



THEOLOGY CORNER

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“What Should Catholics Give During Advent?”

Now that the season of Advent is here, it seems a good time as any to reflect on the nature of Christian giving. With Advent being the season in which we look forward to the Lord's coming, it allows us to reflect upon the great blessing of the Incarnation and consider the ways we can reorient our minds and hearts so that Christ is at its center. It is a time when we set our priorities straight and make strong resolutions in our preparation for the arrival of Christ on Christmas day and beyond. But what does this have to do with giving? It has a lot to do with it. One can recognize this by simply thinking about the act of giving — especially as it applies to the life of a Christian. Often times, when one considers giving, they immediately think about money; giving is about so much more than giving money. Giving is an act of *love*. This is because to give as a Christian means to offer yourself up for the sake of another person without any regard for what you will receive in return. Giving, in and of itself, can deepen our relationship with Jesus and therefore deepen our prayer lives. In a time when we are preparing our hearts and minds for Christ, it is essential to meditate on the things that stand in the way of a true encounter with God.

In the Catholic spiritual tradition, it is said time and time again that the main obstacle to a real encounter with the Lord is the ego. Whenever our actions are ordered toward the self, things become distorted. God created the human person for love. It is in our very nature to be a gift to others. All human persons are imaged after God who gives of himself by his very nature. As John says, “God *is* love.” (1 John 4:8). This fact provides us all with much clarity. Some of the main sources of sin is our disordered love of money, pleasure, and power. But what makes love of these things disordered? Is it because these things are bad? No! It is disordered when we love these things purely for the sake of our own benefit, approaching them as the source of our happiness. On the topic of the proper order of loves, St. Augustine puts it best: “These are thy gifts; they are good, for thou in thy goodness have made them. Nothing in them is from us, except for sin when, neglectful of order, we fix our love on the creature, instead of on thee, the Creator.” (*City of God*, XV, 22.) We always distance ourselves from Christ when we love created things above God and neighbor. C.S. Lewis puts it even simpler than Augustine: “Do not let your happiness depend on something you may lose. If love is to be a blessing, not a misery, it must be for the only Beloved who will never pass away.” (*The Four Loves*).

How can we avoid falling into the trap of loving money selfishly? Give it away. Give to your parish, to a homeless person, to a friend hurting financially. How can you avoid loving pleasure above God? Give it away. We all see our time as valuable and take pleasure in relaxing at home perhaps watching TV or doing some other enjoyable hobby. Sacrifice some of this time in service to others and impact someone else's life by volunteering at your parish to help with education, take time to learn more about your faith, make meals for the homeless, share Jesus with others in the community at large. How can one avoid a disordered love of power? Give it away. Surrender your life to God and recognize that we are nothing without him. Offer your whole being to the Lord this Advent. Let go of the ego and understand, as St. Paul did, that when we are weak we are strong because Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness. (2 Cor 12:9-11). We are truly powerful when we are filled with the power of God.

When we give of ourselves in any capacity, we are living out our vocation as disciples of Christ. And it is when we live out this vocation faithfully that we encounter Christ because the more we love, the more the Holy Spirit is at work in us, and the more the Holy Spirit is at work in us, the more that we become conformed to Christ and abide in him in mind and heart. If we truly dedicate this season of Advent to give time to God in prayer and to our neighbor in service, to give some of our monetary blessings to others in need or for the common good of your parish community, and to offer up our power to God in surrender to his work in us, then we can be sure of our preparation for his advent or “arrival” in our lives as the center of our whole world. This is the great blessing of the Incarnation that is called to mind every Advent as we ready ourselves for the Lord, the ultimate giver, to become incarnate in each one of us — giving us a participation in his own act of giving. God gave us existence, God the Father gave us his only Son, and his Son Jesus Christ gave of his own life for our redemption and salvation. May the Incarnation of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be our source of grace so that we may give of ourselves all the more for his greater glory and for the sake of our perfection in him. I wish everyone a blessed Advent filled with a joyful spirit of giving.