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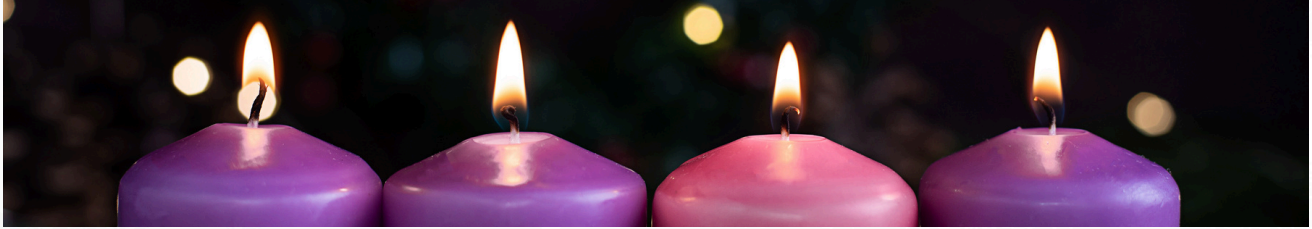


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Celebrating Advent:

Preparing Our Hearts for Christ's Coming

BY MAMA JANE, FOUNDER OF WISDOM WELLNESS COACHING, LLC



Every year, as the days grow shorter and the chill of winter sets in, the Church invites us into one of the most beautiful yet often overlooked seasons of the liturgical year: **Advent**. It is only four weeks long, but it holds within it a depth of meaning that can truly transform our experience of Christmas.

For many years of my life, Advent was not even on my radar. I grew up in a home where church was mainly reserved for Christmas and Easter. We didn't have a crucifix on the wall or prayers at the dinner table. I knew Christmas as a day of gifts and family gatherings, but not as the culmination of a season of spiritual preparation.

That all changed when I got married in Germany. Suddenly, I was surrounded by Catholic culture that breathed Advent into every corner. From the wreaths in homes and churches to the community craft days for families, I was introduced to something I had never seen before: a time of **waiting, watching, and preparing** for the coming of Christ. That simple discovery reshaped the way I celebrate the weeks leading up to Christmas.

What Advent Really Means

The word *Advent* literally means "coming." We prepare not only to celebrate Christ's birth in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago, but also to anticipate His second coming in glory. Advent holds both memory and hope—past and future woven into the present moment.

It is, in many ways, a mini Lent. Though it is shorter and less intense, Advent is still a penitential season. The Church invites us to step away from the frenzy of consumerism and instead ask: Is my heart ready to receive Jesus? What worldly attachments keep me from being all in with Him?

This countercultural approach may seem strange to the world, which is already blasting Christmas carols the day after Thanksgiving. But it is precisely in slowing down, in entering into quiet reflection, that we find the peace we long for amid the noise.

The Advent Wreath: A Tradition of Light

One of the most tangible and beloved symbols of this season is the **Advent wreath**. My first wreath was not fancy—it was a simple table decoration with four candles that I decorated myself. I still use it to this day, like Charlie Brown's little Christmas tree, fluffing it up each year with a touch of greenery and light.

The wreath holds four candles: three purple and one rose. Each week, we light a new candle until all four burn brightly just before Christmas. The purple represents penitence, while the rose, lit on the third Sunday—*Gaudete Sunday*—represents joy.

When my children were little, lighting the candles became a treasured family ritual. There was always the excitement of who got to blow them out at the end of the evening. My daughter Rose always claimed the rose candle, and her brothers would groan, "That's not fair!" To which I would respond, "Her name is Rose—of course she gets the rose candle!"

Those little traditions may seem small, but they root our families in the rhythms of the Church. They remind us that Christmas is not simply a day of presents but the celebration of God entering our world.

Worshipping with All Our Senses

One of the gifts of being Catholic is that we worship with our whole selves—our eyes, ears, voices, hands, and even our sense of smell. During Advent, the colors at Mass shift to purple. The music becomes more reflective, with hymns like *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* calling us into stillness and longing.

Just as a mother prepares her home for a new baby—nesting, gathering, waiting—so too are we called to prepare our hearts and homes for Christ. This might mean setting up a nativity scene slowly, moving Mary and Joseph closer to the stable each week, or holding off on putting up the Christmas tree until the third Sunday of Advent. These gradual traditions teach us patience and keep us focused on the true meaning of the season.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

Confession: The True Gift of Advent

If there is one practice I would encourage every Catholic to embrace during Advent, it is the **Sacrament of Confession**. Preparing for Christmas isn't only about decorating our homes—it's about cleansing our souls.

I remember during COVID, our parish priests spent nearly ten hours hearing confessions in one day because people were so hungry for reconciliation. The line stretched outside the church, socially distanced, with hearts waiting to be unburdened. That is the real "magic of Christmas"—the freedom of knowing your sins are forgiven and your soul is ready for Christ.

Maybe you feel nervous because it has been years since your last confession. Maybe you don't even know where to begin. That's okay. You can simply walk into the confessional and say, "Father, I don't know where to start." The priest will guide you. The Lord is not waiting to punish you but to welcome you home.

As Scripture tells us, there is more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous ones. What better gift could we give Jesus this Advent than a heart reconciled to Him?

Living Advent in the Domestic Church

Our homes are often called the "Domestic Church." Advent is the perfect time to make that visible. One year, a dear friend suggested I use tablecloths that match the liturgical colors. So every Advent, I pull out my purple tablecloth. My kids used to laugh when their friends would ask, "Why is everything purple? Where are your Christmas decorations?"

