

Dear GOF Families,

Advent is upon us now and soon we will be celebrating our Savior's birth! Time sure does fly by, doesn't it? I am so thankful for the Churches wisdom in placing the Church season so perfectly. Advent is a time to reflect and prepare. With all the hustle and bustle that surrounds us in the world around Christmas, it is important not to get caught up in it. Christ is calling each one of us to stop, reflect, listen and to receive. We are a society of doers and even during Advent we can get caught up in doing extra prayers, the Jesse tree, Advent wreaths and other things. These are good things and we should be adding some extra devotions to prepare our hearts for Christ's birth and ultimately his final coming. In addition to that we should spend some quiet time as well, to receive the graces that God wants to give to us this Advent season.

This month we will be talking about the Rosary in GOF small groups. The Rosary can seem overwhelming to take on, especially if you are a family with small children. An idea is to break it up a bit. Say one decade a day with the particular set of mysteries for that day. Refer to Rediscover Catholicism for the typical schedule of mysteries for each day. Another idea is to use a picture for the mystery you are going to pray. Sometimes a visual aid will help keep little minds more attentive (and big minds too!). The point here is to not get bogged down with every detail being perfect and always finishing it. I have mentioned before that a very wise woman once said to me, "if something is worth doing then it is worth doing poorly!" As a family with young children I can relate to that.

The packet this month was more difficult to keep slim than in previous months because there are so many good articles relating to Advent! I was able to keep it to just a couple of articles, however. You will find the Sunday gospel readings with activities for families and also an information sheet with information and websites that I wanted you to know about and have access to.

The hope for GOF this year is that each family is taking these pillars that we are touching on and putting them into practice in your homes. Faith for our children should and can be taught, but it is also "caught". If we want our children to have a chance to live their Catholic faith into adulthood, then we must live it out in our homes while they are young. We must live the liturgical year. Celebrate the Churches seasons, celebrate patron feast days and baptism anniversaries, eat meals together, pray as a family each day or evening, talk about our faith with your kids. No, nothing can guarantee that they will keep their faith into adulthood, but as parents it is our duty and our right to train them in the truths of the Church. That must come first before anything else. It cannot take a back seat to other activities which may be good as well. We just have to prioritize. This may sound like a "to-do" list, but it is not meant to be. Christ wants us to be joyful. By living our faith it will bring us joy!! We must realize that being Catholic isn't living as the world would have us live. It is going against the saying "all for me, now i deserve it!". Instead we should say, "all for Christ, sacrifice for others, love as Christ - until it hurts!".

May God bless you and your families during these Advent and Christmas Seasons. As Matthew Kelly says, "Be Bold! Be Catholic!"

December 11
Third Sunday of Advent
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Reflecting

If a person were to “testify” in a legal trial, that person would have to tell the truth; that’s what “to testify” means. That’s what John the Baptist did. He came to “testify to the light.” He told the truth about Jesus, the Messiah.

We “testify” to Jesus as well. In fact, as Catholic Christians, we testify to Jesus every day of our lives. By every charitable action and kind word, we testify to our faith in Jesus. Every time we celebrate a Sacrament, we testify to our faith in Jesus. In our goodness, others see the love of Jesus because they know we are Catholic Christians. We love Jesus so much and know that he loves us, and so it’s natural for us to share that love with others.

But we can get distracted during this time of year. We can get so caught up in planning, shopping, and decorating that we fail to testify to Jesus. When we get distracted from Jesus, the “way of the Lord” gets crooked. That’s why John’s message in today’s Gospel is so important right now: “Make straight the way of the Lord.”

Sharing

Name one thing we do that testifies to our love for our families. Name one thing we do that testifies to our love of Jesus.

Acting

Make a list of five personality characteristics of John the Baptist and think about which ones are characteristics of your personality as well.

Praying

Jesus, may our behavior during the season of Advent—and every season of the year—testify to your love for us and our love for you. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Luke 1:26-38

Reflecting

A timeline is a horizontal line along which vertical marks indicate key events. So a timeline of your life, for example, would begin with a mark at the far-left of the line with the date of your birth. From there, you might divide the line into years and mark key events in each year.

Today’s Gospel tells of a key event in God’s timeline: The angel Gabriel appears to Mary to tell her that she has “found favor with God,” that she will “bear a son,” and that she will “name him Jesus.” The child will be “called holy, the Son of God.”

But God’s timeline doesn’t begin with Gabriel’s announcement to Mary. God’s timeline includes a whole lot of key events prior to this one. From the beginning of Creation—although God has always existed so even Creation is not the beginning of God’s timeline—this moment when Gabriel appears to Mary was part of God’s plan. We call this *salvation history*.

