

Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

Discovering Joy in Advent

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Hi. I'm Sarah Reinhard. You know what Advent is, right? Because when I grew up, I wasn't Catholic, but we still had Advent. And I remember an aunt of mine loving Advent, and I don't know why. She wasn't Catholic, and it seems to be an almost Catholic thing to observe Advent, or at least that's what it seems to me now that I'm a Catholic, but we used to always light an Advent wreath. And for me, when I think of the joy in Advent, I really think of that Advent wreath that Aunt Charlotte used to light, and I think of the light of those candles, and how by the end of Advent there was a lot more light at the end than there was at the beginning. And I think that that's a good model for us to use as we talk about discovering joy in Advent. Because let's face it, Advent happens at what may possibly be the worst time of the year.

If you were planning the busiest thing, you'd plan it in December, or in May, but that's a different conversation. December is so incredibly busy. Everybody wants a piece of you. The stores have sales, and you have to have all of these things purchased before Christmas. You have to go to Christmas parties, you have to get together with family, you have to... Anyway, I'm getting stressed just thinking about it. And I'm not even talking about the people who are emailing me in August to say "Hey, let's talk about Christmas", which... that's usually the start for me of the stress is in August. So here we are in October, I should be way ready for it now. And by the time you're watching this it's December.

So we're in the midst of Advent. How do you discover the joy in the midst of this busy craziness? Well, first of all, let's go back and talk about Advent. What is Advent? What are we doing in Advent? In the Catholic Church, we have these seasons in the liturgical year, and Advent is one of them. In fact, it's the beginning of the liturgical year. So, it's the new year. With the first Sunday of Advent, we're starting the church year. So it's a beginning, but it's also a time of preparation. That's why you see purple vestments, and purple throughout the liturgical setup in the church, is to remind us that this is a penitential season, because we're preparing for the most exciting event in the history of the world: The coming of our savior.

I know, I've heard this story so many times that it's just about now exciting anymore. So the way I get excited about it is I think about telling it to my children, who are rather young right now. And I used to tell it to other children as well. And I think about how excited I used to get as a kid. Because Christmas is exciting as a kid, and not just because you get presents. In fact, the presents are fun, let's not

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deny that, but what's really fun about Christmas is that there's a baby, and people love babies. I have a confession – I'm not really a baby person. I know, I know. Don't tell anybody – But there is something about a new baby. There's something exciting, there's something really... there's potential in a baby. And that's how Jesus came to us, that's how our savior came to us, as a baby. So in Advent, we're preparing.

If you've ever known anybody who's pregnant, or you've been pregnant, then you can maybe put Advent in the context of preparing for a baby. There's so much excitement, there's so much to do, there's nervousness, there's all kinds of things, just like Advent. That preparation, it's so stressful. But let's go back to... this talk is about discovering the joy in Advent. So we've talked about what Advent is; let's talk about what joy is.

Joy isn't happiness. Happiness is something our culture seems to be obsessed with capturing and getting. We're all supposed to want to be happy, and to seek happiness, and to want happiness more than anything else for our children, for our spouses, for our loved ones. But you know what? It's like a no-win situation, because, I mean, one morning with my kids will ruin my happiness for the rest of the day if I'm not careful. They won't put away their clothes, they won't help me fold laundry, they make a mess. Okay, I'm having a bad mom day, it's true. But, even on a good mom day, I can stub my toe, I can run over a cat. Okay, that really happened. There are all kinds of things where our happiness becomes this thing that's controlled by outside forces. Joy is not happiness; joy is an act of the will. So, you can be really unhappy and yet have joy. Have it deep inside of you.

But how do you find that joy? That decision in the midst of Advent? When we are so busy and so pulled. I always feel during Advent, during December, like I'm pulled. Like I'm a piece of silly putty, of Play-Doh, or clay, and people are just trying to get the most out of me. And they might be people I love and people who love me. They don't want to hurt me. And it's not that they are hurting me. But how do we find the joy? Well, I've thought of 3 ways to discover the joy in Advent. And discovery, let's look at that word as well. Discovery is the kind of thing where it's like a present, right. You're opening it up, and you discover what's inside, but you can't discover until you open it. You don't get the gift until you open it. You have to receive the gift. So we have to discover that there's a lot of intentionality and decisions and choosing in discovering the joy of Advent, and I think maybe that's what makes Advent so difficult. It's short too. By the time I feel like I'm observing Advent correctly, or well, it's Christmas morning, and I mean I

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fail every year. And yet I feel like there's a lesson in those failures for me, because the failures are different every year.

And so let's talk about 3 ways to discover the joy in Advent. First of all, you need to acknowledge where you are. Where are you in your life? Where are you in your spirituality? Where are you in your maturity? Spiritually, emotionally, physically? If you're young and just married, that's a completely different place than being married for 10 years with 4 kids. Or being married for 10 years with no kids. Or being in college. Where are you in your life? What does joy look like in your life? That's something you really have to stop and pray about, and think about. Where are you? What are your limitations? What are your strengths? What's your capability?

Okay, so we're going to acknowledge where you are, then we're going to move on. And the second way to discover joy in Advent is to lighten up on yourself. Now, maybe I'm just speaking to myself here, and if so then I'm giving this talk for myself, and that's totally fine. But I don't know. I put these expectations every year. I want to do an Advent calendar, I want to do the Advent wreath, I want to light everything every night at dinner, I want to do devotions, I want to read the bible more, I want to have perfectly angelic faces surrounding me, I want to go to daily mass, I want go to... do you hear what's happening here? I'm busy before Advent comes, and now I'm going to put all of this on myself. So I really need to lighten up, and I bet you do too. You've got a life, and it's very full in all kinds of great ways. So lighten up. There is no such thing as a perfect Advent. Or maybe your definition of perfect and God's definition of perfect for you are different, and you need to reconcile them. In my experience, that's a very painful process, but I suspect that has to do with my pride more than anything.

Alright. So you're going to start off, you're going to acknowledge where you are, you're going to lighten up on yourself, and third, you're going to remain open to the work of the Holy Spirit. I know, I'm rolling my own eyes at myself, but as I prayed over this talk, and I really thought about "What does it mean to discover the joy in Advent?" I couldn't get over the feeling that the Holy Spirit's got to have a place. That means that you're going to be listening to Him, which means you're going to have to be in prayer. I don't know what prayer looks like for you. And this goes back to step one, acknowledging where you are and lightening up on yourself. Maybe your Advent gift to Jesus, the way you prepare for the coming of the Lord, is that you pause every day, take a deep breath, and pray in Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be. Before you look at me and say "That sounds way too much", or you say "That sounds way too easy". If it sounds like too much, dial it

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back. If it sounds too easy, maybe it doesn't have to be hard. Because maybe finding joy means that we need to stop a little bit and pause in the midst of all of the chaos, and the crazy, and just be with Jesus.

So, I'm interested to hear how you discover the joy in Advent. So, do you want to drop me a line? Or do you want to leave comments on this? I would love to have a conversation about what discovering the joy in Advent means for you. So let's wrap things up with a prayer, but first I want to just remind you what those 3 things were, so that you can be thinking about them and praying about them as well. First, you want to acknowledge where you are. What's your season of life? What are your expectations for Advent? But also, what are your limitations? Number 2, you're going to lighten up on yourself. And number 3, you're going to remain open to the work of the Holy Spirit. God bless you. Let's end in prayer.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, thank you for this time together. Please guide us as we discover the joy in Advent, and prepare for the coming of your Son on Christmas day. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.