

BE PREPARED

By: Fr. O'Dell

This time of year is always busy. It seems like the weeks between Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years and the Super Bowl just fly together - one event stacked on top of another one. Everything else gets sandwiched between the major holidays and we naturally seem to focus on the big events that we all enjoy.

Sometimes though, we forget that each one of those big holidays takes a lot of planning and preparation to pull off. Christmas dinner doesn't just happen by accident. It takes a lot of thought, shopping and cooking to make it a success. Plain truth is, that we sometimes get so focused on the big ticket events, that we scarcely give any thought to the time and energy that goes into them. We don't spend enough time concentrating on the periods of preparation as we should.

The same is true in the practice of our faith. In the next few weeks, we will be celebrating some big church feast days. We will be celebrating the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary - a feast that remembers that Mary was conceived without the stain of Original Sin on her soul so that she could be an appropriate vehicle through which Christ would enter the world. We celebrate Christmas - the birth of the Messiah - the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Who was both God and man. We will be celebrating the feast of Mary our Mother on January 1st, the Epiphany of the Lord (the Three Kings visiting Jesus) on January 6th, and a week later the Baptism of the Lord. A lot of feast days - and we sometimes forget the preparation that we need to pour into those celebrations to really make them meaningful to us.

For Catholics though, we have a built in time of preparation that takes up nearly the whole month of December. It's called the season of Advent - the time of preparation to remember the Incarnation and to welcome the Son of God into our world. We also remember the next coming of Jesus in glory at the Final Judgment. We use this season to prepare primarily for Christmas - but it also helps us to get ready for all of the other feasts I just mentioned.

Unfortunately, we often look at preparation periods as a "second best" use of our time - instead of a period that is essential to plugging into the deeper mysteries that these feasts celebrate. We should be using Advent as a time to get our own house in order so that the coming of Christmas will find us well prepared to greet Christ.

So what are some of the things that you can do during Advent to help yourself (and your family) to get ready for all of the celebrations that will soon come our way. First, take some time to get a right order to your activities in your mind and heart. Learn how to prioritize things. Not everything is of equal value. Advent is a good time to get that "ordering" in place. It gives us the opportunity to **PRIORITIZE** what is and what isn't important and then tailor our faith life around those priorities. It reminds us that **Jesus is really the reason for the season.**

Second, we need to take plenty of time to **REST** and **RELAX**. All too often, we get so plugged into the busy-ness - that we just get busy about being busy. While all of our preparations are good things - they still take time and work. None of the preparations are worth a plugged nickel if they rob us of the joy of celebrating these holy days. Without reflection - even the best celebration becomes pretty devoid of meaning.

Third, spend time talking to God. Not only that, **LISTEN TO GOD**. So often, if we just make silence a regular part of our preparation period, it's amazing all of the things that God will whisper into ears if we are just open to hearing Him. If we never listen, how can we ever expect to know the Will of God in our lives.

Fourth, spend time in **RELATIONSHIPS**. It profits us nothing in our preparation, if we gain every material thing that we can possibly accumulate, if we finish every task that is set before us - and in the process alienate all of the significant relationships in our lives because we aren't spending enough time or attention on them. Part of our preparatory activities should always focus on maintaining good relationships with those who are important to us.

So, this year, in between shopping for Christmas, making a whole ton of food for a Super Bowl party, feeding an army at Thanksgiving, take time to make use of Advent and to really focus on getting ready for the amazing mysteries of this time of year.

Have a great holy day and holiday season.