After Gabriel appears to Mary, God’s timeline continues: the birth of Jesus the life of Jesus, the suffering and death of Jesus, the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. And you know what? God’s timeline continues *still*; we are part of God’s timeline because we have faith in Jesus and share that faith with others.

Sharing

Talk about how every event in life is connected to things that happened right before the event. Marvel at how connected we are to things in our history.

Acting

Read the First Reading for today (2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16) and see how it is part of salvation history.

Praying

You call us to yourself, God, throughout all time. We respond with faith and love. Amen.

Nativity of the Lord
John 1:1-18

Reflecting

It’s Christmas Day! Isn’t it awesome! For weeks and weeks, we’ve looked forward to this day and all its wonderful celebrations. Now is the time for those special traditions that are unique to our family and friends at this time of year.

And now is the time for a prayerful meditation. Get comfortable, close your eyes, and breathe slowly and naturally.

Imagine yourself walking through a dark night, up a hill, toward a small light in the distance. As you walk toward the light, it gets brighter. Then you see a small group of people and animals gathered around a manger in a stable. In the manger is an infant—a baby boy. You see the child’s mother, looking down at her child with love. Her husband stands beside her, protective and attentive. Surrounding the Holy Family are

shepherds and their sheep, looking on with wonder. You are aware of how bright the light is, yet all you hear is the rustle of hay as the animals move around. The light is still and holy. Imagine picking up the child and holding him, looking down into his sweet face, slowly swaying back and forth with him in your arms. Imagine, then, placing him tenderly back in the manger.

Now see yourself backing away from the stable and turning around to leave. You notice that the dark night is now bright as day. That’s because you’ve just held in your arms the

light that “shines in the darkness,” that John talks about in today’s Gospel: “...the light of the human race.”

Sharing

Share about a time when you were surrounded by darkness for a while, and how it felt when light returned.

Acting

Make copies of this meditation and share it with your family today.

Seeking the Gift of All Gifts This Christmas

It seems this year's Black Friday, starting at midnight Thanksgiving, outdid all previous Black Fridays as Americans spent an amazing \$52 billion. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that some Americans are calling Black Friday "my favorite holiday."

I'm sure you heard about the Los Angeles woman who pepper-sprayed fellow Walmart shoppers so she could get her hands on a half price Xbox. A police officer in North Carolina had to use a puff of pepper spray to calm down Walmart shoppers there.

There seems to be a frantic effort on behalf of many in our culture to obtain lots of stuff at bedrock prices. Isn't this what makes a person happy and fulfilled? Won't all those Black Friday gift purchases convey happiness to others?

Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that "stuff" brings moments of happiness. No, in the sense that seeking to fill our deepest yearnings with "stuff" is vanity. The more we attempt to fill our hearts with secondary sources, the more our sense of emptiness increases. The things we usually turn to for fulfillment, like athletic achievements, awards, academic degrees, possessions, and positions all become vanity of vanities when such good things are made substitutes for primary things.

The Advent Season is a time to seek God afresh. The very best gift you can seek this Advent and Christmas is the special gift of God himself.

This gift of God is essential to discovering the essence and foundation of fatherhood. What I'm going to describe is far more important than a list of fatherhood do's and don'ts, techniques of catechesis, and strategies for child-training. This gift, in fact, lies at the nuclear core of fatherhood.

A perfect place for investigating this special gift is Pope Benedict's book, *Jesus of Nazareth*. In it he says:

"This is ... the point around which I will construct my own book. It sees Jesus in light of his communion with the Father, which is the true center of his personality; without it, we cannot understand him at all, and it is from this center that he makes himself present to us still today."

This one word contains the whole history of redemption. We must therefore let Jesus teach us what *father* really means. The Lord reminds us that fathers ... 'give good gifts to their children.' Luke specifies the 'good gifts' that the Father gives; he says 'how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'"

This means that the gift of God is God himself. The 'good things' that he gives us are himself. This reveals in a surprising way what prayer is really all about: It is not about this or that, but about God's desire to offer us the gift of himself – that is the gift of all gifts, the 'one thing necessary.'

Prayer is a way of gradually purifying and correcting our wishes and of slowly coming to realize what we really need: God and his Spirit."
(pp. xvi, 135-137)

To obtain this gift we must resist the temptation to get lost in the frantic pace of our consumer culture during the Advent season. Stay with me here because what I'm trying to share with you isn't just a discounted Black Friday Xbox, but the entire store. To experience it requires focus, intention, and desire as described by Gregory Palamas (1296 – 1359), a monk of Mount Athos in Greece and later the Archbishop of Thessalonica:

“Grace hides its presence within the baptized, waiting for the soul’s desire; when the whole man turns himself wholly to the Lord, then in an unutterable experience it reveals its presence in the heart ... then the fire of divine grace diffuses itself even to the exterior senses of the heart.”

