

## **CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF ADVENT FROM BISHOP PETER LIBASCI**

The holy season of Advent begins the Church's Liturgical Year and celebrates the *two comings of Christ* who came *once to save* the world and will come again *to judge* the world. St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructs us "We do not preach only one coming of Christ, but a second as well, much more glorious than the first...His first coming was to fulfill his plan of love, to teach men by gentle persuasion. This [second] time, whether men like it or not, they will be subjects of His kingdom by necessity."

Advent, prior to the Second Vatican Council, was marked by days of fast and abstinence. Nevertheless there was a gradual "**Christmas creep**" that led to Christmas parties and colorful decorations that emphasized the anticipation of the celebration of the FIRST coming of Christ, with little or no emphasis on his SECOND coming. To focus on the Second coming, decorations were banned, "Christmas parties" were strongly discouraged until the "Twelve Days of Christmas" and Christmas Carols and music were also banned until Christmas.

Advent became a very subdued and quiet event. It appeared that we were in fact preparing to celebrate a Holy Birth that (in a make-believe way) hadn't happened yet, all the while focusing on the Second coming. For all its goodness, it was still hard to understand if we were focusing on the Second coming or the approach of the celebration of the First.

The attempt at catechesis is missing something. The beauty of the Incarnational piece has been dulled. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and continues to dwell among us. The reality that "for a time he was lower than the angels" and now he "is seated on high yet dwells here on earth" needs to be appreciated, not only during this Holy Year of Mercy but as basic tenet of our Faith.

### **WHAT IS ASKED THIS YEAR:**

1. Beginning with the FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, in every Rectory, Convent, Catholic School, Diocesan Institution and Catholic Home, **the image of the Christ Child should be displayed** in a suitably decorated place of prominence and approachability. Not the crèche, just the infant.
2. Beginning with the FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT and throughout the Advent Season, the music at **Mass should include Christmas Carols that enjoy the quality of a lullaby** and center on the great mystery of the incarnation and birth that did occur in history.
3. Though the decorations should not loudly celebrate Christmas during Advent, throughout Advent there should be evergreens of life and hope, the violet and rose colors of the penitential character of the season **AND there should be decorations to enliven the church that awaits the Bridegroom's Second coming**.
4. There should be open houses and celebrations of the reality of the Incarnation, sharing the warmth of gathering and hospitality as we look toward the Parousia and the fulfillment of Christ's promise. Let home and Diocesan Institutions have warm hospitality-and make sure to share this with the poor in a personal face to face way.
5. Avoid whatever may encumber you during this time. Instead, make the most of the Sunday Liturgies. Share the mystery of the Incarnation and the Parousia [the Second coming of Christ] with a deep spiritual consolation that is different from what the secular culture considers "joy".
6. On the THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, the HOLY DOORS throughout the Diocese will be blessed and opened. Make pilgrimage to the Holy Door site. Bring the image of your Infant Christ Child to carry and pass through the Holy Door. Make this an occasion to return to Him who IS Mercy.

What is being asked is that during the Advent season, we take the **infant** as our centerpiece, remembering that He came as one of us. When an infant is in the house, everyone must be conscious of that presence and speak more softly, be attentive more closely, welcome family and visitors, exercise patience, accept inconvenience—even in the extreme, for the sake of the fragile life entrusted to our care.

In reality, there ought to be a movement in the Church during the Advent Season which encourages and enables people to be more human, more patient, gentler and more encouraging of the CHILD WITHIN every human being. We are not, after all, immune to the effects of loneliness, want, hurt, fear, hunger or pain. Attentiveness to one another and awareness of the fragile nature of a human being is, at the same time, attentiveness to the constant God-inspired call to growth.

If we are looking toward the Second coming of Christ, such an Advent should be especially lived by us as children of the Kingdom. To be judged as having achieved a fuller awareness of human fragility and potential, is to be judged as growing more closely to "the full stature of Christ."