

Preparation for the Sacrament of First Holy Communion

Suggested December Ritual

(The proposed ritual takes place during the celebration of Sunday Mass.)

Background

What is Advent?

Advent means "arrival" or "coming." It is a season of expectation and hope. Believers across the world spend the weeks before Christmas preparing for that day of beauty and light.

The first recorded mention of Advent occurred at a meeting of church leaders in Spain in the 300's A.D. The Council of Saragossa encouraged people to attend church daily between December 17-29. Advent eventually developed into a month-long season in December.

Traditions vary by country, but people celebrate Advent all over the world.

In Eastern Orthodox churches, believers participate in a Nativity Fast that begins November 15 and ends December 24. During the fast, they abstain from meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil.

In Germany, Christians set four candles in an evergreen Advent wreath. Each Sunday preceding Christmas, they light another candle while singing Christmas songs.

In China, families put up a "tree of light" and decorate it with lanterns, flowers, and red paper chains. Some give apples on Christmas Eve because the Chinese word for apple sounds similar to the word for peace.

In the Philippines, people attend nine different early morning masses with the final mass occurring on Christmas Day. They decorate a bamboo pole with a lighted "lantern" that represents the star followed by the wise men.

In Costa Rica, families decorate their houses with tropical flowers and set up a nativity scene. On Christmas Eve, everyone dresses up and goes to Midnight Mass.

Preparation for this ritual, may present an opportunity to explain the meaning behind the Advent Wreath and the candles:

The first candle, called the "Prophet's Candle," symbolizes hope. The Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah, waited in hope for the Messiah's arrival.



The second candle, called "Bethlehem's Candle," represents faith. Micah had foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, forging a connection between King David and his coming descendent whose kingdom and throne would be established forever.

The third candle, called the "Shepherd's Candle," symbolizes joy. To the shepherds' great joy, angels announced that Jesus came for humble, unimportant people like them, too.

The fourth candle, called the "Angel's Candle," represents peace. The angels proclaimed that Jesus came to bring peace on earth—He came to bring people close to God and to each other again.

Preparation

As Jesus offers Himself to us in Holy Communion, we are called to offer ourselves to Him in return, and to offer ourselves to others. Create among the children an awareness of those for whom Christmas is difficult: the elderly, those who live alone, the homeless, etc.. How can they show to them that someone cares? Explore the various ways of reaching out to others.

- (i) Invite the children to place a small, wrapped gift (value to be decided in consultation with parents - e.g. gloves/socks/hats max. €5) in a small gift bag (sample opposite). Arrange with a local Nursing Home/Care Home/charity for the gifts to be delivered from the children in advance of Christmas.

Or

- (ii) Invite the children to design and prepare individual Christmas cards. In it they might inform the recipient they are preparing for their First Holy Communion and write a message telling the recipient they are thinking of them over Christmas.

The gifts or cards are presented at the Mass and collected in large baskets or hampers.



Prayers of the Faithful

(Some of the Prayers of the Faithful may be included in the Intercessions of the Mass.)

1. May the Jesus, the Bread of Life give food to the hungry and nourish us as faithful members of God's family. **Lord, hear us.**
2. We pray for all members of God's family: may they be moved to share the light of God's love with those around them. **Lord, hear us**
3. For families for whom Christmas will be difficult. Help us to reach out in love and kindness. **Lord, hear us.**
4. For children preparing for First Holy Communion, their parents who support them, their Sponsors who witness to them, their teachers who instruct them, and our community who prays for them. **Lord, hear us.**