

Away in a Tabernacle

About this time of year, the sights and sounds of the cities and towns really begin to change. Scarecrows, auburn sunsets, the symphony of animal activity, and the rustle of leaves are replaced by glowing reindeer against a gray sky, Christmas trees dripping with ornaments, the busy hum of shoppers, and the all-familiar holiday tunes. In harmony with the rest of the world, the sights and sounds within the Church also undergo a transformation. Green vestments and draping turn to purple and rose, Scripture readings take on an Old Testament theme and focus on the book of Revelation, and wreaths with candles appear where nothing was before. All of these symbols and changes of Advent have a definite significance. They are meant to help prepare the Catholic for the threefold coming of Christ: His historical coming at His birth in Bethlehem, His second coming at the end of time, and His continual coming into our lives. In other words, they help instill in the Catholic the proper “spiritual attitude” toward God that is necessary for him/her to encounter Christ in the manifold ways in which he/she is meant to in the Christmas season.

The color purple signifies both royalty and repentance. Thus, purple reminds the Catholic that although Jesus was born of humble means, He is King and thus deserves the reverence and honor due a king. The purple also calls one to repentance. Jesus was born to die for each of our sins, and that is a truth Catholics should especially meditate on this time of the liturgical year. The color rose is meant to arouse joy in the Catholic because of Christ’s birth. The Scripture readings (the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation) foretell of the victorious coming of Christ the Bridegroom, and thus show that all of salvation history is ordered to the coming of Christ, from beginning to end. Hence, the readings direct us to order our lives to that same end of welcoming the coming of our Savior and King. The wreath reminds us to have hope and take in courage in Christ’s victory over sin and death, and the candles remind us to honor Christ as the true light of our darkened world.

However, if the Catholic does not have a personal relationship with Jesus, then these symbols and themes, which are meant to prepare him/her to encounter Jesus, are just incidentals. The rose-colored vestments, which are meant to signify joy in Christ’s birth, do not really signify joy, for how can one be joyous over the birth of a person he/she does not truly know? In the same way, how can the purple draping call one to repentance for sin if he/she does not love the one Who suffered for his/her sins? Likewise, can one be truly gladdened by another’s victory when he/she does not know that person from another acquaintance? For those who have read and heard about Jesus but do not have a relationship with Him, these liturgical colors, readings, and symbols are simply random change and decoration to make the church look pretty. These symbols hold as much meaning and significance as the glowing reindeer in front of Best Buy. These symbols, which are meant to help the Catholic welcome Christ’s manifold comings, can not do that if one only *knows about* Christ.

What is necessary to turn a meaningless Advent into a life-changing one is to focus first on Christ coming into our personal lives. This is where a relationship with Jesus can really take root. Only after the Catholic appreciates the reality that Jesus *wants* to come and *can* come into his/her personal life can he/she begin to appreciate the historical coming and second coming of Christ. Before that time, they are inconsequential and have no personal meaning, just like the liturgical symbols. Jesus in the Eucharist desperately wants to come into our lives, not as an abstract notion but as a tangible person. He is always waiting to be recognized, adored, loved, and welcomed, and He does so quietly in the tabernacle.

This Advent welcome the Eucharist, Who is truly Jesus, into your life. Do this by receiving the Eucharist at Mass with a heart made pure by frequent use of the sacrament of Confession. Go often also to Eucharistic adoration to be with Him. In welcoming the Eucharist’s coming into your life, you will be able to wholeheartedly welcome the child Jesus and look forward to His second coming.