**The Peace of Advent – and of Ordinary Times**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

2020 is the year of Advent!

Well, that is a presumptuous declaration to make as there has been a “year of Advent” since the first millennium. But, the truth is, so often I have let it pass unnoticed.

As a child, I saw Advent as a purple draped season that lay like an eternity between me and the magic of Christmas morning. It had some likeable traditions like Advent wreaths and Advent calendars and the grammar school Jesse trees we made each year. But, more often than not, I eagerly anticipated its conclusion at the expense of experiencing its unfolding. I would like to say that I have outgrown this. Yet, I have to admit that, for me, Advent is all too often overlooked in the hustle and bustle of my typical December.

However, 2020 is different – and I think this may be the year that Advent will finally get its due.

My December calendar this year is … oddly empty. Usually, this month is filled with many joyful events that I anticipate every year: Christmas parties, concerts, tree lightings, open houses, dinners with friends and family, and road trips to visit the far flung. Added to this happy mix are the many traditions associated with the life of Catholic University that I am blessed to share: gatherings with students, colleagues and alumni to celebrate, a faculty and staff-served pancake dinner for students taking final exams, concerts by our music students, and the liturgies that draw us together in celebration.

This year, though, the pages of my calendar are empty, as so much of this has been cancelled. It would be dishonest to pretend that I am not mourning the temporary absence of these cherished events.

Yet, it is in this very emptiness that Advent will thrive. Without the distractions of a premature Christmas season, I notice the quiet expectancy of Advent a bit more than I have before.

There is time to spend alone in the peaceful quiet of a dimly lit church because I am not distracted by the noise and bright lights of the shops downtown. There is more time to care for those who are mourning, because I am not as occupied with celebrating amidst those who are joyous. There is time to write letters to loved ones, because I am spending more time at home.

There is time to read the inspirational books recommended to me by wise people because I am not on a plane or train on the run. There is time to really listen to the words of the season’s beautiful hymns when I hear them play in the peace of my home rather than over the loudspeakers of crowded department stores. There is time to commit to my parish’s Advent preparation programs because I am not keeping my schedule open for the busy-ness of a typical December.

There is more time to give to God at the start of my day and at its close than the mere scraps of sleepy minutes that, too often, are all I offer Him. There is time to cherish all of the holy celebrations that fall in Advent– the memorials of St. Francis Xavier and of St. Ambrose, St. Nicholas Day, the Marian celebrations of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Loreto and Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Lucy’s Day (a personal favorite to us Italians named Lucia), and, of course, the four Sundays of Advent themselves. All of these have an often overshadowed significance of their own in the great unfolding story of salvation.

There is more time for my heart to prepare the way of the Lord – because many other, lesser preparations do not preoccupy my heart this year. There is more time for sacred silence, eager expectancy and holy hope.

Like so many, I ache for a return to “normal.” I hope that next December will see many of my favorite traditions return. I expect that they will be even more appreciated because they have been so missed. But, for now, I am deeply grateful for an Advent that is better than normal – an Advent closer to what it is meant to be, and an Advent that I am praying will prepare all of us for the joy of Christmas and a holy return to ordinary times.

*May God bless you with the holy hope of Advent!*

*Lucia A. Silecchia is a Professor of Law at the Catholic University of America. "On Ordinary Times” is a biweekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at* *silecchia@cua.edu**.*