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10 Lessons to Help Us Prepare for the Greatest Birthday

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7-9 minutes

The key to the success of the party or celebration depends upon the prior preparation for the party. In other words, the more intense the preparation, normally and in most cases, the more successful the celebration.

This concept can be and should be applied every year in the preparation for the most important birthday in the history of humanity — the Birthday of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — the day we call Christmas!

Due to Materialism, Consumerism, Hedonism, growing Agnosticism, as well as militant and rapidly growing Atheism, the true meaning of Christmas is slowly being suffocated in modern society. Once a Christian nation, the United States is gradually turning into a secular, even paganistic nation. Instead of the motto, “*In God we trust*”, the common prevalent mode and mood is, “*In money and material things I trust!*”

Black Friday: A Tragedy Symptomatic of the Times

Many of readers may remember [2008 on Black Friday](#) — the day

after Thanksgiving — when people were waiting the whole cold night so they could “*shop until they drop*” and a terrible tragedy occurred. The doors of a Walmart in Long Island, New York opened wide to the stampeding of buyers. Such was the rush, like a pack of buffaloes, that one of the employees was trampled and killed. The manager of the store closed to mourn for his employee; still many were clamoring that they had a right to buy.

Symptomatic of our times, buying material things presides and prevails over the importance of the human person. Materialism and the love for things are valued more than the life of a human being. Indeed, something has truly turned sour!

Christmas

May the true understanding of Christmas, the *Reason for the Season*, wake us up to what is truly valuable and matters in life. Indeed, Christmas can teach us many sublime lessons, and Advent is the time to prepare intensely for this most important of all birthdays!

First Lesson: God’s Love for All of Humanity

The Letter of Saint John highlights God’s initiative in the Plan of Redemption with these words: *God loved us first*. (1 Jn 4:19)
Pope Francis pointed out in one of his latter writings the danger of Pelagianism. This is a false philosophy that states that we can be saved by our own human efforts. Totally wrong. We can only be saved by God!

Second Lesson: The Meaning of the Name Jesus

This holy name, given to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel, signifies Jesus' mission — the reason why He came to earth, and it was and is to save all of humanity. The name *Jesus* means *savior*.

Advent, which leads to Christmas, is a time in which we have to humbly admit our dire need to be saved by Jesus. A very short but powerful prayer that we should say often is: *Lord Jesus, save me*. As Peter sank in the waves of Lake Galilee, he cried out, "*Lord, save me!*" (Mt 14:30) This should be the ardent and earnest prayer issuing from our hearts in Advent and Christmas. Jesus will save only those who willingly allow themselves to be saved.

Third Lesson: Humility

Jesus described the qualities of His Most Sacred Heart using two words: "*I am meek and humble of Heart...*" (Mt 11:29) The whole ambiance and environment of Christmas, and all that leads up to it, expresses most eloquently the virtue of humility: Mary on a donkey, rejection from one Inn to the next, bowing down to enter an animal shelter in Bethlehem, the humble Shepherds as the first guests, a humble Carpenter and his young Virgin wife. All of these elements point to how much God loves the humble and those who strive to practice the virtue of humility.

Make this your prayer: "*Jesus meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.*"

Fourth Lesson: Poverty

Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen expressed it succinctly but powerfully: “*The Creator of the universe had nowhere to be born in His own creation.*” Even before being born, Jesus had no place in the Inns that Saint Joseph knocked at; He had to be born in a stable, a refuge for animals. What an example of humility and poverty!

We can glean many spiritual treasures and jewels from this reality. Money, materialism, consumerism, possessions, and hoarding — all of these can obtain for us bodily pleasure. However, they cannot bring us true happiness. Indeed, true happiness can only be found in encountering God, allowing God to possess us and ourselves possessing God.

Jesus is the reason for the season and the true source of happiness in this life, as well as eternal life in the life to come!

Fifth Lesson: Bethlehem, Its Eucharistic Meaning

The word *Bethlehem* actually means *House of Bread*. How interesting the fact that Jesus, who would call Himself *the Bread of Life* (Bread of Life discourse: John 6), would be born in the town of *Bethlehem — the House of Bread*.

This Advent, your heart and soul must be a true Bethlehem where Jesus wants to be born. If possible, it could be every day through the reception of frequent and fervent Holy Communions — the Bread of Life.

Sixth Lesson: Clean the Stable

It must be said that the stable of Bethlehem did not exude the

best of smells. On the contrary, it must have exuded the ghastly odor of animals and animal dung. This is symbolic of our soul that clings to sin.

We must cleanse and sweep out our souls through Sacramental Confession so that as Christmas approaches in this Advent Season, Jesus will be born with great joy in the depths of our souls.

Seventh Lesson: The Fragrance of Christ

As a consequence of making a good Sacramental Confession, sweeping and cleaning our souls spotless, then indeed we can become what Saint Paul says in his writings: “*Become the fragrance or the aroma of Christ!*” (2 Cor 2:15) A Christian is called to radiate the Presence of Christ in the world!

Eighth Lesson: The Effort It Takes to Follow the Star

The Magi had an ardent yearning to encounter the Newborn King. However, it was not easy; rather it took time, effort, suffering, and searching to finally arrive at their destination, where they found the Child Jesus in the arms of Mary.

For us to live out Advent fully and so experience the true joy of Christmas — the birth of the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings — we must make an effort to follow the Star. Symbolically and mystically, the *Star* means to be docile and open to the inspirations that the Holy Spirit sends us. We must have our spiritual radar open to God’s interior voice that speaks in the

depths of a contemplative heart, and be ready to say and respond: “*Speak, O Lord, for your servant is listening!*”

Ninth Lesson: Peace to All of Good Will

The choir of angels announced: “*Glory to God in the highest and peace to men of good will.*” (Lk 2:14) Advent and Christmas should be a time and a Season in which we try to eradicate from our hearts the bitter roots of resentment, bitterness, rancor, anger, jealousy, and envy that can dampen or destroy our interior peace. Saint Augustine defines peace as, “*The tranquility of order.*” Saint Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises challenges us to *order the disordered* in our lives.

Tenth Lesson: Mary and Saint Joseph, Our Models

Indeed, if we truly desire to live out Advent with the best of dispositions, let us turn to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the greatest of all the saints, good Saint Joseph. May we make Jesus the center of our hearts and lives as they did.

May this Advent be the best Advent in your life, so that Jesus may be born in your own interior *Bethlehem—the House of Bread*. May your soul, through Mary’s prayers, be a well swept and clean house, so that the Son of God can abide in it, in time and for all eternity!