But that simple choice spoke volumes: we are in the world, but not of it. We don't rush ahead to Christmas. We wait. We prepare. We live differently because we believe differently.

The nativity set in our home also became a catechism in miniature. The kids would move Mary, Joseph, and the Wise Men closer to the stable each week. Baby Jesus remained hidden until Christmas Eve, when we would finally place Him in the manger with joy and reverence. These tactile, visual reminders planted seeds of faith that I trust will stay with my children for life.

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Fighting the Culture of Hurry

The world tells us Christmas is about more—more gifts, more parties, more spending. Yet by the time December 26 rolls around, the radio stations drop the carols, the decorations come down, and the world moves on.

The Church, in her wisdom, tells a different story. **Advent is not Christmas**. It is its own sacred season of expectation. And when Christmas finally arrives, we don't stop celebrating after one day. We continue for the entire Christmas season, culminating in the Feast of the Epiphany.

If you've ever felt burned out by Christmas before it even arrives, embracing Advent may be the antidote. Let it slow you down. Let it teach you how to savor, how to wait, how to rejoice when the time is right.

A New Year of Grace

With Advent also comes the start of a **new liturgical year**. Before the world celebrates New Year's Eve with fireworks and champagne, the Church is already quietly beginning again with Christ the King and the first Sunday of Advent.

This is a powerful reminder that our lives as Catholics are ordered not by the world but by God's time. Each liturgical season offers us a fresh opportunity to draw closer to Him. And Advent is the perfect place to start anew.

Encouragement for Supporting Catholic Businesses

Sisters, I encourage you this year: do something intentional to mark Advent in your home. Light the candles, pull out the purple, go to confession, and set up the nativity piece by piece. Allow yourself to enter into the rhythm of waiting, longing, and preparing.

If you've never celebrated Advent before, let this be the year you begin. If it's been a long time, come back. And if it's already part of your tradition, go deeper. Share your practices with others. Teach your children and grandchildren. Invite friends into your home to see the wreath and hear the story.

Because at the end of the day, Advent is about more than candles and colors. It is about preparing our hearts to receive the greatest gift the world has ever known: **Jesus Christ, God with us**.

This season, let's reclaim the joy of waiting, the peace of repentance, and the wonder of a God who loves us so much that He came as a baby to dwell among us.

Come, Lord Jesus. We are waiting.



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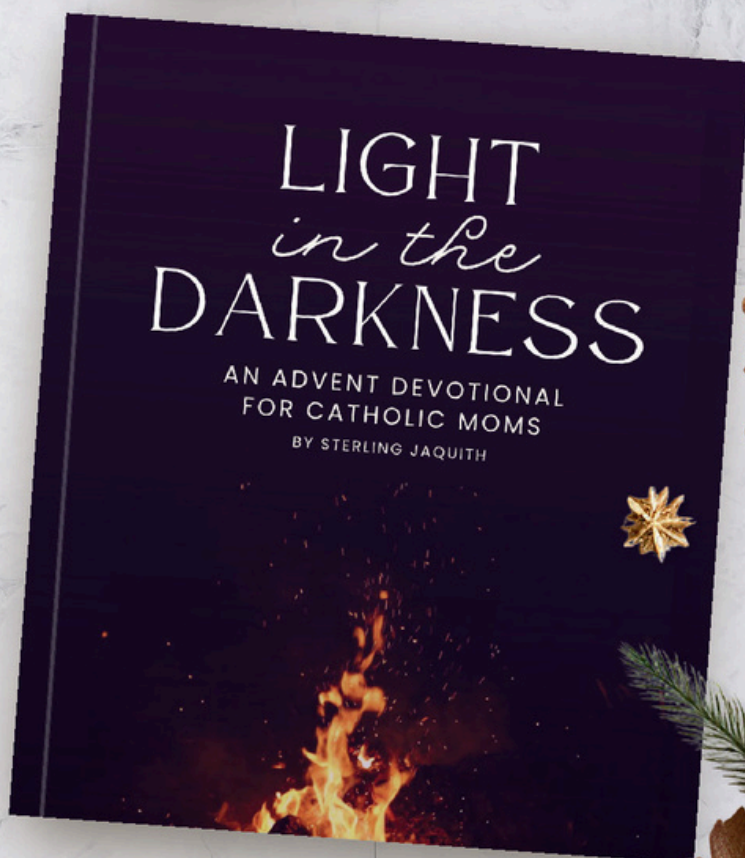
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your joy, your compassion.

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and all creation celebrate
your presence among us
through pain and happiness,
where there is need
and where there is plenty.

We ask this in the name of Jesus,
Child of the crib and Prince of peace.
Amen.



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Let us go, then, to Bethlehem

to see this thing that has taken place, which
the Lord has made known to us. So they went
in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the
infant lying in the manger.

Luke 2:15-16

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THE STABLE WAS ENOUGH, AND YOUR HOME IS TOO

By Kylie Hein

I can practically taste the chocolate chip cookies that never made it to the table that day. I can envision the way they would have warmed my tongue as the chocolate, with just a hint of saltiness, led from a single bite to bliss until I couldn't resist another. And yet, that day, it wasn't meant to be.

