



Orantes

Newsletter of the Office for Divine Worship
of the Diocese of Worcester

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Pope Benedict on Advent

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Advent "places us before the luminous mystery of the coming of the Son of God and the great 'benevolent plan' by which he sought to draw us to himself, to allow us to live in full communion of joy and peace with him. Advent invites us, in spite of the many difficulties we encounter, to renew our certainty of the presence of God: He came into the world, in human flesh like ours, to fully realize his plan of love. And God asks that we too become signs of his action in the world. Through our faith, hope and charity, he wishes us to make his light shine anew in our night." -Pope Benedict XVI, 5 December 2012.

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The Theology of Advent

At the heart of the Advent mystery is a tension, described precisely in the *Roman Missal*:

Advent has a twofold character, for it is a time of preparation for the Solemnities of Christmas, in which the First Coming of the Son of God to humanity is remembered, and likewise a time when, by remembrance of this, minds and hearts are led to look forward to Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. For these two reasons, Advent is a period of devout and expectant delight.¹

This twofold notion of preparation and longing provides the vocabulary for the liturgical prayers of Advent.

The first Preface for Advent, for example, is a poetic restatement of the twofold character:



For he assumed at his first coming
the lowliness of human flesh,
and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago,
and opened for us the way to eternal salvation,
that, when he comes again in glory and majesty
and all is at last made manifest,
we who watch for that day
may inherit the great promise
in which now we dare to hope.

The context for this twofold expectation is provided on the First Sunday of Advent in the Office of Readings by the *Catechetical Instruction* of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem:

We do not preach only one coming of Christ, but a second as well, much more glorious than the first. The first coming

¹ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 39.

was marked by patience; the second will bring the crown of a divine kingdom....



At the first coming he was wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. At his second coming he will be clothed in light as in a garment. In the first coming he endured the cross, despising the shame; in the second coming he will be in glory, escorted by an army of angels. We look then beyond the first coming and await the second. At the first coming we said: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. At the second we shall say it again; we shall go out with the angels to meet the Lord and cry out in adoration: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord...

These two comings are also referred to by Paul in writing to Titus: The grace of God the Savior has appeared to all men, instructing us to put aside impiety and worldly desires and live temperately, uprightly, and religiously in this present age, waiting for the joyful hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Notice how he speaks of a first coming for which he gives thanks, and a second, the one we still await...

The Collect for the First Sunday of Advent focuses on the second coming of the Lord, asking God to give us “the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.”²

The Collect for the Second Sunday intensifies this longing for the Lord to return in glory, asking that “no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son.”

The Collect for Gaudete Sunday begins a shift to anticipating the Incarnation, asking that those who “await the feast of the Lord’s Nativity” may “attain the joys of so great a salvation and...celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.”

² Cat. 15, 1-3: PG 33, 870-874.

Finally, the Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, made familiar by its use in the Angelus, continues this focus on the Nativity of the Lord, whose celebration will occur within a week. The Collect also places the Nativity within the context of the Paschal Mystery, asking that we who celebrate the Incarnation “may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.”

The Second Preface of Advent is also focused on the Nativity, recalling the Messianic prophecies, the Virgin Mother’s longing and the Baptist’s announcement of his coming. The prayer concludes by asking that we might be “watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise” as we prepare to celebrate the great Christmas solemnity.

These theological strains are practically reflected in traditional liturgical practices proper to the Advent season.

Because this season of joyful hope and waiting has, by definition, an “unfinished” aspect, the use of a blue-hued purple, the color of the horizon just before the sunrise, has been adopted for vesture, altar cloths, banners, etc.

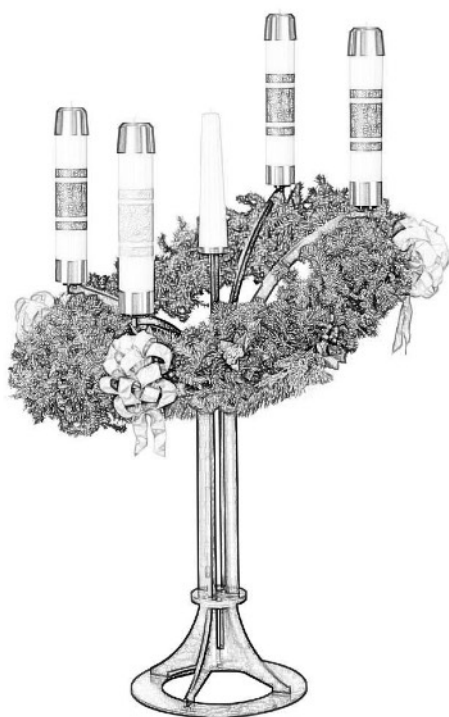


Likewise, while the season is characterized by a quickening anticipation of the coming of the Lord, its preparatory nature has resulted in a certain character of restraint. This is clearly reflected in the rubric of the Roman Missal requiring that “during Advent the floral decoration of the altar should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this time of year, without expressing in anticipation the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord.”³

³ GIRM, no. 305.

