

Resources for Praying and Experiencing Advent

by Father John Coleman

Reflection: The Living Gospel

Advent has always been my favorite liturgical season. Maybe because, unlike Lent or other seasons of the liturgy, it only lasts four weeks. It is also a time of waiting, of hope and expectation, not of what has been but of what will be, come the birth of Christ. It is also a season filled with wonderful scriptural passages from Isaiah, and gospel readings about John the Baptist. When I was on the faculty of Loyola Marymount, each year I would spend three days at the house of prayer for priests during Advent to bring myself to the longing, waiting and acceptance of what God would do. The older I get, the more I am in that mood of waiting, longing and, ultimately, gratitude for what has been, alongside openness and gratitude for what will be, even if it entails diminishment of memory and energy because of my age -- 83 years and seven months. I also know that more diminishment, and finally death, will be my plight, but I want to always say: "For all that has been, Thanks, for all that will be, your will be done."

So, I wanted to suggest a few resources for praying and experiencing Advent. The first is a booklet of daily devotions for Advent 2020 by Charles Paolino, published by Ave Maria Press from South Bend. Paolino is a deacon, married with four children. He is also the managing editor at [Renew International](#) and a columnist for a newspaper and website in Metuchen, New Jersey. He has also spent 43 years in newspaper journalism.

The format of the booklet is simple. For each day of Advent, Paolino takes a passage from the first reading and then the gospel of the day. He then does a thoughtful reflection on the day's gospel, not just by exegesis but by applying it to his life and times. He ends each reflection with a consideration of an act to do that day. One, for example, from his reflections for Tuesday, December 15 reads: "I will pray today for those whose faith has been shaken, for those whose faith is weak, and for those who profess no faith." Each day's resource for that day of Advent is short (two pages), reflective and would allow us each day as much as ten to fifteen minutes of prayer. I recommend the booklet as a valuable resource.

The Divine Office: The Liturgy of the Hours

Many divine office books have seven different sections of prayers. But a Catholic version exists which only have two each day, morning prayer and evening prayer. There are 3 antiphons, followed usually by a psalm. Morning prayer also consists of 3 antiphons and psalms, followed by a reading (usually from Old Testament but also sometimes from the New), a responsory, the canticle of Zachariah, and some intercession prayers, followed by a final prayer. Evening prayer is much the same, except the canticle is the canticle of Mary. Each one of the prayers does not last longer than 15 minutes. In advent the prayers and Intercessory prayers are linked

to the themes of advent. The Catholic Book Publishing Company of New York published the English translation of this version of Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours in 1976.

Advent Wreath and Advent Candles

Many families might want to get their own Advent wreath with the four candles. Often they light the candles before dinner. The four candles are lit each week of Advent, only one on the first week, two on the second, three on the third and four on the last week of Advent. Three of the candles are purple but the one for the third week is pink. Again, it is only a short and brief reminder of what Advent is about for each day of Advent.

The O Antiphons

In the last week of Advent, starting on December 17, there are O antiphons whose history date back to the fifth century A.D. Each antiphon takes a phrase found in Isaiah in the Advent readings. On December 17 the O antiphon is O Wisdom; on December 18th, O Adonai (Lord), on December 19th, O Root of Jesse, on December 20th, O Key of David, on December 21. O Radiant Dawn, on December 22, O King of Nations and on December 23, O Emmanuel. The Advent hymn , O Come , O Come Emmanuel comes from the last of these O antiphons. They were sung each evening at Benedictan monasteries or in cathedrals. The Latin first words for each antiphon spell Eram Cras—a Latin phrase for” I will come tomorrow”. So, the O antiphons look forward with longing for the coming of Christ. They are wonderful to hear sung. If you google, Plough music series, Light in the O antiphons, you will get U tubes with them being sung. Each one only lasts a few minutes. Again, for that last week of Advent, when going to the Advent wreath to light the candles, you might also want to play the u tube for that day’s O antiphon from the Plough Music Series.

But whatever you do, do try to enter into the spirit of hope, peace, joy and love connected with our deepest longings for God to come into our world and enter our lives.