Opinion
Spirituality



Advent candles and a wreath help bring focus to the time before the coming of our Lord. (CNS/Nancy Wiechec)



by Christian Mocek

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Advent is, in my opinion, the most overlooked liturgical season. In between two busy holidays and competing with the Christmas rush, Advent never gets the credit it is due.

Often, I think, because it clashes with what this time of year seemingly prioritizes: Being busy over being intentional, and consuming under the guise of giving.

December is a paradoxical month. For many, it's the beginning of colder, darker and shorter days. One might think it's the time to slow down, take stock and ready ourselves for an unfolding winter. However, even if we are trying our best to avoid it, it's often one of the busiest months of the year.

Truth be told, I struggle immensely with the holidays. The sudden and unavoidable monsoon of consumerism washes over every part of life. Family gatherings, though full of joy and cheer, are often too loud and over stimulating for this highly sensitive introvert. And, the travel — there is always so much travel. It's a sad fact that due to work and visiting family out of state, I spend more time sleeping away from home in December than at home.

When I am at home, however, I often find myself fighting the urge to lay on my couch with a good book under the light of the Christmas tree until the Christmas rush passes me by. I think that's why I appreciate Advent so much. Advent is like taking a deliberately slow walk surrounded by sprinters. One looks left and right only to find people passing by. All headed toward presumably the same finish line — Christmas.

Advent is an uncovering of what's been covered all year long. An intentional peeling apart in search of our center. It's everything we wanted the time to do all year. A slowing down, a bringing forth, a time to prepare, a time to encounter, a time to embrace others and ourselves.

Advent is such a time of repentance and reflection, that it can only take place if we make the time and space for it. This might sound like an impossible, radical notion given the pace of this time of year.

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Advent passes us by because it's easier to fall into the rush of the holidays than slow down and take measure of our spiritual and emotional selves. It's easier to buy and plan frantically for a perfect holiday than inquire where our desire for a perfect holiday comes from. It's hard to consider a different way when we've covered over our hurts, brokenness and insecurities among those closest to us for so long.

The truth is, our Messiah didn't come to earth like a king with a large feast waiting. He came as a baby. Wrapped in ripped cloth. Laid in a manger, not on a king's throne.

Advent is to make us like the shepherds keeping watch, waiting with anticipation in the cold and lonely dark, or the three magi journeying toward Christ with their hearts set on more than what they could see with their eyes. It's to prepare our hearts to hear his voice, see his star, know his light and go running to him.

Feasting when we're not ready is not really a celebration at all. But when our hearts are ready, through prayer, fasting and giving what we can to whomever we can, we will be ready for Christmas with hope in our hearts and a deeper understanding of the peace this Christ-child brings. For Christmas peace is not perfect celebrations or perfect gifts. Christmas peace comes when we learn — through intentionality, prayer and giving — how to walk in the light of the Lord.

My suggestion this Advent is to slow down as much as you can. Walk slower, don't talk as much, read the daily Mass readings, and listen. Manage your gatherings so that they can be celebrated, not overwhelming. Rethink your "commitments" so you can be present to the peace of Christ awaiting you. Do as you would when entering the room of a newborn child — quietly adore the wonder of new life.

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