

Sunday, November 27, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

ADVENT

Advent is a unique season and, along with Christmas, is my favorite time of the year. It also is, for me, one of the best reasons to be a Christian because of the anticipation, hope, love, generosity, and celebration that Advent embodies. I would miss all that inspiration if I belonged to another faith or had none at all.

Every year I discover new meanings of Advent. It certainly is an immediate preparation for Christmas, perhaps its most traditional purpose. The Church also designates it as a time to prepare for the end of the world and the end of personal life. The end of the world may indicate the termination or destruction of terrestrial life, and humankind seems bent on doing this, whether through nuclear arms, endless wars which destroy human environments and displace people, or through denial of world climate conditions. The end of our personal lives also needs preparation, but many types of involuntary change, e.g., disease, divorce, loss of jobs, and unexpected upsets, also signify death. Advent, then, is not just a frivolous season with parties, decorations, and shopping but an annual opportunity to experience new life and purpose.

The most familiar image of the Advent/Christmas season is a portrait of a little child with his mother. It is more than just spiritual art. The child Mary held in her womb – and that every other pregnant mother also holds – is someone kicking, yelling and knocking to be let out. This is a metaphor for Advent when we have the opportunity to tend to the latent goodness trying to emerge from us. Even if we think we are good enough, there is more that we can bring forth. It is necessary, in fact, to do so in order to supplant the selfishness, violence, and other meanness that is too prevalent in society today.

The Advent/Christmas season also focuses on smallness and its power to bring awe and change into the world. Consider a baby or young child. Many small moments or small things have a similar effect. Most movements start small, e.g. the Civil Rights Movement with Rosa Parks on a bus. A small candle can diffuse darkness and fear. A pinch of this, a dab of that, a dash of something else makes every recipe taste better. Advent is a time to emphasize the value of small things and the effect they can have on our environments. A smile, a handshake, a phone call, a visit, a short note or e-mail, a kind word or two of encouragement to counteract the meanness and constant competition of life. More small things done more regularly by more people would make our world a much better place.