

Insights In Liturgy

Celebrating Advent

By DAVID E. NOWAK
Part 3

Although Advent is not a penitential season, it is filled with the Baptist's cry to seek the forgiveness of sins and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. A communal celebration of reconciliation can be a special opportunity to appraise our lives and admit our need to change.

Isaiah reminds us on the first Sunday of the new year, that we are a people who "wander" from God's ways. We are often in need of rediscovering our lives in God by acknowledging our failure to "cling to God, by calling upon his name."

To ritualize our darkness and need of God's mercy a communal celebration of reconciliation, especially with General Absolution, could begin in a dim, candle-lit church (using additional soft lighting if necessary). There, during an examination of conscience in litany style, one candle could be extinguished for each invocation until the congregation is in near total darkness.

After absolution the candles could be lighted once again while an appropriate scriptural passage (Rev. 22:1-7) or Psalm (Ps. 26) is meditatively read or sung.

Like the seasonal cycle, each day is characterized by certain special times separated by ordinary ones. Each day's activity is a microcosm of the yearly cycle. It, too, needs to be brought into focus, at specific times, to

remind us of new hopes and forgotten possibilities.

Each day begins with a fresh sense of promise in the morning and closes with the evening's memory of things accomplished and opportunities still untapped. This daily pattern, like the ecclesiastical year can serve to clarify and deepen our journey into the mystery of our lives.

Advent is an excellent time to place ourselves consciously within this pattern of beginnings and endings, high points and low points, which characterizes all our lives. Growth in our spiritual lives cannot happen unless it happens within a specific time which can be named and known, and met again and again, always offering a new challenge.

This is the genius of our liturgical cycle, and the reason for regular, communal prayer of the hours. Liturgy of the Hours keeps the time by which we identify ourselves to ourselves as a community of Jesus' followers. Prayer of the hours joins us to Christ's coming each day so that we can strengthen and pass on that identity. It is only by regular, and timely, assent to God's coming in the cycle of our daily lives that the signs of His presence in our communities will be clear and true to the Gospel.

Communities unaccustomed to praying the hours will find Advent an ideal time to introduce this form of worship. The lighting of the Advent Wreath, for example, can easily be incorporated into Evening Prayer. (See: "Monthly Misalette", December, Advent Vespers, pp 40-42). Or senior citizens inclined to daytime activities could

celebrate the morning hour and include the Advent Wreath in that time of prayer.

The final days of Advent are especially blessed with the tradition of the "O" antiphons sung from Dec. 17 to Christmas in the evening office. These titles of the long-awaited Savior may even stimulate other ideas for advent art and song.

Further, the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours suggest that the office of Readings be celebrated before the eucharist on Christmas Eve as a solemn vigil. (#215).

Clearly, while advent is the shortest of our liturgical seasons it is filled with many possibilities for communal prayer. We could go on to trumpet the need for non-sacramental penitential services; for non-eucharistic Marian liturgies; for family or children-centered celebrations on the feast of lights (St. Lucy, Dec. 13) or the feast of charitable surprise (St. Nicholas, Dec. 6). We could turn to patron saints and folk customs, such as the tradition of the Posada among the Spanish-speaking, rediscover advent drama, like the Paradise Play, or seasonal symbols, such as the Jesse Tree.

But, while finally there may be no limit to our storehouse of advent treasures, there should be limits to what we actually do. A multiplicity of rites or symbols will inevitably reduce good ritual and symbol to liturgical clutter.

In all that you do, whether in prayer, song or dance, strive first to embrace Advent's darkness and longing, joy and light, as a simple promise, but one we cannot live without.

Advent is, above all, a simple season of God's simple coming.

Mindszenty Report Hits TV Shows

The Mindszenty Report has criticized attacks on religion, morality and the family on programs on all three major television networks.

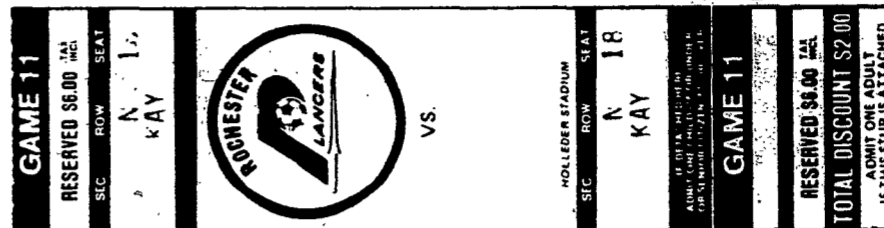
A publication of the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, the report said that episodes on Alice and

M.A.S.H. (CBS), Laverne and Shirley and Ryan's Hope (ABC) and Saturday Nite Live and The Word (NBC) promoted immorality at the expense of Judaic-Christian principles.

"Contrary to being neutral on moral issues, TV feeds its

viewers a steady diet of godless secular humanism," said John D. Boland, research director of the foundation. "Concerned viewers must take their objections to the sponsors whose commercials pay for the programs. The networks don't care what you think," he said.

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All in the Family

By Sarah Child

Calling For Humor

It was not a good week. A virus attacked the second time in two months with a vengeance. Two days on the couch letting the eight-year-old answer your calls is not good for either your already frustrated self or for the job.

Two days later I try to pick up the pieces. There had been a call during the fog, from the Jewish Community Center. My daughter had written down the name and the number on an odd scrap of paper. Now the paper was missing.

There was little else to

do but throw myself on the mercy of the JCC people. I called, talked to a few people who referred me to somebody named Phyllis.

Weakly, (from embarrassment, not the virus) I tried to explain about the virus, the eight-year-old, the lost message and my messy desk which is supposed to be restricted to my papers only but at this moment has half a walkie talkie, an instamatic camera, a green comb and a novel the head of the house has been at for a week. (He is not much for novels, obviously.)

Phyllis (or maybe her secretary), on the other end of the line, cuts me short.

"And why" she says, "should your house be any different than anybody elses?" I laugh in relief and delight. Phyllis, no longer a stranger, joins me.

By the time I had hung

up, the lost week was forgotten and mood was definitely upbeat. Thank you, God, for Phyllis. And for others who know how to project something other than gloom, doom, and crisp efficiency.

The call reminded me of one I had made six months ago to a health care facility to get some information.

I asked for "Mrs. Capelletti."

"Capelletti is pasta," said the laughing voice at the agency. You want Mrs. Cappellini."

By then, I didn't. I preferred to keep talking to the woman with the sense of humor, but she had other phones to answer.

Hopefully the trend will spread, perhaps inward to the phone company. I can see it all now. One day soon I call for information. Instead of an irritating message telling me to consult my directory (why would I be calling if I already had not?) I'll get a joke.