

Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

Six Ways to Keep Your Advent Season Holy, Part I **Elizabeth Ficocelli**

Hi! My name is Elizabeth Ficocelli and I'm a Catholic author, speaker and radio host. I'm so delighted to be with you for this special Advent online retreat. I have a two-part presentation I'm going to be giving you today called "Six Ways To Keep Your Advent Season Holy".

Before we begin with the presentations, let's start with a prayer.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come Lord Jesus and open our hearts and minds in this beautiful season of Advent and show us what You will. To open ourselves to how You want to pour out grace during this season. To make the most of this season. To have a special spiritual walk with You. And we ask, as we ask for all things in the name of Your son, Jesus Christ.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you're like me, you come to the season of Advent and boy! Is it not a busy season? I mean, right sandwiched in between two giant holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas, to me it can be the shortest and can be the most hectic four weeks of the whole calendar year.

And yet, it's a very powerful spiritual time.

The first season of our liturgical calendar, in fact. And we know we're in Advent because of the color purple. That blue-purple that we see on the priest's vestments at church and on the altar cloth.

And it's this very special season all of it's own. Separate from the season of Christmas. And yet, so many times it's hard to find a good, solid spiritual walk because of the distractions, the temptations of materialism and secularism that seem to be wanting to pull us off the path at every juncture.

So, you'll want to look at this season of Advent and think of it as a time of expectant waiting. You know, you think about a pregnant woman expecting her first baby or any baby and she's not just sitting around waiting but there's

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preparation she does. She gets that nursery ready. She makes special preparations to welcome that baby into the family.

And in Advent we're called into that same expectant waiting. Not just sitting around but getting ourselves ready for the coming of the Lord. And, in fact, that's what the word, "Advent" means; it means, "coming".

And the Lord comes to us on different levels. Certainly he comes to us as a little baby in that manger in Bethlehem back 2,000 years ago; the Incarnation of the Word. And we celebrate that in the season of Advent and that's very important.

But we also, during the season of Advent, get reflective on the second coming of Jesus. You know, one day, he's going to come in the future and we want to get our hearts ready for that second coming as well.

But did you know there is another coming of Jesus during the season of Advent, and really all year long? And that's how Jesus comes to us every day of our lives. Into our relationships. Certainly in the form of the Eucharist and coming into our hearts.

And we know it's a good time to think during Advent, "How open am I to how God might want to come into my world today, my life today and do the work He wants me to do in my world and in my life?". Are we open to that or are we closed? Like so many of the inns were closed in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph.

So, what this presentation is about are six tips to keep your season holy. To find that time with Jesus that you so desperately need and deserve. And, I love to make things easy, so my six tips start with the letters of Advent. And Advent is a six letter word: A-D-V-E-N-T.

In the first presentation we're going to look at the first three letters of Advent and the first three tips. In the second presentation we're going to look at the second set of tips. So, be sure to see both presentations and get the whole message.

And since the first letter of Advent is, "A", my first tip for you to find holiness in the season is Adoration. And we spoke about the incarnation of the Word, Jesus becoming flesh and entering the world 2,000 years ago is what we celebrate primarily in this season.

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And when you think about that event 2,000 years ago, it was so significant that there was this great celestial happening in the heavens. Right? The big star of Bethlehem. There were the host of angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest". And as a result, people responded; from the lowly shepherds to the mighty kings, they all came to adore that baby in the manger -- that king of kings.

And that was really the first adoration. Although, I'd like to say that the Blessed Mother probably had the first adoration when she received the body of Jesus into her body, I'm sure she spent much time in adoration.

But, for the rest of us, this was that first experience of public adoration of the Lord. And 2,000 years later, we're invited to still adore the Lord not in that manger in Bethlehem but in the Eucharist -- in the Blessed Sacrament.

Eucharistic adoration is a tradition that started all the way back in the 2nd century they can trace it back to monks that were living in these monasteries. And many times a religious order might not have had a priest among their order and so they had to rely on a visiting priest to come and consecrate the hosts.

And when they did they would consecrate a supply of hosts and the monks would keep that in a special place, a tabernacle. Where they would go before the Lord, recognizing it was the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus and they would keep in that special place and they would pray reverently before it. That was really the first Eucharistic Adoration.

Over the centuries it began to take different shapes, different forms and eventually kind of fell by the wayside until someone we all know and love recently, St. John-Paul II, resurrected Eucharistic Adoration. He brought it back to St. Peter's in Rome and it spread globally. You know, he had such a great love for the Eucharist. Declaring a year of the Eucharist. Spending many hours, himself, before the Blessed Sacrament.

And as any parish can attest today who does this devotion of Eucharistic Adoration; the fruits are innumerable! We have marriages being healed. We have children returning to the faith that may have gone astray. We have people discerning religious vocations. Physical healings. Miracles. Answered prayers of all kinds. So, it's a tremendous practice.

