

This Advent: Prepare to Receive the Great Gift of His Presence!

Did you know God loves us and wants us to be in a relationship with Him? John's Gospel explains why Jesus was born. It says, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Christ said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." This means that Jesus came so that we will know how to have friendship with God that is life-giving.

As humans, we have a tendency to sin and walk away from relationship with God. We tend to rebel. We tend to think we can find happiness apart from doing things God's way. We want to make up our own rules because we think we know better than God does about how to be happy. We search for happiness in dozens of ways that eventually we will realize are all dead ends. We hunger for love and belonging to someone. We feel an emptiness inside that we try to fill with material things, power, fame, or pleasure. None of them satisfy the deepest longing of our hearts. What will fill the yearning? For what are we really waiting? In *Redemptoris Mater 52*, Blessed John Paul II said, "It is an unending and continuous transformation between falling and rising again, between the man of sin and the man of grace and justice. The Advent liturgy in particular is at the very heart of this transformation and captures its unceasing "here and now" when it exclaims: "Assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again!"

St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in You." We can enter into this resting in the Lord here and now, not just when we die. We can have abundant life guided by the Holy Spirit through faith. Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit if we ask to receive Him. The gift of faith we received at Baptism has to be something we want so that our faith can be fully active in our life. Perhaps that gift of Baptism is still like an unwrapped present that you need to open before you can start to use it. What will we do with this gift of faith? Open it or set it on a shelf?

Through Christ we can know God. The New Testament tells us how to please Him. We have not been abandoned to figure this all out by ourselves. Since God loves us, He would never keep us guessing. Jesus taught us how to make the gift of faith our own, instead of sitting on a shelf where it does not do us any good. Yet He does not force us to accept this gift. He gently offers it to us and waits for our response. How will we respond? How do we accept this gift?

Our "Yes" to God means making a commitment to following Jesus and His way of happiness. God gives all the graces we need to accept the gift of faith. He makes it possible to know His love for us in a very real way. He helps us to stay in relationship with Him through the Sacraments. Next time we are at Mass, we can sincerely offer our whole self to Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. See what He will do. It is what our hearts really want and need, so why not give it a try?

Advent is a time of the year when the Church remembers the gift God gave us by sending us a Savior. The Gift of New Life is the most precious of all gifts. None of the presents under the Christmas tree can begin to compare with the joy that a relationship with God will give us. This Advent let us prepare to open our hearts to receive Jesus as our best friend and Lord. It will be a gift that keeps giving all year long.

Q. What specific things can I do to help me focus more on the gift of Jesus than on the gifts under the tree?

Q. Why do you think God allowed His only Son to be born in such a humble way?

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