

When Your Family's Advent Falls Apart



THIS IS A
BLOG POST
ABOUT
"ADVENT"

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IN THIS BLOG POST FROM THE USCCB'S FOR YOUR MARRIAGE WEBSITE, AUTHOR JOSH NOEM FINDS SOLACE IN THE CENTERPIECE ON THE TABLE DURING THE ADVENT SEASON. WHEN LIFE FEELS LIKE IT'S OUT OF CONTROL, THERE ARE WAYS TO STAY GROUNDED DURING ADVENT.

Advent — real Advent — is full of silent prayer and dog-eared devotional books and thoughtfully-sourced gift buying and wrapping. It's less TV and more cribbage. It's candlelight in the long nights. It's post-card perfect photos on Christmas cards with individualized greetings to connect with friends and family.

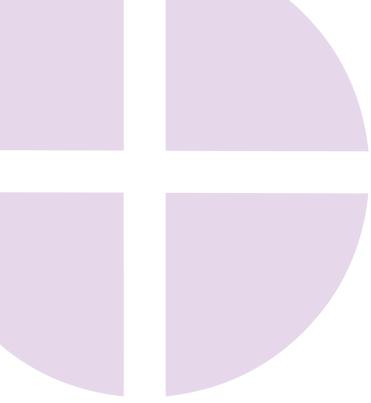
"Advent," on the other hand, is what most of us experience in family life, and it's a far cry from the above. Maybe one day, when the kids are grown and out of the house, Stacey and I will sit and play cribbage by candlelight after spending an evening writing Christmas cards. It ain't this day, though, lemme tell ya.

Just last night, for example, a staff Christmas party, Oscar's senior band concert, and Simon's basketball game all began within half an hour of one another. Or how about leaving for work when it's dark and getting home when it's dark in time to scarf down dinner before two cars depart to the four winds for dance lessons and parish meetings? Sound familiar?

It would be a challenge to implement Advent in normal circumstances but throw in everything else going on in the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas — parties, errands to buy gifts, school programs — and fahgedaboutit. We began with grand intentions — silent prayer every night — but those efforts barely lasted into the second candle. We made it to the parish reconciliation service and have been trying to just keep our heads above water since then.

So, our "Advent" this year has been more *Survivor* than *Charlie Brown's Christmas Special*. One remnant from Advent has remained, though, and I've found myself clinging to it like a life-preserver: the Advent wreath.

We have an Advent wreath in the middle of our dining table, nestled in greenery, and both Stacey and I have been committed to gathering around it. If we can't have everyone because someone's at practice or working late or at an evening meeting, so be it, but every night



some of us eat food together and when we do, we light the candles and sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”

That 20 seconds of stillness and song is an anchor. We all gaze at the light and raise our voices and tune our lives to a different longing than the concerns that rush through our days. It’s nothing grand — it’s just a moment, after all — but it keeps me rooted and it reminds me that we’re on a journey, we’re walking together.

So, I think that’s a piece of advice I’d like to remember for next year: It will all fall apart — just know that going in. Nice to begin with good intentions, but have a fallback position when the front lines get overrun. Cling to just one thing — that’s enough. It doesn’t have to be perfect. You don’t have to achieve holiness or enlightenment or perfection in four weeks. You just have to walk together. God will meet you on the road.

