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Advent: Who has time to wait?

BY CHRIS PLACE, INTERN

As a kid, my favorite part about Advent, besides writing my wish list to Santa, was the **Advent Calendar**. For those who are unfamiliar with this term, an Advent Calendar is a tool which numbers the days of Advent and often provides a token to Christians who are preparing and waiting for Christmas.

For many years, my family bought cardboard Advent Calendars from the grocery store. Each day, one of the five children would peel back a numbered slot to reveal a Bible passage and a small chocolate. We, of course, thought the chocolate was a sweet consolation for quietly listening to our mom reading scripture.

Eventually, my family shifted to a reusable, cloth Advent Calendar, which featured a moveable toy mouse and numbered pockets. While we children missed the candy, our focus was quickly redirected to competition in moving the mouse the greatest number of times and claiming the ultimate victory of stuffing the fluffy rodent into the final Advent pocket.

While our intentions may not have been the noblest, the effect was evident: anticipation and longing for Christmas was building with each day.

Unfortunately, in my recent past as an undergraduate and young adult, I have really felt that I have been cheated of this waiting experience. I don't seem to have the focus or the time anymore.

Instead, I am so concerned with exams/work, goodbyes, travel, last-minute shopping, and family commitments that I rarely have a moment to contemplate the approaching celebration. If I do, it is only in those last seconds of excitement before I fall asleep on Christmas Eve: a dismal representation of the Advent Season.

While I have noticed this occurrence for the last couple years, I'm sad to admit I have not changed anything. Life continues to remain busy, and the demands surrounding Christmas almost seem to increase. When I think about the upcoming Advent season, I can only manage to wonder, "Who has time to wait?"



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Waiting All The Time And In Many Ways

While waiting may seem absent in our Advent times, in our daily lives, waiting abounds!

We wait in traffic, in the check-out line, and in the doctor's office. We wait to fill up our gas-tanks and to use the public restroom.

We wait for computers to boot-up, for water to boil, for screens to load, for red-lights to turn, for class to end, for showers to warm, for papers to print, for laundry to dry, and for lists to end...

However, I have only mentioned one basic form of waiting. These every day examples highlight circumstances when we must patiently give time to something else that needs time in order to function properly.

A different kind of waiting would include potty-training a puppy, training for a marathon, or writing a thesis. In these cases, we must do more than simply provide time. We must work actively during this waiting and suffer the growing pains in order to reach our desired end.

While the first form of waiting may be frustrating, especially when we must sacrifice time for something from which we gain no lasting value, this second form of waiting can and, in many case, will be painful.

The outcome is based on our personal discipline and stamina. This form of waiting could more accurately be called striving.



However, I believe there is a form of waiting that is still more difficult and could possibly generate much more ache. Waiting when we don't know or can't control the outcome...

Whether it be applying for a job, accompanying a seriously-ill friend, or "crushing" on a new acquaintance, circumstances where we must anxiously anticipate an unknown outcome can be the most exhilarating and most difficult experiences to endure.

However, these are the experiences which reveal the most valuable aspects of waiting. It is times like these that we must hope, pray, and trust. It is no wonder our Church wants to emphasize waiting in the season of Advent.

So the question returns: if waiting is so abundant and important in our lives, why do we have such a difficult time in Advent?

Advent is Counter-Cultural

Our culture and technology are constantly trying to eliminate our need and ability to wait.

Our gadgets get quicker. Our medicine becomes more advanced. Growing pains, like potty-training your puppy, can be "taken care of" if you have enough money. Even romance can be arranged by internet match-makers at our convenience.

Instant gratification seems to be the ruling principle and goal for much of our world.

The way that our society deals with Christmas demonstrates this principle. Carols start earlier. Sales fight for our attention. Christmas parties fill up our schedule. Gifts are always needing to be wrapped.

Now, I will be the first to admit that these things are not bad. They are actually quite good. Christmas is a wonderful time.

The challenge is when we get so absorbed with the Christmas spirit, we forget Advent.

We forget the importance of patience. We don't get to practice prayer or hope. Sometimes, as I shared at the beginning of this reflection, we forget to wait all together.

Advent Opportunity

The Church has provided us with an amazing opportunity to return to our need to wait.

Advent is a season to remind us to wait, to develop a spiritual practice to cope with the pains and anxiety of waiting, and reconcile that the future is not just our own.

Advent Assistance

I have already admitted that waiting is hard. Not only is the culture that we live in battling our ability to wait, but waiting itself is often uncomfortable.

Now, while Advent is designed to assist us to appreciate waiting, I know I still need help appreciating and utilizing Advent.

Fortunately this year, I am blessed to be in a strong spiritual community and, actually, be in an occupation which constantly surrounds spirituality . I get opportunities like writing this pamphlet and describing Advent to RCIA candidates to remind me of the season. The reader of this reflection may not be as lucky.

With that in mind, I have done some reflecting and inquiring of other campus ministers as to how students and other professionals could get into the Advent spirit.

Here are some of the suggestions which arose:

• **Attend Mass ***

There are four Advent Masses designed specifically to prepare Catholics for Christmas. Why not attend?

• **Maintain an Advent Wreath**

Among roommates or family, designate a time of day which you light an Advent Wreath. The practice can be joined with singing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” and a common meal.

• **Meditate using the Metaphor of Parenting**

The most perfect metaphor for waiting could very well be parenting. It is packed with anticipation, growing pains, anxieties, and surrender.

Take thirteen to thirty minutes to quietly contemplate the process of parenting. Consider the desire to conceive a child, pregnancy, child birth, child rearing, the first joys, and the first fears.

If the consideration is too personal, imagine Mary, the Mother of Jesus. This is Advent after all.



• **Utilize an Advent Calendar**

It helped me as a kid. I am going to try to utilize an Advent Calendar again this year.

But instead of just eating mini chocolates, Fr. Gary has suggested I focus each day on one waiting word or phrase. I have provided my schedule below. Please feel free to use it.

2* <i>Desperate Hope</i>	3 <i>Pilgrimage</i>	4 <i>Spark</i>	5 <i>Desire</i>
6 <i>Training</i>	7 <i>Angst</i>	8 <i>Silence Space</i>	9* <i>Excited Hope</i>
10 <i>Discernment</i>	11 <i>Tremble</i>	12 <i>Mortality</i>	13 <i>Restless</i>
14 <i>Trust</i>	15 <i>Craving</i>	16* <i>Joyful Hope</i>	17 <i>Quest</i>
18 <i>Longing</i>	19 <i>Pregnant</i>	20 <i>Sigh</i>	21 <i>Ache</i>
22 <i>Racing Heart</i>	23* <i>Promising Hope</i>	24 <i>Stillness</i>	

Advent practices can extend much beyond my suggestions. My prayer is only that we can truly appreciate this season.

Just take the time and wait!

Want to Pray about it?

- Consider the following prayers:
- “Patient Trust” by Pierre Teilhard de Chadin
 - “A Future Not Our Own” attributed to Oscar Romero
 - Our Father



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