

From the Deacon's Wife

We are approaching the final days before Christmas. If you are not completely satisfied with your Advent preparations, there is still time! For the little ones in your family, it is important to help them understand that we are preparing to receive the Christ Child in a special way at Christmas. They need tangible symbols to stay focused and to understand how to prepare themselves. When I was growing up, my parents did this in a couple of ways. They would explain that Christ would want us to do good things – like being helpful to Mom or to our siblings, doing chores without being asked – and refrain from doing things that would make Baby Jesus sad – like fighting, saying mean things, complaining about chores, etc. We would be reminded of this daily as we gathered for night prayers. Once the tree was put up, the wooden shed and paper Mache hills would be set under the tree. We each chose a shepherd or a sheep as “ours” and placed them on the hills. Each day that we were good, we moved our piece a little closer to the manger. If we had been unkind, we had to stay where we were. The goal, of course, was to get to the stable by Christmas. Some years we had a doll cradle for the infant Jesus, and each day we performed a good deed or offered up a sacrifice for the Christ Child, we placed a cotton ball in the cradle. We tried very hard to make a soft bed for the Baby Jesus (a baby doll), who would be placed in the cradle on Christmas Eve. The focus was always on what we could do to please the Infant Jesus.

As I grew older, I began to understand that Advent was a time to “make room in my heart” for the Christ Child. This meant focusing on eliminating the distractions and unproductive thinking in my life and spending time pondering what place Christ had in my life and in my heart, so that on Christmas, I could truly welcome the Infant to reign in my heart and be a part of my life.

For children, the focus is often on what they want to get for Christmas. Santa has such a big role at this time of the year; it is hard to keep that role from being materialistic. As a child, I never received a gift from Santa. Christmas Eve, the presents that appeared under the tree were all from the Christ Child. Mom & Dad explained that all gifts really come from God. At Christmas, the Christ Child wants to share His abundance with us. Santa helps to find out what each child wants, and helps deliver the presents, so some people mistakenly think the gifts are from Santa. This reinforced to us, as we grew older and understood better, that all good things come from God, and we are only stewards of His gifts.

During this final week of Advent, I ask you to ponder what gift or grace you need most. Pray each day asking that the Christ Child will bless you with that grace. Make room in your heart, and time in your life, to hear what He has planned for you. Let go of having control over everything that happens, and thus allow Him to give you the graces you need.

Observe the little children. See the wonder and awe in their eyes at this time of year! Become like one of them and look forward to His coming with joy in your heart. Welcome the Christ Child when you receive him spiritually this Christmas, and resolve to keep that place in your heart open for Him throughout the coming year. Know He loves you as you are, and has great plans for you. Be open and full of faith. He will always be with you.

May God bless you and your loved ones this Christmas season!