The perfect cookies, the perfect home, the perfect family didn't exist. Instead, that day became yet another failure — another lie that I wasn't good enough. And it began with something as simple as lumpy brown sugar. A place where I allowed the enemy's lie to creep in and take hold of my heart.

What I longed for that fateful Saturday before Thanksgiving, at the age of twenty-three, was rest. Distraction from my heavy workload and mental exhaustion. I wanted respite.

Instead, I was swept back into the chaotic pattern of preparing for guests at my parents' home — a home not clean enough, a kitchen missing ingredients, and a heart full of bitterness.

Had I known it was the last day I would ever spend with my mother, perhaps I would have shown up differently. I would have been more kind. More helpful. Less focused on my ideal, and more present to the gift of the moment. But that's the struggle, isn't it?

These are some reminders I've held onto since then — and ones that might help reframe this season for you, too:

- **It will never be perfect, but it can be peaceful.** Peace isn't found in flawless cookies or spotless homes; it's found in Christ's presence and the people in front of you.
- **When you surround someone with love, they care less about your surroundings.** The Wise Men came to visit the Holy Family in the stable. They came for the Child — not the food, not the environment, not the gifts.
- **Perfection is a trap, presence is a gift.** When the "shoulds" pile up, pause. Ask: *What's driving my fear — others' opinions, or the Lord?*

When people come to your home this Christmas, they come for you. And if they don't, that's something for them to work out, not you. When I think back on that last day with my mom, I wish I had let go of perfect sooner — not for the cookies, but for her. Presence is what lasts.

So set down the chase for perfect. Be present. Because Emmanuel — God with us — didn't come to a flawless palace. He came to a humble stable. And in that place, the Word became flesh. The stable was enough. Your home is too.

Kylie Hein is a Catholic coach, speaker, and host of the **Persistence in Prayer Podcast**. She helps women find peace in the midst of overwhelm by rooting their lives in prayer and presence. Kylie and her husband are raising two kids (and cows!) in small-town Nebraska. Learn more at www.kyliemhein.com.







SAINT NICHOLAS

FEAST DAY: DECEMBER 6



Saint Nicholas was born almost 1700 years ago into a very wealthy Greek family. Sadly, his parents passed away when Nicholas was a young boy, so he went to live with his uncle.

Nicholas' uncle was a very kind man who used the Bible to teach Nicholas all about Jesus. Nicholas grew to love Jesus very much, and wanted to be just like Him! Since his family had been very wealthy, Nicholas decided to use that money to help those in need. He especially loved helping children.



Nicholas remembered a lesson he learned in the Bible. Jesus said:

"...WHEN YOU GIVE ALMS, DO NOT LET YOUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT IS DOING, SO THAT YOUR ALMSGIVING MAY BE SECRET."

Matthew 6:3-4

Inspired by these words, Nicholas would sneak around when giving to the poor so no one would know where the money came from.



Look carefully at the town below. Can you spot the 5 sneaky St. Nicks?

