

Spirituality Commission Report November 13, 2021

Father, my day-to-day routine is so busy.
So much so that I sometimes forget to stop to thank you for all that is good in my life.
My blessings are many and my heart is filled with gratefulness for the gift of living,
for the ability to love and be loved, for the opportunity to see the everyday wonders of creation.
I want to thank you, for those things in my life that are less than I would hope them to be.
Sometimes life is very hard, and it's a struggle to keep my head above water.
Things that seem challenging, unfair, or difficult often hurt.
When my heart feels stretched and empty, and pools of tears form in my weary eyes,
still, I will rejoice that You are as near to me as my next breath and that
in the midst of turbulence, I am growing and learning.
In the silence of my soul, I thank you most of all for Your unconditional love. Amen.

This time of year, it can become easy to become wrapped up in all that we have to do – or think we have to do – and it is important to be mindful of where our focus and activities are directed.

Observe Advent

Decide what you have to do, what you want to do and what others expect you to do. Increase your Christmas preparation time and reduce your stress by cutting out the latter.

- Maintain the four weeks before Christmas as a time of preparation instead of acting as though Christmas were already here. You can't celebrate Advent as a spiritual season if you're in a constant whirl of activity - parties, shopping.
- Minimize the angst that many people feel by separating what you have control over from what you don't.
- Opt out of the post-Thanksgiving buying frenzy by joining those who celebrate the day after Thanksgiving as “**Buy Nothing Day**”, a 24-hour moratorium on consumer spending. Then shop the next day on Small Business Saturday.
- Watch what you watch
The weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day are a prime time for many people to watch favorite Christmas TV specials or movies. But remember to keep Advent in your TV and movie watching. And even with the best Christmas programs, don't stop at watching. Let that be just the start of interacting with your children, grandchildren or godchildren. After *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, go to a Christmas pageant. After *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, read St. Luke's entire Nativity story together.
- Make plans to attend your parish penitential services and advent retreat. Invite your friends to come along.
- Make regular use of the sacrament of reconciliation.
- Follow the scriptural readings for the season of Advent, you can find them in your parish bulletin or on the USCCB website.



I wanted to share this story as an Advent Reflection.

Receiving Advent by Tom McGrath

One year during Advent, our parish priest invited us to write down on a slip of paper a word that named something that is keeping us from getting closer to God. He suggested it might be a fear, a resentment, or an attitude that shuts us off from the love God so wants to give. We were to fold the paper over a few times, grasp it tightly in one hand, and make a fist around it while he began to preach on the Scripture readings.

After a minute, my hand began to ache. At two minutes, my hand grew numb. At three minutes, the hand started shaking uncontrollably. He told us to open our hands. I found how hard it was to do that. After grasping the piece of paper so tightly, my hand had stiffened and seemed to have a mind of its own.

I can't remember what else he said that day, but I have never forgotten that lesson. Hold on to a resentment, fear, or bad attitude long enough and you will become paralyzed.

As I begin Advent every year now, I start with the realization that I need to let go of any and all spiritual impediments I'm hanging onto. Advent is a time of receiving. It's hard to receive if your hands are clasped shut. So, I begin Advent once again with this prayer:

Holy Spirit of God, open my hands, my eyes, my ears, all my senses,
and all of my heart so I will be ready to receive your Advent blessings.

And then I sit there in the Advent darkness, my hands open before me, waiting on God.