My first tip for your season, to keep it holy this Advent season, is Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Find one hour this season where you can go before the Lord

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and you can pour out your heart to him, yes, but make sure in that hour you listen. And you get radiated by the sun (as a priest friend would often say to my husband and I). You know, just let Him fill you with His Presence and His love and it will be a place where you get rejuvenated and reenergized and a sense of peace in this otherwise hectic season. So, “A” is “Eucharistic Adoration”.

The second letter of Advent is the letter, “D”. And that tip for you is, “Divine Word” and what I mean of course is Holy Scripture or the Bible.

And I know that Catholics sometimes have a bad wrap, lay Catholics aren’t known to be the best biblical scholars out there. I think that came to us from generations of Catholics where they were told, “Don’t spend too much time with the Bible on your own in case you misinterpret it.”. And the truth is that when you look at a couple of centuries of breaks from the Catholic Church all these Christian denominations all claiming to correctly interpret scripture, and yet, arguing among themselves as to what is the truth. We see there really is a case to be made for an authoritative interpretation of scripture which we have with our Catholic Church.

But the good news is, in the past couple of decades there are some marvelous Catholic Bible study programs! That you can do on your own or in groups and it’s a wonderful way to start embracing the Bible as God wants us to. Because the Bible is God’s living Word!

It’s His inspired Word given to His chosen authors and these words have such meaning. They might have been written thousands and thousands of years ago, and yet, you may have heard a verse over and over in mass or on your own and suddenly, one day, it takes on new meaning. And that’s because the Bible is ever-ancient and ever-new. I like to say it’s kind of like a well that can never run dry. You can never deplete the Bible in all of it’s wisdom and consolation and guidance for us.

And as Catholics when we go to mass regularly, every Sunday and even during the week, we are so blessed because we hear a great amount of Holy Scripture in a three year cycle. And so that’s wonderful!

But, it’s really interesting to notice that in Advent, we tend to hear the same readings every Advent over and over. And so, we want to take notice of this. We want to pay attention to what is being told to us in Advent from Holy Scripture.

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We hear readings from the Old Testament about Isaiah and he's talking about the prophecy of the Messiah to come. And in the New Testament we hear readings from St. Paul who is talking about Jesus being that fulfillment of the Messiah.

In both the New and the Old Testaments during Advent we hear about the second coming of the Lord. The coming of the Lord at the end of time. And in the New Testament we are introduced to a new character such as John the Baptist and the Blessed Mother who are heralds for the coming of Jesus. Very important figures in the season of Advent!

So I would encourage you, if you're going to spend time with scripture which is my second tip -- Divine Word, to start there. Start with those readings that we hear in mass and let the Lord speak to you through them.

You know, if you're going to approach the Bible maybe for the first time, just spend a few minutes a day. 10 minutes a day, that would be fine. And make sure your Bible is a Catholic edition. It could be Catholic Revised Standard Version, a New American Bible, it could be Ignatius but make sure it's Catholic so it has the complete set of books in it.

And don't be afraid to get a paperback Bible that you can write in and highlight with marker. Make it yours. Live in your Bible. Pray in your Bible. Keep it in a handy place. So, whether it's on your kitchen counter, your prayer corner or your nightstand but where you're going to open it up and read it.

And you might practice what they call "Lectio Divina" which is just a slow meditative time with a passage of scripture where you put yourself into that scene and you say, "What would I hear if I was in that? What would I see, what would I smell, what would I taste?" And just ponder. Read it out loud, that's a great way to kind of slowly ingest it and see if the Lord is speaking to you.

So, "D" spend a little time with God's word for the season of Advent.

The third letter of Advent is the letter, "V". And for me, the "V" stands for, "Virgin Mary", a very key player in the figure of Advent. Because we know, really, Jesus could have come to the world any way God wanted. Right? He could have flown in on a spaceship or hatched from an egg but God willed that Jesus would come through a family; particularly through a woman.

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A lot of times our non-Catholic brothers and sisters say to us, “Why do you guys spend so much time on the Blessed Mother? What’s the deal with her?”

Well, there’s a lot of really sound reasons. First of all she is, as scripture tells us, Blessed among women. She was chosen from all women -- past, present, future for the singular most important task of bringing Christ into the world. She is the sinless virgin that Isaiah, again, talks about in scripture.

She’s the one who said, “Yes.” to God’s plan. And her “fiat”, her “yes” changed salvation history. Changed our lives forever. Thank goodness! Did you ever think, what if Blessed Mother said “No”? We would all be in a lot of trouble, I’m sure.