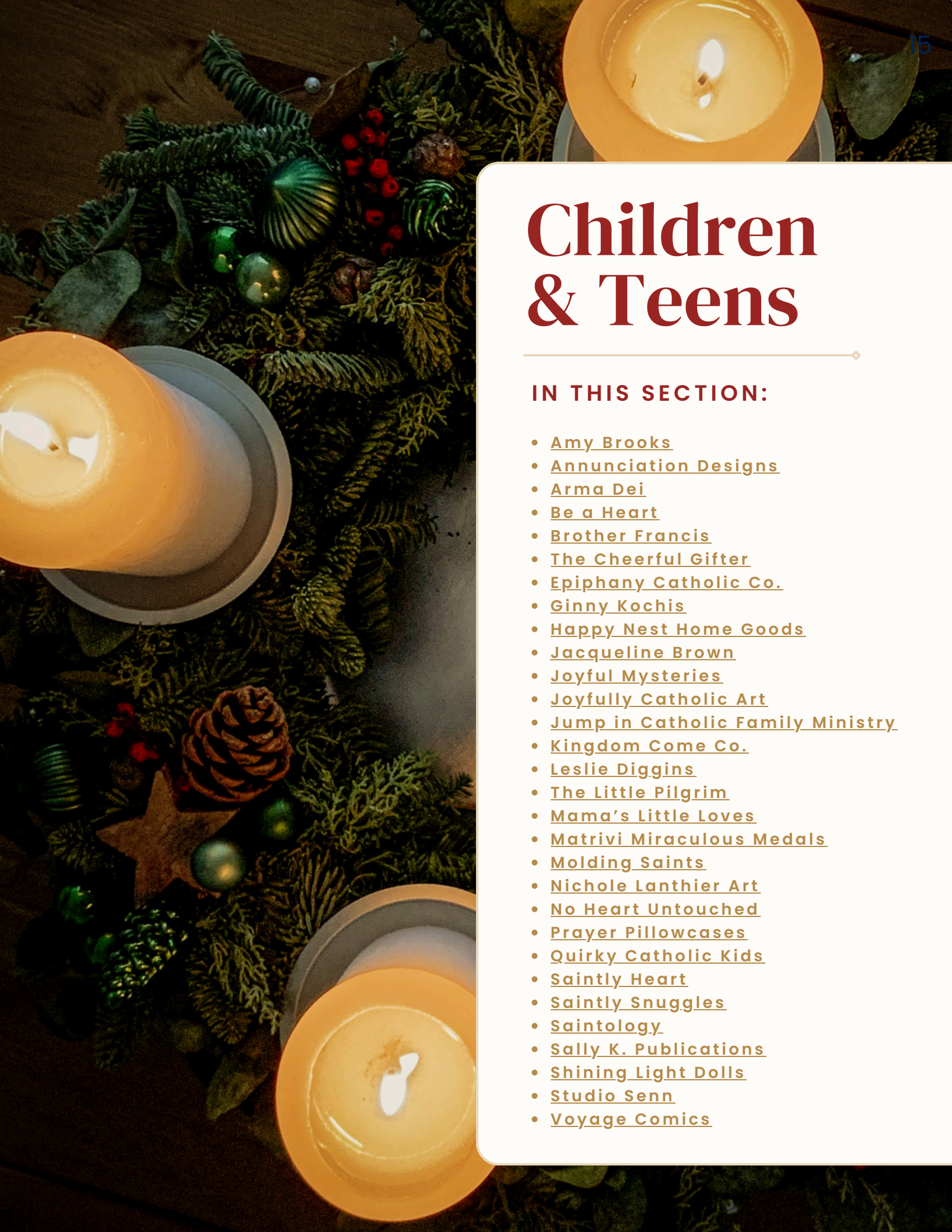


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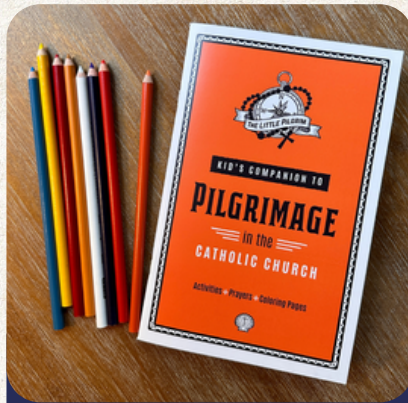




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Pope Francis



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St. Alphonsus Liguori



BLACK FRIDAY, VELOCIRAPTORS, AND CHRISTMAS PEACE:

A Guide for Neurodivergent Families

By Ginny Kochis

If you're raising a house full of quirky, out-of-the-box children, chances are you function better on routine. Unfortunately, that's not what *The Holiday Season* is, especially when we're talking about society's version: the one that stocks shelves with decorations in late July.

Society's *Holiday Season* is sugar (oh my, is it sugar....). It's activity and change. It's early mornings and late nights; large festive gatherings and overstimulation. By the time your Thanksgiving's been run over by Black Friday-focused reindeer, you're enmeshed in meltdowns over how things should go, or the way they should have gone, or the reality that no, you cannot procure a genetically engineered velociraptor by Christmas.

You and your kids are out of sorts, drowning in a sensory-unfriendly executive function nightmare.

Fortunately, my friend, all is not lost. You can thrive this Advent and Christmas season with some of my top tips for Catholic families raising neurodivergent kids.

Say no to the pre-season chaos

You can thoughtfully decline the cookie exchange, the Jesse Tree swap, the neighborhood caroling, and the block party. You don't have to, of course, but I've found the less busy we are, the better. Neurodivergent kids need sleep. They need downtime. And as their parents, so do you.

Keep the rhythm

This season will have its interruptions. Things will be different, and that's okay. What matters most is the daily safety net of typical behaviors and activities woven into the fabric of your home life. Keeping that rhythm amidst the glitter and baubles facilitates executive functioning, sensory processing, and emotional regulation across the board.

Be proactive, not reactive

Preparation is a neurodivergent family's best friend. Rigid thinking, difficulty with transitions, and general anxiety over the unknown can make life more difficult to bear. Talk about situations and circumstances before you leave the house. Review where you are going, what the environment will be like, and the type of behavior expected. You will help your children develop realistic expectations that are less likely to break from the reality of a situation, as well as offer your children an opportunity to put coping mechanisms in place.

Have a backup plan

You can't stay home forever, and sometimes, there are events you just can't skip. Art supplies, books, puzzles, busy bags: have readily available anything that will give your kids an outlet. Sensory-soothing tools are great, from headphones, stuffed animals, and blankets to silly putty, Play-Doh, gum, and fidget tools.

Be up front with friends and family

Most of your friends and family members recognize your children's needs. Still, gentle reminders can be helpful for holiday gatherings. That way, your selective eater won't be hounded to *just try it!*, or your overwhelmed, needs-a-break kiddo won't be dragged back into the fray.

Live liturgically, your way

Your quirky, neurodivergent family is unique and unrepeatable, and your liturgical living efforts should be, too. Do what works for your crew, not what works for that family on Insta. And if you want something gentle, flexible, and meaningful for your Advent, check out my [Works of Mercy Advent Calendar](#).

Skip Mass on Christmas Eve

Especially if it's a hot, standing-room-only mess. I don't know about you, but I don't enjoy celebrating the birth of Christ packed in like sardines and regulating sensory-sensitive kiddos. We switched to Mass on Christmas morning years ago. It's quiet, peaceful, and everything we want our Christmas to be.

So, yeah. Cultural Christmas is out there, but it doesn't have to throw your family for a loop. Take a big, deep breath, be prepared, but don't fret the commercial expectations. Just rest in the coming of our newborn Savior and the beauty of your unique and unrepeatable family.