The Advent Wreath

As the Season of Advent approaches, most Churches will observe the traditional lighting of the candles of an Advent Wreath. The *Book of Blessings* assigns the blessing of the wreath to the First Sunday of Advent (or the Saturday evening before).⁴



Does the Blessing have to take place during Mass?

No. The blessing may take place “during Mass, a celebration of the word of God, or Evening Prayer.”⁵

What colors are the candles?

While different colored candles are used in different countries, in the United States, three of the candles are usually of violet and the one lit on Gaudete Sunday is rose.⁶

Where should the wreath be placed?

The wreath may be hung from the ceiling or placed on a stand, but should be of “sufficient size to be visible to the congregation.” If located in the sanctuary, the Advent Wreath should not “obscure the altar, lectern, or chair.”⁷

Is there a rite for lighting the candles each week?

No. The wreath is blessed only on the First Sunday of Advent. On subsequent Sundays “the candles are lighted either before Mass begins or immediately before the opening prayer; no additional rites or prayers are used.”⁸

When is the Advent Wreath blessed at Mass?

When celebrated during Mass, the blessing takes place at the conclusion of the General Intercessions.

⁴ BOB, no. 1509.

⁵ BOB, nos. 1510 and 1511.

⁶ BOB, nos. 1510 and 1511.

⁷ BOB, no. 1512.

⁸ BOB, no. 1513.

How does the blessing begin?

Four sample intercessions are provided by the *Book of Blessings*.⁹

That the keeping of Advent
may open our hearts to God's love;

That the light of Christ
may penetrate the darkness of sin;

That this wreath may constantly remind us
to prepare for the coming of Christ;

That the Christmas season may fill us with peace and joy
as we strive to follow the example of Jesus;



What is the difference between the two forms of the Prayer of Blessing of the Advent Wreath?

After the Intercessions, the celebrant extends his hands and prays one of two prayers.

The first prayer focuses on the Second Coming of the Lord in glory. Echoing the embolism to the Lord's prayer ("we wait in joyful hope") the prayer asks that the Church await the Lord "who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin." It then asks that the light of this wreath may reflect the splendor of Christ."

The second prayer focuses on our preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of the Emmanuel, "the hope of the peoples...the wisdom that teaches and guides us...the Savior of every nation." The prayer concludes by asking that the light of the wreath "be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation. May he come quickly and not delay."

After the Prayer of Blessing, the first candle is lit.

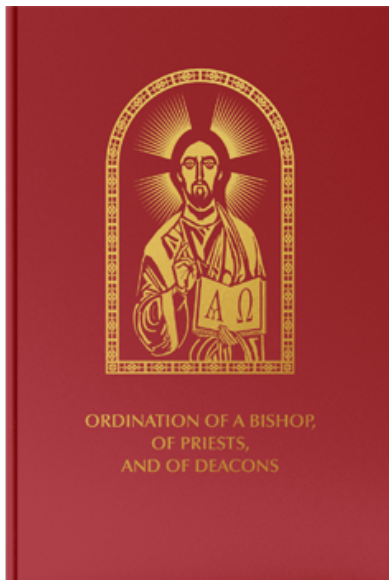
⁹ BOB, no.1518.

New Liturgical Books

The USCCB will meet in Baltimore from November 15-18, 2021 for the first time since the onset of the pandemic.

Among the liturgical items under consideration are:

1. The addition of Saint Teresa of Calcutta to the calendar for the Dioceses of the United States of America.
2. Arrangement of the texts for the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The translation itself was approved in November 2019.
3. A new translation and adaptation of *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass*.



In regard to revised editions of other liturgical books, the approved and confirmed USCCB edition of the *Rites for Ordination of Bishop, of Priests, of Deacons* is being printed and [may be pre-ordered on the USCCB website](#).

Among the revised translations approved by the USCCB which are awaiting confirmation by the Holy See are the *Order of Penance* (approved in June of 2021), and the the Spanish language *Bendicional*.

Over the past several years, the USCCB has approved several segments of the revised translation of the *Liturgy of the Hours*. The earliest this project is expected to be completed, confirmed and in print is 2025.

Closing Thoughts

As of this writing, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts continues to experience a high level of transmission of the COVID-19 virus.¹⁰ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that even vaccinated persons should wear a mask in public if they are in an area of substantial or high transmission and should get tested if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms in light of the possibility of breakthrough infections.¹¹

While all diocesan wide-liturgical restrictions have been lifted, except in regard to distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds, pastors may still opt to reinstate precautionary practices, particularly if the rate of transmission increases in their city or town. For this reason, pastors and their collaborators are urged to continue to pray for deliverance from this latter stage of the pandemic.

The slightly revised version of the Diocesan Prayer in Time of Pandemic is recommended to all our readers in these liminal times.



O God, whose Only Begotten Son bore the weight of human suffering for our salvation, hear the prayers of your Church for our sick brothers and sisters and deliver us from this time of trial.

Open our ears and our hearts to the voice of your Son: Be not afraid, for I am with you always.

Bless all doctors and nurses, researchers and public servants; give us the wisdom to do what is right and the faith to endure this hour, that, trusting in your loving protection we might see the end of this pandemic and rejoice in your mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

¹⁰ <https://covidactnow.org/us/massachusetts-ma/?s=25171432>