The Father’s gift will not only change your life, but it’s one of such staggering transformative power that it could literally impact your family for generations. If you have an aspiration to create a legacy of faith in your family, then this is where it begins. A deep experience of the gift of the Holy Spirit will give you a gift from the heart of the Father that will simultaneously empower your fatherhood to resemble His. You will then be equipped to pass on the Father’s gift to your children. Listen carefully to Pope Benedict XVI’s advice:

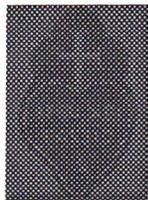
“I would say simply: no one can give what he does not personally possess; in other words we cannot pass on the Holy Spirit effectively or make him perceptible to others unless we ourselves are close to him. This is why I think that the most important thing is that we ourselves remain, so to speak, within the radius of the Holy Spirit’s breath, in contact with him. Only if we are continually touched within by the Holy Spirit, if he dwells in us, will it be possible for us to pass him on to others.”

Make time in your schedule this Advent for some special times to pray. Keep your focus on experiencing the fullness of the Father’s promise and of your baptismal inheritance, that is, the fullness of the Holy Spirit – the gift of God himself.

And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:9-13

Come Holy Spirit, and fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Your Divine Love.



Father Cedric Pisegna, C. P.

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12/7/2011
13:06:17

Advent 2011

Advent is a word that means "coming." This season is a time of preparation for the second coming of Jesus as well as Jesus' first coming at Christmas. As we hear God's Word and pray, we also open ourselves to Jesus' coming *right now*.

We are used to preparing for a future job by going to college. We prepare for tests by studying. We prepare for our future by saving money. Similarly, we must also prepare to stand before Jesus on judgment day. God has taught me that all of life now is a preparation for our meeting God. We hear Jesus tell us, "Watch." "Be alert." "Be ready."

There are three main areas where we must prepare. **First**, we must grow in our relationship with God. As we deepen our relationship with God now, we will be ready to receive the beatific vision then. **Second**, we must progress in character. Our life now is about growing in virtue. All our secrets will lay bare in the light of God's face. **Lastly**, we must realize our potential. God has gifted each of us and we must discover and use our talents. Everyone will have to account for what they did with their lives.

Who we are is God's gift to us, who we become is our gift to God.

God isn't interested in perfection, but very interested in our progression.

Advent, then, is a season of hope, expectation, promises fulfilled, patience, waiting and prayer. It is a time to sense God's presence and comfort. It is through God's love that we will be motivated to grow and go forward. This season is a time to look at ourselves and push ourselves to become. We must be ready for our death. If we choose to progress in each area of life, we will be ready to receive Jesus when he comes in Glory. When we die he will receive us. We will also receive him in a fresh new way at Christmas. O Come O Come Emmanuel! Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus!

Prayer of Self-Surrender

Jesus,
You are coming in Glory as King.
I want to be ready.
I surrender my life to you.
Transform me into your image.
I love you Lord.
AMEN!

Surrendering to God is not a one-time prayer. Surrender is a lifestyle that is expressed by prayer and right choices and solid behaviors. It is a lifestyle of seeking God through prayer and action. During Advent, seek Jesus in his Word. Read the daily Mass readings before you participate in the liturgy. Interested in a great Mass/Bible devotional? www.wau.org Spend time in quiet, silent prayer. Reflect on where the Church is inviting you to grow. Journey with Jesus as he teaches us and guides us to new life. The Lord Bless you and Keep you as you seek new life in Christ. Love, Fr. Cedric

Many people open themselves to reconciliation during, this preparation for Christma. I pray that you will examine your heart, confess your sins and receive the grace of God.

Here is the examination of conscience sheet I promised you on TV:

RECONCILIATION

A person's conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God

whose voice echoes in our depths. (*Catechism #1776*)

The Spiritual and moral life is about going forward, moving and growing. As you examine your heart, your conscience, are there any areas where you feel stuck or are even going backwards? You must confront and confess these issues in order to move. In addition, you must be honest enough to try to get to the roots. As you open your issues and sins to the Lord, you can *trust God* for mercy, gentleness and healing.