Ginny Kochis is an author, educator, and neurodivergent parent coach. She founded Quirky Catholic Kids (formerly Not So Formulaic) in 2017 as a resource for Catholic moms raising neurodivergent children. Drawing on nearly two decades of parenting her own bright, quirky kids and twenty-five years of educating teens of all ability levels, Ginny provides practical support and prayerful encouragement for out-of-the-box families. She loves the beach, is terrible at dusting, and lives in Northern Virginia with her family.



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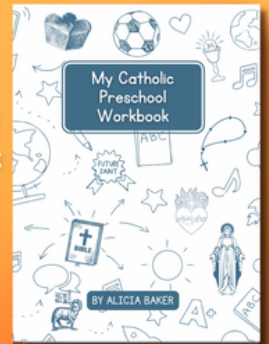


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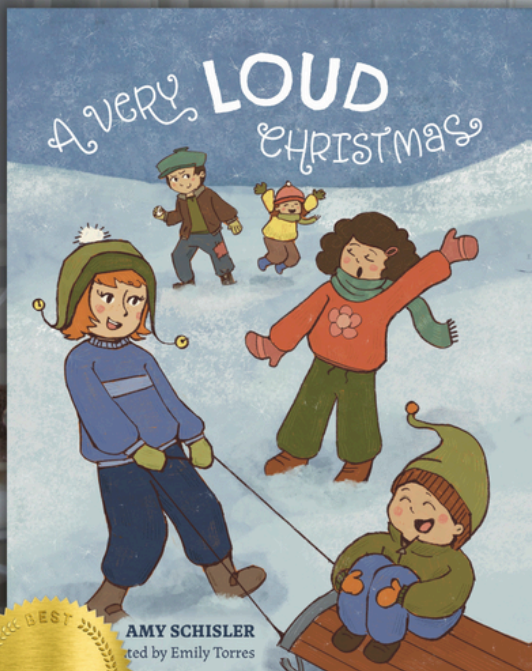
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G.K. Chesterton



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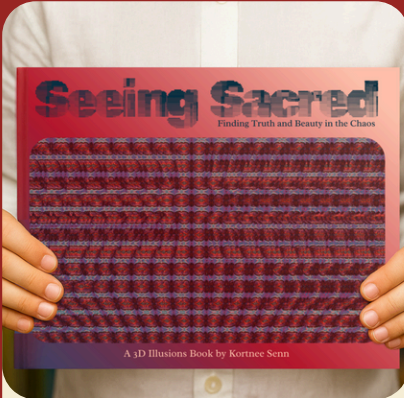
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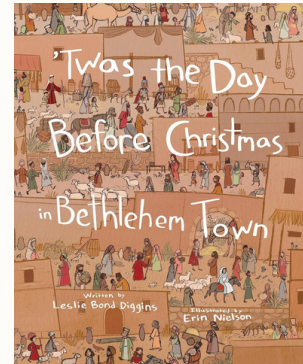
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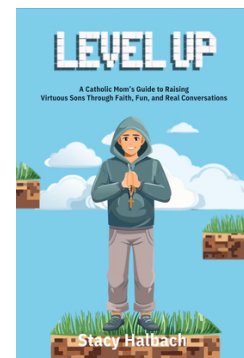
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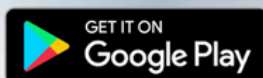
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CATHOLIC COOKIE EXCHANGE

by Amy Brooks

Do you like to bake cookies before Christmas Day? Do you love all the festive gatherings that happen in December? If so, you might want to embrace this fun Catholic Cookie Exchange idea.

If you are planning on giving cookies to neighbors or getting together with friends to swap delicious homemade cookies, put a Catholic spin on it! Here are some cookies that are not only delicious, but also remind us of holy Saints and the reason for the season!

Bringing faith into your fun events with friends is what Prayer Wine Chocolate is all about! Visit PrayerWineChocolate.com for more ideas and inspiration!



Little Flower Spritz Cookies

Spritz Cookies are popular around the Christmas cookie baking kitchen, so use the cookie press to make flower cookies and name them after Saint Therese', the Little Flower! Here is a **Spritz Cookie Recipe**

North Star Cookies

You can make your (North) star cookies one of two ways. Make them using the cookie press (more Spritz Cookies) or you could use a cookie cutter and make them sugar cookies.

Cabrini Pizzelle's

Classic Italian cookie, a little title tribute to an Italian immigrant who is also a great Saint. According to biscuitpeople.com, "Pizzelles are the oldest known cookie and originated in the mid-section of Italy. They were made for the "Feast Day of San Domenico" in the village of Cocullo. This village in Taly was once overrun with snakes, and they were chased out. Afterwards the village celebrated with pizzelle!" Here is a recipe: **Pizzelle Recipe**

If you are hosting a Catholic Cookie Exchange party, challenge friends to bring a "Saint Inspired Cookie Plate"!

Like the idea of combining faith and friendship? Follow Prayer Wine Chocolate on Instagram!

Saint Hildegard Cookies of Joy!

