

Chris Stein Reflection

November 29, 2020

Recently, with the celebration of Thanksgiving having passed and Christmas being the next major holiday, I've had several conversations with people about preparation for the Christmas season: lights going up around houses, decorating the houses and Christmas trees, shopping for gifts, what Christmas might look like this year, and various plans being made. It is really an exciting time for many people.

This also happens in the Church: we can be very involved with the active life. We engage in many activities and ministries and events. There has been a major emphasis on active ministry being involved in things like social justice for the poor, concern for the sick and vulnerable, getting everyone involved in ministry of some form, hosting events and fundraisers.

This active world that impacts us all: we look ahead, prepare, and get excited for the next big thing. Our lives are filled with sports, music, school, family and friends. It is a very active world and we are very active people who always seem to have something else to do.

Now, all of these are wonderful and worthwhile things! So let me be clear: I do not want this to be heard as a message of frustration or condemnation or calling anyone out. Many of these ministries are absolutely wonderful, and it is so great when I see people who actually want to be involved in the life of the Church!

But today I want to draw our attention to the other side of the passive or contemplative life: the need to enter into contemplation, rest, and reflection. A time to slow down, to take a break and

maybe cut out some activity, in order to sit with God. Jesus tells us today to be watchful and alert. To watch for Him and His return. We have now entered into this season of Advent: a time of watching, waiting, and preparation for the return of the Lord.

This season calls us to clear up space in our lives and make room for Christ. In this preparation we prepare for the three moments or way of encounter:

First, we take the time to receive Him in the mystery of His coming at Christmas, the Incarnation when God became man 2,000 years ago.

Second, we prepare to receive Him now in this earthly life: we receive Him in the Sacraments and in prayer. This is, when adequately prepared, where God gives grace and shares His very life with us through the Church.

Third, we prepare for God's final return: the moment of our death when we will stand before Him, or His Second Coming at the end of time, if we would happen to be alive. This is the time of judgement, the time of either punishment or reward.

So let this Advent be a time to listen and prepare: What is God saying to me? Where do I need to grow? How can I prepare for Him? Have I made the space to receive Him?

This Advent take time to scale back, to enter into moments of prayer and silence, and to listen. Most of us, somewhat unfortunately, but perhaps, also providentially, have had some time freed up due to Covid 19. Why not use it and turn it to prayer, giving it back to God?

Finally, why is this important? Why is the contemplative or passive life necessary? I recently read *The Power of Silence* by Robert Cardinal Sarah. In one section he quotes Mother Teresa from her book *In the Heart of the World*. Mother Teresa says, "We need to find God, and he cannot be found

in noises and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. . . . The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in active life. We need silence to be able to touch souls. The essential thing is not what we say, but what God says to us and through us. Jesus is always waiting for us in silence. In this silence he listens to us and speaks to our souls. And there, we will hear his voice. . . .” (Sarah, *The Power of Silence*, 238). This quote gets to the heart of Advent: it gives us time to be with God and refresh our lives to be better suited for the active life.

So let this Advent be a time of silent listening, waiting for the Lord to speak to us personally. Enter into the presence of God and He will speak to you. He will always show up, we just have to listen. And if we listen and act on His Word, we will receive Him at Christmas, in the Sacraments and prayer, and eventually for all eternity.