

Ask, Father James:

“What is the Spirituality of Advent?”

Advent means 'Coming' in Latin. During this season, we are invited to pray the Maranatha prayer - O come! O come! O come! Lord Jesus - Immanuel! The reason is that we don't long for someone who hasn't already deeply touched our lives. Advent is a time to prepare for his coming. This season reminds us of God's greatest gifts of Christian life. God gave us His best - He gave us our saviour Jesus Christ. God wrapped himself up in the flesh of humanity and comes to us. Advent reminds us that the kingdom announced by John the Baptist, has "come near."

Advent is the period of the four Sundays before Christmas. Usually, we begin the celebrations by putting out the advent wreath with the four candles which represent the four weeks of Advent, and one candle is lit each Sunday. Three of the candles are purple because the color violet is a liturgical color that signifies a time of prayer, penance, and sacrifice. One of the candles is pink, symbolizing Gaudete; Ecclesiastical Latin for rejoice, because the Lord is near. This is lit in the third Sunday of Advent. It is actually a thing of joy to look toward his coming. Thus the practice of calling this day Gaudete Sunday. Even the priest gets to wear a "pink" colour vestment on that Sunday.

The whole and main thrust of Advent is to signal the hope and possibility of a fresh start, a resetting of our default mode. It is our born-again experience. Advent is about the transformation of our hearts from the way we live our ordinary, everyday lives. All the Advent texts and readings are quite appropriate for the times in which we are living. The readings call us to anticipate his coming especially in very extraordinary ways. We do this by putting up our Christmas trees, Christmas lights, decorations, advent wreath, exchanging gifts and presents with family and friends and sending Christmas cards, etc. During the Advent season, we are also called to try and prepare spiritually by going to the parish's end of year sacrament of Reconciliation. We are also called to adopt extraordinary ways of praying in our homes; for example, doing brief daily devotionals, carrying out some of the activities on our Advent Calendars and building our own Nativity scenes.

In Advent, we are called to beat our swords into plowshares and to wait in patience. God promises to complete what was begun in Christ. There's nothing wrong with hope in the not yet, but it begins with gratitude for the already. Thus, we wait with patience (Rom. 8:25) because God is faithful. An important part of Advent is preparing for the day when God will ask what we did with our lives, what we did with our resources, and what we did with this world. So when the first candle is lit and the voices of Advent sing out across the church—Wake up! It's time to begin again! This invitation does not come just once a year, of course. It comes with each new week, with each new day, with each new moment. It comes to us in what St. Teresa of Ávila once called the interior castle and what St. Catherine of Siena called the cell of self-knowledge.



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