This recipe was actually written by Saint Hildegard herself! According to Saint Hildegard, the cookies "calm all bitterness of the heart and mind, open your heart and impaired senses, and make your mind cheerful"! Here is a good recipe that includes Use Spelt flour to keep the recipe more historically accurate: **Recipe for Cookies of Joy**

Saint Zelig Linzer Cookies

When I look at Linzer Cookies, I think of lace. When I think of lace, I think of Saint Zelig, the lacemaker! If you don't already have a Linzer Cookie recipe, **here's one!**

Saint Carlo Acutis Chocolate Hazelnut Thumbprint Cookies

Carlo Acutis loved Hazelnut! This newly canonized millennial saint is certainly leaving his mark on our Church, so this is the perfect way to dedicate a traditional Christmas cookie to him. Here is a Thumbprint cookie recipe: **Chocolate Hazelnut Thumbprint Cookies**





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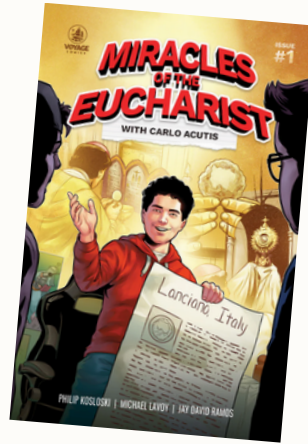
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Hi, I'm Rose.

So many Catholic women tell me:

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How Do I Offer My Grief To Christ This Advent

By Nichole Haugen

How do I know if I am offering my suffering/grief to Jesus?

If you are like me you were told to offer it up a lot as a child. I took this to mean that I should suck it up. That I should stop complaining. That my feelings and what I was struggling with wasn't important.

As I have grown and matured in my faith I find myself at times wondering if I am offering up my suffering the *right way*. Am I surrendering my grief completely? I hear quite often that 'God loves us and will never give us more than we can handle'. But my broken human heart struggles to grasp that.

Life is painful. There are ways every single day that I feel cracked and broken. This can be in little cuts like my children complaining about the food that I serve, to big cuts like lies in my marriage and my parents dying 4 months apart. These cuts are ways that the devil starts to sneak into our hearts. He is able to take our hurt and pain and turn them into lies that we start to believe are truths about our identity.

So how do we offer it up?

For me the difference between offer it up vs. suck it up is a feeling. When I think of sucking it up, I feel rejected, hurt, lonely, and miserable. When I think of offering my pain and hurt to Jesus so he can hold and mend me, I feel peace, calm, and free. So really the main difference is trying to go it alone vs. asking Jesus for help.

This is not always easy. The past month I have been in a very big grief spiral. Life felt hard and heavy. I didn't want to pray. I didn't want to bring it to Jesus. I already felt rejected by him and how he allowed this to happen. I certainly didn't want to bring more to him only to be rejected even more.

Then it clicked. That was the lie that the devil was not only feeding me, but that I was believing whole heartedly. The lie that Jesus wants me to suffer. The lie that Jesus wants me to be alone in my suffering.

Sometimes Jesus wants us to flip over tables and have an outward action to stand up against the injustice that has been done. Other times Jesus wants us to have, what feels like a more passive action, of offering our suffering up to him. Both of those are choices. Both of those are actions.

We tend to believe that the action of offering up our suffering is not as beneficial. It's quiet. No one knows we are doing this. We also get caught up in the belief that we need to stand up for every injustice. This leads us down the path of complaining, not praying, and feeling like a victim.

So how do we know which path to choose? I know that this starts by asking Jesus. I know that this calls for me to die unto myself and not believe that I have to do everything alone. I am working on the belief that the quiet offering is the most powerful action of all.

This Advent, remember that his mercy is ever outpouring. Even when we don't show up perfectly. *Especially*, when we don't show up perfectly. Do not lose hope in the heaviness of grief. Let us invite Jesus into all parts of our heart, so that we may be healed.

If you are grieving and feel alone, I invite you to my Catholic grief group. Grief is unpredictable. Some days feel gentle. Others feel like you can't breathe. While the world is rushing on you are left wondering; how do I keep going when my heart is still broken? Where is God in this pain? Is it even possible to feel peace again?

The next cohort starts November 7th. We meet weekly for six weeks to focus on the 3 pillars that help you in your grief. The rosary, reflection, and self regulation. Join us at www.catholicgriefcoach.com

Everyday Catholic

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SECTION SPONSOR



by Kristine Bruce



The Prodigal AT THE MANGER

Every Christmas my heart pulls me back to Bethlehem. I don't know about you, but no matter how many years go by, the Nativity scene still stirs something in me. I imagine kneeling with Mary and Joseph, gazing at the Baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, and hearing the angels sing in the night sky.

One thing that amazes me is who God gathered there. Shepherds left their flocks and ran to see. Wise men crossed deserts and mountains, chasing a mysterious star. Even the animals leaned in close, as if creation itself knew something extraordinary was happening.

It says something, doesn't it? The manger is not a private place. It's an open invitation. Everyone belongs there: the poor and the wealthy, the local and the foreigner, the simple and the wise. God did not come with walls. He came with open arms.

But here's the thing. For some of us, Christmas also stirs a deep ache. The song says "all is calm, all is bright," yet at our tables there may be an empty chair. A son or daughter who no longer attends Mass. A friend who has drifted away. Maybe even a spouse or sibling whose faith feels cold. That absence seems to weigh more heavily during this season of joy.

Yet the manger whispers hope. If God could draw shepherds out of their fields and Magi across deserts, He can draw our loved ones too. I sometimes picture them, even if they feel far from God right now, standing quietly in the stable. They linger in the shadows, hesitant and unsure, yet still within reach of the Child's gaze and the warmth of His love. I believe that in time, that gentle love will draw them closer to the manger itself.

This year, when you pause before the crèche at church or at home, consider bringing not only your own prayers but also the names of those who are far away. Imagine placing them right there in the straw beside the Child. He sees them. He loves them. He is already working in ways we cannot always see.

