

LITURGICAL LIVING

Series 13: November 19-25

Advent Traditions

Remember, Advent doesn't begin until December 3rd. But, we are talking about it early so we can prepare ourselves to more fully enter this beautiful season of preparation- prayer, fasting and alms-giving. Last week we presented the idea of keeping Advent. To not jump ahead to the celebration of Christmas but to enter into the waiting, the expectant joy. Here are a few Advent traditions that could help you do that! Maybe focus on adding one this year.

Advent Music and Books

Christmas songs. There are a lot of traditional carols that are more Adventy! My personal favorite carol is "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and Matt Maher's "[The Advent of Christmas](#)" album was my go to last Advent. There are so many beautiful Advent/Christmas children's books. Here is a post from [Blessed is She](#). This is a great resource for women! I have used their studies for Advent and Lent myself! Advent Devotionals for adults. The parish is ordering "[Rejoice...](#)" from Ascension that will be available in the Narthex. There are also many other options from [Ave Maria Press](#).

Advent Wreaths

Advent wreaths are such a beautiful liturgical practice. From the smell of the evergreens to the ambiance of the candles and finally the repetition of prayers are something that I really cherish in Advent. The exact origins are unknown but they are believed to have come from Germany. Pope St. John Paul II was the first pope to bring the tradition to the Vatican actually and one has been used there each year since! There is so much religious symbolism that can be discussed with Advent wreaths.

- The Circle: no beginning nor end. This symbolizes God's eternal nature.
- The Evergreen: the immortality of our souls
- The Pine Cones: new life and resurrection
- The Four Candles: The four weeks of Advent and the 4,000 years from the creation of Adam and Eve until the birth of Jesus.
- Candle Flames: The light of Jesus Christ



You can find one to purchase of course. But, we make a family outing to gather our own. We go out on a hike with a scissors and gather spruce, pine and cedar branches as well as some cones. From experience, it's always good to gather some extra. I have found that Norway Pines (not native to our area) work great because they are soft. Spruces White spruce tends to be more pokey and a little harder to work with because of that! We then have a metal coat hanger we made into a circle and create the wreath. We bend the branches and try to make it look as pleasing as possible. The smell is great and there is pride in making our own. Needle falling is something to consider so we always place it on a green placemat. Don't forget to bless with holy water when you're all finished! We use real candles that we bought online. We get the three purple, 1 rose and 1 large white candle for the center. We did one year use tea light candles, but that wasn't our thing. We preferred the taller candles. It's good to spray with water each day so they don't dry out. More instructions [here!](#)

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Advent Traditions Continued

Advent Calendar

Advent Calendars are a good way for kids to be able to understand how much longer in this time of waiting. There are many types you can select. You can make them, buy them-disposable or reusable. I think it is most important to consider if the calendar fosters a sense of waiting rather than fostering the spirit of receiving. More [here](#).

The Jesse Tree



An Advent activity that traces salvation history from Creation through the Incarnation using bible readings and ornaments with traditional symbols. There is one for each day of Advent. There are some different variations. Some sets have you craft ornaments or come with them that you place on a tree each day. We actually just got a block set so no tree for us! It can become a really beautiful custom! More about Jesse Trees, [here](#).

Straw for Baby Jesus

"And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to one'" (Mt 25:40). A kid's good works during Advent can create a soft, comfy bed for baby Jesus when he is born. What you do is create an empty manger where Jesus will be born. Put some yellow or brown pieces of yarn (or real straw if you're brave) in a container nearby. Throughout Advent, if you see your child doing a good job on something, being kind or listening well, they can put a piece of straw in the manger. You can even have siblings award siblings. Then on Christmas Eve, bring out baby Jesus and place him in your straw filled manger. This is a beautiful way to highlight almsgiving and help to reinforce good behavior without the rewards for a prize and it is not a long term thing so it doesn't really risk creating a sense of entitlement that other reward charts can at times. I have not done this, but this is my add this year!



Christmas Cards

Christmas cards are a beautiful tradition that many families keep, and it is something I strive to add into our Advent this year. Having three kids in four years has really made it challenging to keep up with the baby books and family portraits. Looking back even at last year's church directory family picture with a newborn, a toddler with a food stained shirt and a toddler who was clearly just crying; makes me smile. A practice for Christmas cards is to hang each Christmas card you receive through Advent and Christmas somewhere prominent. These photos of family and friends are beautiful decorations! Then when it's time to take them down, don't toss them. Keep them in a basket or somewhere accessible and take out a few at a time as a tangible reminder to pray for them and their intentions. This could be in a family rosary or whatever works for you!

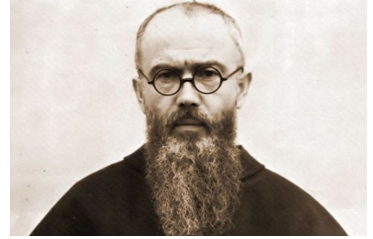


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Series 12: November 19-25

Celebrating Thanksgiving with the Saints

You may have wondered why St. Maximilian Kolbe for Thanksgiving? It's not his feast day and he has nothing to do with Thanksgiving. Or does he? His story is powerful! During WW2 he was arrested and sent to Auschwitz concentration camp for publishing newspaper articles that spoke out against the Nazi regime. On the way to the camp, amidst the fear and dread, he sang songs of hope and thanksgiving. Others eventually joined him in song. His life ended when he offered to take the place of another who was selected to die. St. Maximilian Kolbe is an example of living a life of gratitude to God.



There are many other Saints who have demonstrated great gratitude to the Father. St. Teresa of Calcutta once said, "The best way to show my gratitude is to accept everything, even my trials, with joy." St. Jose María Escrivá also said "Get used to lifting your heart to God, in acts of thanksgiving, many times a day. Because he gives you this and that. Because you have been despised. Because you haven't what you need or because you have. Thank him for everything, because everything is good."

Having gratitude to God has the power to transform our lives! St. John Chrysostom said, "Happiness can only be achieved by looking inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has, and this requires transforming greed into gratitude," and St. Gianna Beretta Molla also said, "The secret of happiness is to live moment by moment and to thank God for what he is sending us every day in his goodness."



Gratitude has the power to improve relationships, increase empathy, improve overall well-being- physical, mental and spiritual, improve sleep and increase self-esteem.

Gratitude fosters one's relationship with God because when a person takes time to appreciate the good things that are in their lives, they usually recognize that there must be a source of goodness from which these blessings come. For some, being grateful may be the one habit that eventually inspires them to leave a life of darkness and seek out a friendship with their Creator, the King of light and hope.

Some practical ways to focus on gratitude:

- keep a gratitude journal;
- set aside times daily, weekly and annually to thank God for the blessings in your life (such as before your daily Rosary, on Sunday after Mass, or on Thanksgiving Day);
- make a practice of noticing the positive side of situations and savor the good in others throughout the day; and
- keep a gratitude jar during Lent or Advent in which to put notes about things you are thankful for.

This year, let's celebrate Thanksgiving Day with the saints! Their words can help us shine out with the glory of Our Lord, the author of all that is true and beautiful. Along with St. Augustine of Hippo, we may pray, "O my God, let me remember with gratitude and confess to thee thy mercies toward me," and remember along with St. Teresa of Ávila, "In all created things discern the providence and wisdom of God, and in all things give him thanks."

