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# MUSINGS OF THE ORDINARY

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When the Celtic Christian monks evangelised pagan tribes and countries, rather than expunging pagan festivals from the life of the new Christian communities, they 'christianised' them. They gave the festivals new meaning and used them as teaching vehicles in their evangelistic outreach.

Our current liberal atheistic culture is reversing the process. Christian festivals are being paganized, cut off from their Christian meaning and offered to the god of consumerism. Valentine's Day, Shrove Tuesday, St Patrick's Day and Halloween are examples of this trend. The anticipation of Good Friday by marketing 'fruit buns with a cross on' is another example, but pales alongside the anticipation of Christmas which begins in September. The usurping of these festivals is part of the atheistic campaign to destroy or totally neutralise the Christian Faith in the world.

Sadly, some Christians have colluded with this de-Christianisation process, deluding themselves that they are trying to counter the attack, when in fact they are diluting the Christian faith and so exacerbating its demise.

Church 'Pancake Nights' may be good fellowship times, but often the numbers at Mass on Ash Wednesday are but a fraction of the previous evening's attenders.

One notable casualty in the de-Christianisation process is the virtual disappearance of the season of Advent in anything by name.

In order to "Put Christ back into Christmas,' Christians place Christmas cribs in church on Advent Sunday and gradually fill them with animals and shepherds over the four weeks of Advent, until the Christ child arrives on Christmas eve. There are endless variations on this theme, some of which border on the ridiculous. The gospels describe the nativity of Jesus as an emergency rather than a carefully planned affair. The presence of Christmas trees and singing Christmas carols in church well before the feast of the nativity has the effect of turning the Season of Advent into nothing more than a 'warm up' period before the main event. The liturgical colour used in Advent may well be penitential purple, but the anticipatory atmosphere of celebration turns it into a period of focus on Love, Joy, Hope and Peace rather than its previous focus on Heaven, Hell, Death and Judgement.

Advent has ceased to breathe with its two lungs of the First and Second coming of Christ and so is a shadow of what the Church intends it to be.

It is the season when we reflect on our salvation history and how God interacts with his people on this continuing journey until Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead

before the Heavenly Banquet. If we only focus on the first coming of Christ in Bethlehem we are in danger of falling into the heresy of regarding Jesus to be only a human being through whom God gave us some good advice about the importance of loving each other. If that is true, then Advent really is simply a preparation period for a celebratory party and the world has got it right because there will be no second coming of Jesus.

If the Church has got it right, and Jesus is true God and true Man through whom heaven and earth have been reconciled, then Advent is a time we recall the story leading to his birth and a call to review how we live and exercise our discipleship in this 'in-between' period before the Last Judgement.

If we want to 'Christianise' Christmas, then we must restore Advent to what it is meant to be. We know that the Patriarchs, Prophets, John the Baptist and Our Lady are part of our salvation story and they trusted God without fully knowing how our salvation would be achieved.

Advent should be the season when we journey with them, listening to their voices of trust and hope. We should listen to their call for us to change direction in our lives as we are led to the expectations expressed in the words of the hymn 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,' which are voices calling for Jesus to return in glory.

If Advent is to be truly Christian we should avoid placing Christmas symbols in our churches no sooner than Advent 4. Without these distractions we are more likely to hear the still small voice of God born in Bethlehem, proclaimed by Jesus in his ministry, in his dying breath on the Cross, in triumph on Easter Day and in his promise to be with us until he returns again in judgement.

***In Christ***

***Monsignor Harry***



If we wish to really celebrate Christmas then we must ensure Advent is what it is meant to be.



Pope John Paul II in his address on Dec. 18, 2002 said, "*The liturgy of Advent...helps us to understand fully the value and meaning of the mystery of Christmas. It is not just about commemorating the historical event, which occurred some 2,000 years ago in a little village of Judea. Instead, it is necessary to understand that the whole of our life must be an 'advent,' a vigilant awaiting of the final coming of Christ. To predispose our mind to welcome the Lord who, as we say in the Creed, one day will come to judge the living and the dead, we must learn to recognise him as present in the events of daily life. Therefore, Advent is, so to speak, an intense training that directs us decisively toward him who already came, who will come, and who comes continuously.*"