If your own faith feels steady this year, Christmas is still your chance to widen your heart. Because truly, every Catholic knows someone who is searching. Every parish has prodigals. What if we all prayed for them at the manger this Christmas? Imagine what that would do!

The wonder of Christmas is not only that God came into the world, but that He came for everyone. No heart is too far. No darkness too deep. Love Himself has come close, and He never gives up.



A Christmas Prayer at the Manger

*Jesus, here I am
in the stable with You.
I see Your sweet face,
and I feel the warmth
of Your love.
Today I bring to you my loved
ones who feel far away.
They linger in the shadows,
unsure if they belong,
but I know You see them,
and You welcome them.
Draw them close, Lord.
Let the light of Your face
rest upon them.
Soften my own heart to love
them as You do: with mercy,
with compassion,
with forgiveness.
Teach me to wait
with patience,
to believe with hope,
and to endure with trust
in Your plan.
Stay with us, Emmanuel.
We need You.
Amen.*

Kristine Bruce created
www.PrayingForOurProdigals.com
to be a place of hope and
community for Catholics praying for
loved ones. Through weekly
reflections and resources, she helps
families find strength in prayer, peace
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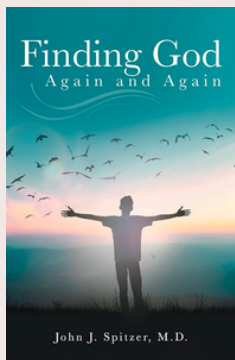


Irish Home Blessing

God bless the corners of this house, and be the lintel blest,
And bless the hearth and bless the board, and bless each place of rest,
And bless each door that opens wide to stranger as to kin,
And bless each crystal window pane that lets the starlight in,
And bless the roof-tree overhead and every sturdy wall.
The peace of man, the peace of God, the peace of love on all.
Amen.

"A man of prayer is capable of everything."