Sometimes she’s referred to as the, “new ark”. In the Old Testament we have that gold fancy box. Remember? It housed the word of God on stone tablets. It was so sacred you couldn’t touch it. It was kept in the holy of holies in the center of the temple where only the high priest could go in once a year. You know, that’s how sacred it was.

Well, in the New Testament we have a new vessel that’s going to carry the word of God. Not on stone tablets though, in the living flesh, Jesus Christ. Of course, that vessel is Mary. And so, she’s referred to as the “new ark”.

Sometimes you might hear her referred to as “the new Eve”. And that comes from, you know, when you think about the Old Testament and our first parents, Adam and Eve. Well Eve was disobedient, brought her husband into disobedience and they ushered sin and death into the world.

But in the New Testament Mary and her son, Jesus, become the new Adam and Eve in that they don’t disobey God. They obey God and as a result they usher in salvation and redemption.

We can say that Mary is Christ’s greatest disciple. Certainly there at all the key moments: his birth, raising him, his first public miracle at Cana, his death on the cross, Pentecost. She was there at all and always obeying. Always saying, “Do whatever he tells you.”.

She’s the mother of us all. Jesus gave her to us when he hung from the cross and he said to John, “Behold your mother and mother behold your son.”. He was putting her in charge of all children to come. Whether we’re believers or nonbelievers she is the mother of us all.

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And she's the Queen of Heaven. She resides up there with her son still pleading on our behalf, still interceding for us. Still loving us, worrying about us and bringing us messages when God sends her to keep us on the path of holiness.

And the other really important thing about Blessed Mother... Man is she a powerful adversary against the evil one. You know, she is the woman in Revelations, in Genesis that talk about crushing the head of the serpent. So, we want to be sure to be staying under her mantle of protection. Praying her powerful rosary and not just during the weeks of Advent but really all year long.

There are two feast days that we can incorporate into our spiritual walk during Advent to deepen our relationship with the Blessed Mother. The first one is December 8th. It's the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

The Church has always believed and professed that Mary was immaculately conceived because she had to be to be the vessel to house the word of God in the living flesh. But the Church actually put it in writing in the 1800s to combat some heresy at the time.

And just four years after that Our Lady appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes in France announcing herself as the Immaculate Conception. So, she was confirming the Church dogma. So, December 8th we want to make sure we're going to mass (it's a holy day) and honoring our Blessed Mother in a special way.

And there's another feast day that we can celebrate. It's the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It's on December 12th. And our latino brothers and sisters, this is a really big day for them. Lot's of celebrations. But, it's important to remember Our Lady of Guadalupe is not reserved to Mexico or South America. She is the patroness of all the Americas.

We are probably familiar, many of you, with the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe appearing to Juan Diego the new convert on Tepeyac mountain, on that hill. And she appears and performs two miracles. She produces these flowers in the dead of winter that he can take to his bishop to show that this is real. But she also, even more importantly through God's grace imprints her image on the inside of his cloak or his tilma.

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It's a miracle that converts, something like, 8 or 9 million Aztec indians in the course of 10 years. So, incredible evangelization! And that tilma is still yielding miracles to this very day.

So, if there is a parish in your diocese that does a special presentation or procession, celebration or feast on this day I encourage you to celebrate Our Lady on that day as well.

But, you know, I think Blessed Mother as this great disciple and model of all virtues is someone we can all emulate. I know as a wife and mother sometimes she can be a little intimidating to me because she's so perfect and I'm not! You know?

But one little way I try to emulate the Blessed Mother is I imagine how she must have received Jesus into her body when the angel came to her. With great humility, and thanksgiving and praise and joy and I try to remember every time I receive Jesus in my body through the Eucharist just a little bit to try to emulate Mary's beautiful joy in thanksgiving and praise when I receive Jesus in the same way.

So my third tip for keeping the Advent season holy is bringing the Virgin Mary a little deeper into the walk of your spirituality these next couple of weeks.

So, I'm going to pause at this point and we'll end with a prayer.

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord we thank You and we praise You for this season of Advent. We thank You for leaving Your Presence with us in a permanent way through the Blessed Sacrament, through the Eucharist. And help us to find time this busy season to adore You in that beautiful gift that You've left us to strengthen us so we can really feel Your Presence and hear what You wish to tell us.

We thank You for Your Divine Word. We thank You for the living Word that You've left us again a powerful example of your Presence in our life, Your guidance in our life. The example of Your love that You want to impart to us every day and encourage us to spend time with those special holy words that you've given us each day of Advent.

And we thank You most especially for the gift of Your wonderful Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, who still intercedes on our behalf who loves us so much. Help us

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to invite her deeper into our life this Advent and beyond this Advent so that we can really be pointed to You as she always points to You more deeply.

And we ask all these things in the name of Christ. In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So, stay tuned to the second part. We'll finish our six tips to keep your season holy. God bless. Thanks for listening.