to rediscover our need to be ready, and our hope for surprises.

But it should be no surprise to liturgical planners that Advent also calls us to look carefully into our tradition for the symbols and rites which help us to ponder the mystery of our lives. Here are a few.

Surrounded by endless strings of Christmas lights and incessant canned carols, we can easily neglect the symbolic power of darkness and silence.

Silence and, especially, darkness may remind us of death or sinfulness, but they are also a primary symbol of growth. In the quiet night of the earth seeds are nourished, firmly rooted, and prepared for steady growth into a rich harvest. Often Jesus went into silent, darkened places to pray and grow in the love of the Father

Practically, even communities with limited budgets can effectively plan liturgical prayer with generous amounts of darkness and silence. On any sacramental or liturgical occasion during Advent the community could be greeted by a dimly lit church and, with a brief invitation from the presider, be drawn into a communal meditation in silence. Then, if an Advent wreath is to be used, a semi-dark atmosphere dramatizes even more pointedly the symbolic link between the candlelighting service and our watchful vigil, "silent before the Lord God." (Zep. 1:7).

In place of the penitential rite, or following communion, short sentences from scripture, such as the cries of the prophets, could be read or sung as seeds for reflection, allowing for a period of silence between each sentence. During the Liturgy of the Word the readings, especially the Old Testament or Psalm, may also be proclaimed in this way.

Advent Christians are professional waiters. We do not simply "get through" the season, or settle for distractions to make the time go faster. Our waiting is a time for being alert, full of promise, and already thrilled by God's presence breaking into our lives. Advent is not time to waste before Christmas,

but a time of transformation.

In our liturgical planning we could do well to remember we are a people waiting upon the presence of God. Our intercessory prayers should remind us of those who are waiting: parents for the birth of a child, the sick for renewed health, or the old for death. These are the living symbols of our advent journey.

The music we choose should lead us from the natural but somewhat hollow feeling of timpani, harp, and woodwinds, to feelings of anticipation and expecting with the rich addition of organ, until, finally, we surge with the confident readiness of brass on Christmas day.

Advent is a hopeful time. It is a time to renew the hopeful promise of salvation which is not a theory about God's presence in the future. Advent is the promise of real presence here and now.

Advent is the hope that the routine of our daily lives has a transcendent significance revealed to us even now. It is the belief that life itself is a revelation of God, present and yet to come.

Practical planning to celebrate our Advent hope does not require entirely new worship plans. Ordinary rites, such as a communal anointing of the sick, can have special significance when done within the Advent season. The hope for health can alert the whole community to the hope of salvation.

A communal anointing of the sick is especially appropriate at the beginning of Advent when the eucharistic liturgies emphasize the second coming. Those who are anointed are comforted with the promise that as they now share in Christ's suffering they will later share in his glory.

Speaker

Father Robert Kennedy, diocesan director of liturgy, will give a day of renewal on Advent themes at the Cenacle Renewal Center on Friday, Dec. 16 beginning at 11 a.m. He will repeat the same program on Saturday, Dec.

17, closing with the Mass of Obligation at 3 p.m. A registration fee will be charged. Further information is available by calling Sister Betty Rogers RC, at (716) 271-8755.

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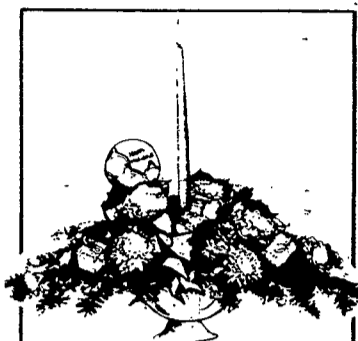
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Celebration

Bishop John E. McCafferty confers the Sacrament of Confirmation on youngsters from St. Monica's and St. Augustine's parishes Nov. 28 at St. Augustine's. This was the first shared confirmation ceremony for the two parishes, which have worked together during the past three or four years on programs for high school students and the elderly, and now hold joint staff meetings.

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