St. Vincent de Paul



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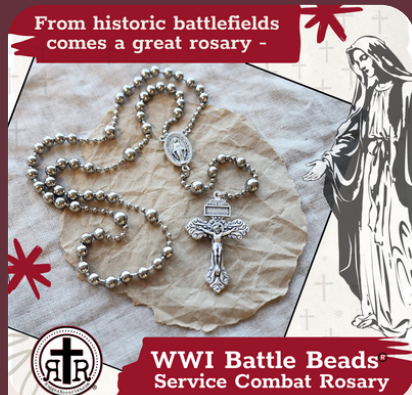
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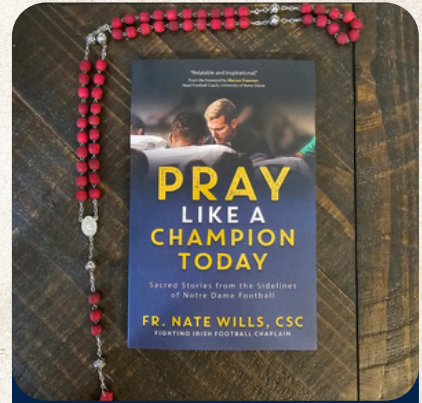
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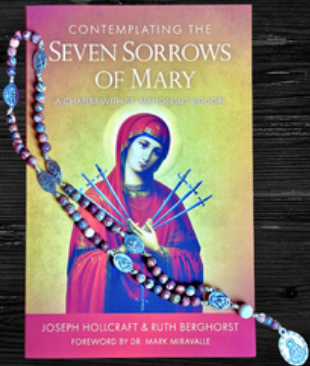
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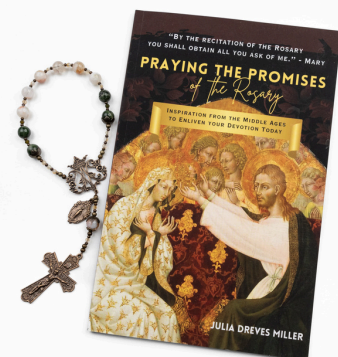
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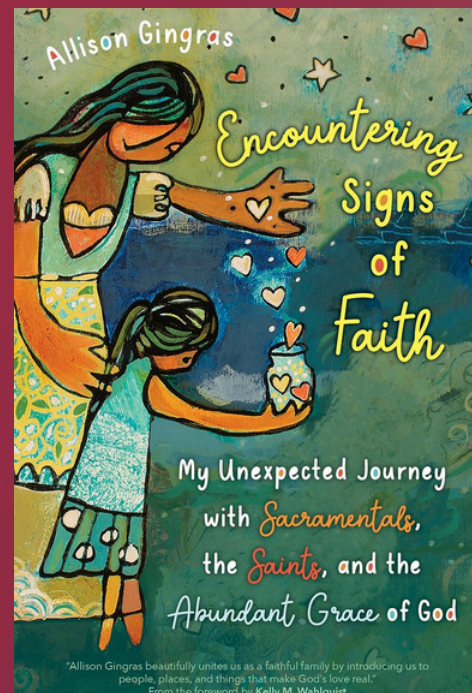
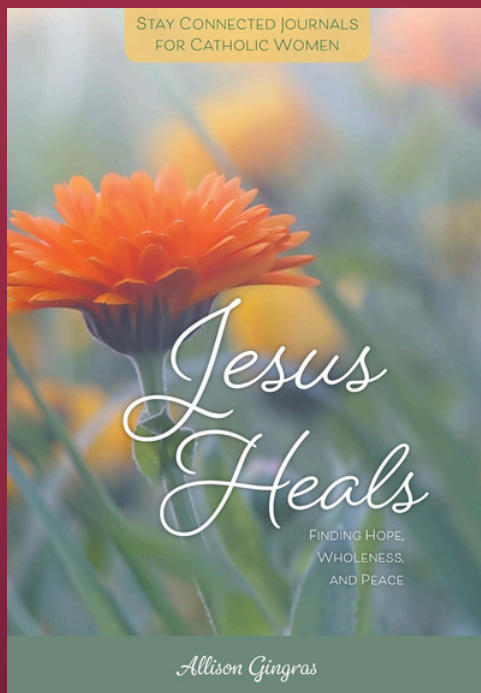
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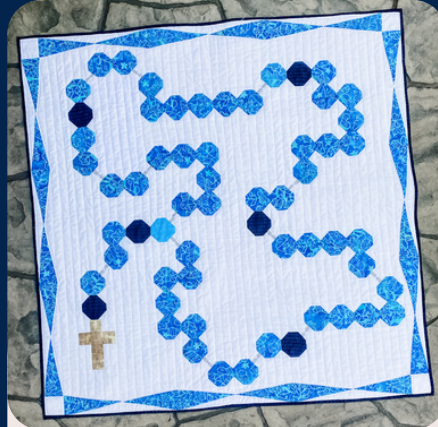
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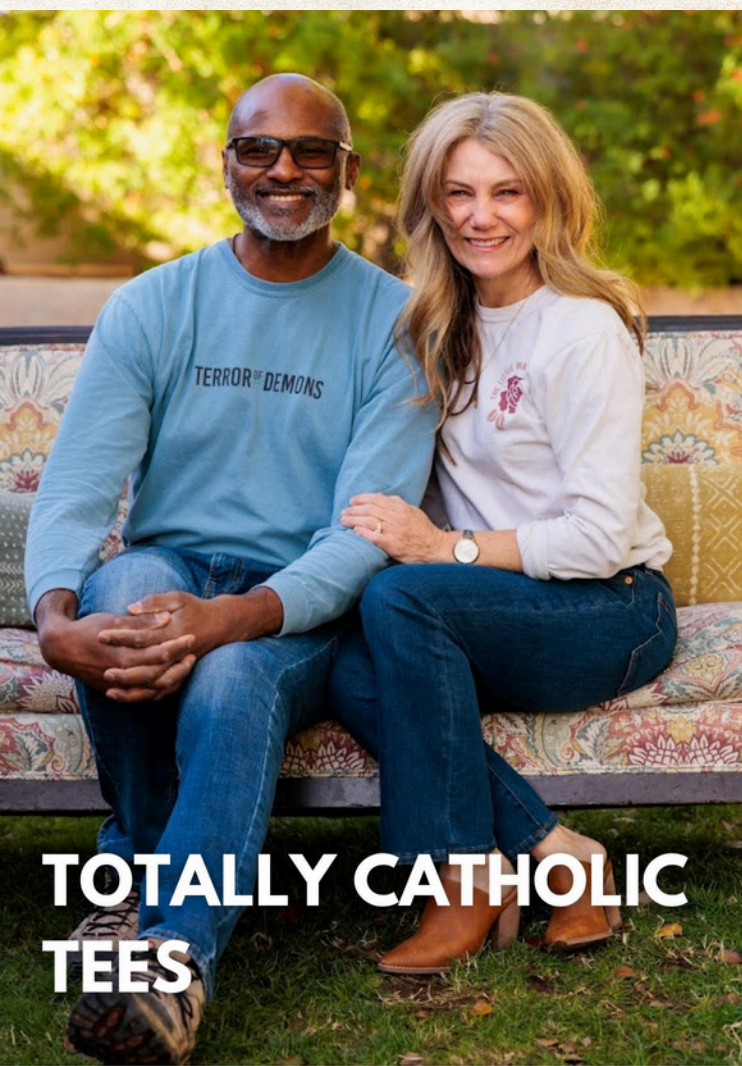
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"I AM NOT ASHAMED TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL"



THE GIFT OF NO

by Sterling Jaquith
CatholicMomCalm.com



I want to give you a gift I've been giving Catholic women since 2016, when I wrote a book about how to Advent without losing your mind – the permission to say no.

You can say no to Zoolights if it's dark and your 4-year-old needs to be in bed. You can skip holiday parties you don't want to attend. You can give all grandparents the same gift. I make a photobook. Everyone gets a copy. You can put up your tree the day after Thanksgiving or wait until Christmas Eve. There is no holiday decoration police.

You do not need to participate in all the saint days, recitals, cookie exchanges, or anything that takes your heart so far from Jesus that you are stressed. I still have special moments with my six kids in November and December, but I don't lose my peace trying to create them.

When you die, Jesus will not ask you about the activities of the holiday season 2025. He will ask you about peace, love, and how much you trusted Him. Your kids want a peaceful mom more than they want to keep up with the Joneses' social calendar. That influencer mom, it's her job to celebrate feast days, take pictures, and post them online. Do not feel guilty for not doing all the things.

Write down what you did last year, and what you might do this year. Ask the Holy Spirit to come down and guide you. Circle the ones that truly bring you joy. Say no, thank you to the ones that cause stress or imprudent spending. Choose Christ and choose peace.

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