Some issues to think about:

- 1) **Anger:** Are you angry with others, circumstances, self or God? Is there bitterness, resentment and non-forgiveness in your heart? Do you manage your anger by "exploding" or "imploding"? Possible roots of anger are: Perfectionism, Grasping for control, unrealistic expectations, family of origin.
- 2) **Relationships:** Is there someone you need to forgive? Can you ask for the courage to pray for them now? Is there someone you need to confront about their behavior? Ask for the courage to do so and to do it in a non-threatening way. Are you striving to love the irritating and "unlovely" people in your life? Or do you just avoid them?
- 3) **Codependency:** Do you allow the behaviors and emotions of others to control and manipulate you? Are you a people pleaser and live in fear of what others think all the time? Do you stand up for yourself? Are you true to yourself? Roots: insecurity, fear of rejection.
- 4) **Idols:** What "catches" your eye in life? Is it out of balance shopping, T.V., excessive Internet, gambling, food, drinking, sex, travel, sports, or work? Are you impulsive, compulsive, obsessive and out of control in any of these areas? What would being in balance mean in these areas? Roots: Low self-image/body image, boredom, lack of control, frustration with life, loneliness, self-sabotage. The need to escape from external and/or internal pain.
- 5) **Gossip:** Do you build relationships with others based on ungodly talk and slander? Control? Manipulation? Possible roots are the need for acceptance and approval from others. Belittling others to make yourself feel more important. Insecurity.
- 6) **Lust:** Do you watch programs on T.V., explore the Internet or read books that are inappropriate? Does this lead unwanted behaviors? Possible roots: Longing for God shifted to lust. Lack of contentment stemming from the need for excitement. Lack of self-control and immaturity. Simple rebelliousness and flippant disregard.
- 7) **Laziness:** Are you lazy in areas of personal health, relationships, work, and seeking God? Roots: Lack of self-control and discipline, immaturity, low self-esteem, selfishness, lack of integrity.
- 8) **Pride:** Are you stubborn, controlling, insensitive, cynical, contentious, opinionated and slow to say you were wrong? Do you judge others harshly simply by appearance? Pride denies and hides issues. It has a need to always be right. Humility admits, confronts and confesses. Roots: "I" Selfishness, negative self-image, fear and insecurity.
- 9) **Anything else?** Is there any other area that you need to confront and look at in order to experience healing, forgiveness and go forward? Look at your relationship with God, others and self. Try to think not just about your issues, but possible roots. God Bless you as you confront, face your pain, confess and move *forward!!*

ACT OF CONTRITION

Jesus, I have sinned.
I am sorry.
Have mercy in your kindness.
I want to make a move and change.
I believe in your healing love.
I make the decision to follow you. Amen!

In addition to an act of contrition (sorrow for our sins and for hurting God) we also receive a "penance" when we celebrate reconciliation. A penance is not a "punishment" for our sins. Rather, it is a means to help you to turn from sin and begin afresh with God. Reading the Bible has traditionally been given as a penance to help people to turn to Jesus and experience healing. Please pray as you read slowly this passage from **Psalm 51** from the Bible as your penance:

~Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my guilt
and *cleanse* me from my sin.

~Behold, you desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean;
wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

~Fill me with joy and gladness;
let the bones which you have broken rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquities.

~*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

~O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
were I to give you a burnt offering,
you would not be pleased.

~The sacrifice acceptable to God
is a broken spirit;
a broken contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise. Amen.

***Based on Fr. Cedric's books *You Can Change* and *A Retreat with Fr. Cedric* BOOKS

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INFORMATION SHEET

The monthly packets are available online at the parish website which is www.custercatholic.org Click on the GOF tab and it will have each months' packet listed.

Remember to check out www.pflaum.com for activities associated with the Gospel Weeklies. There is information for parents and activities for the kids.

A great Advent and Lent program is found at www.holyheroes.com This is a family apostolate that has some real depth while being entertaining too! It has short videos for each day (less than 5 minutes total) of Advent and the emcees for the videos are the kids so our kids like to watch other kids presenting information! You simply sign up on their site and they will send you an email every day with the videos and optional activities.

www.catholiicing.com, www.catholicmom.com are solid Catholic websites that follow the liturgical year with activities and teaching.

www.catholicculture.org is a website that has something for the whole family. There are articles for adults and activities as well. This is the website I go to often for GOF materials.

www.catholicchild.com www.chcweb.com www.illuminatedink.com are websites that would have Catholic gifts for kids for Christmas.

* Beginning in January during the GOF Mass, Fr. Peter will bless water, salt and/or other religious items you would like to have blessed. There will be an information sheet in the January packet about holy water and blessed salt.