

An Advent Challenge

December 2017

As we approach Christmas, in his first article Fr Digby presents an 'Advent Challenge' for families, and in his second he examines the risk of peer group pressure.

We'll all have noticed by now that the pre-Christmas 'hype' is well underway and, as we know, this can affect our family life in all sorts of ways. Whilst the Advent Gospels at Sunday Mass remind us to 'stay awake', to get ready for the coming of the Lord, we can find ourselves so distracted and busy that quiet moments of reflection, if they were ever possible, now seem even more beyond our reach - you've done well then to have got as far as taking time to read this!

We can find ourselves so 'on the run' and 'on a roll' that the present moment, listening to others and to God in moments of prayer, become almost impossible. In addition, just when we would like to be getting ready to welcome the Prince of Peace in the season of goodwill we can find ourselves getting especially irritated with the children or others in the family.

So what might help us to be a bit calmer and more receptive and open to the message of Advent in these few weeks? How can we, the family and the Church, stay awake so as to welcome him when he comes?

Well, as so often, we might get help from the children in an indirect way. For example we would hope that in their schools they'd be receiving the message that the Christian faith, especially the Nativity of Jesus, so movingly depicted in the nativity plays and Carol concerts, must never be reduced to the level of 'fairytale', never be made sentimental. The birth of Jesus is far removed from the 'Santa's grotto' way of thinking and is real and down-to-earth.

Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, really did share our humanity in all things but sin. The gift of his only beloved Son shows just how much the Father loves us. He gives us His Son, born of Mary, so that we could once again share the divine life that had been forfeited by original sin. If accepting that stretches our faith, it'd be worth praying about and accepting as an 'Advent challenge' in itself. If at Christmas we can gather the family around the crib, and focus our adoration on the Redeemer of the world, then the open arms of the Christ Child will welcome and embrace all comers with the gift of unconditional love.

Christmas Hype

December 2017

A source of stress that we might feel this year, or any year, is the peer-group pressure our children might be under to show their friends the most expensive Christmas gifts. If there's a worry that they're going to be left behind in this, parents might be receiving the message, "If you loved me you would be giving me the extra special trainers," or "the very latest X-box". The pressure to overspend to prove our love can be a real worry.

If possible, the parent here would have a chat with the child explaining that how much they love them never depends on how much money they spend on Christmas presents. Easier said than done you might say! However, not impossible and a real opportunity to grow together in the unconditional love our children receive from God through us parents, 'the first teachers of our children in the ways of faith.'

Prayer

December 2017

Holy Spirit, come. Give us wisdom and understanding so that our families may know Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, more personally and intimately during this season of Advent. We make our prayer through Christ Our Lord. Amen