



Advent is, above all else, a season of hope – a virtue that is all too rare in our world. To live as a person of hope is to behave in such a manner as to draw suspicion that we are behaving somewhat erratically as far as worldly norms go. This new type of behavior – what some may even call erratic behavior (the behavior that led people to conclude that the Apostles were “under the influence” on Pentecost) – is characterized by nine attitudes.

Practicing Selflessness

- 1.** The first step in practicing selflessness is to offer gratitude: you have everything you need! If you are thankful for what you have, you have taken the first step toward freeing yourself to think of what others need.
- 2.** Take inventory of the selfless things you are already doing ... not to pat yourself on the back, but to realize that God’s grace is already at work in you. Thank God for this grace and pray that it might multiply and enable you to practice selflessness without resentment.
- 3.** Express appreciation to those who show you selfless love.

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. (Mt 16:25)

1: UNINHIBITED SELFLESSNESS

Did you survive Black Friday? I hope so. Come with me now into a much safer and more loving “space” – Advent.

Advent is the antithesis of Black Friday.

Black Friday is all about scarcity, limited opportunities, and fear of missing out. It is about chaos and frenzy. It is about making sure you are first in line. Am I exaggerating? Everything about Black Friday screams “ME!!!”

Advent, on the other hand, offers the promise of abundance and hope. It is about calm and peace. It is about recognizing that it is, in fact, NOT about ME. Advent celebrates the dawn of an era – the coming of Jesus – marked by uninhibited selflessness: a new kind of love found in Jesus Christ.

The uninhibited love that flows in the Kingdom of God as a result of the coming of Christ is not just a warm and fuzzy, momentary feeling. It is an ongoing unselfish concern for the good of others. In fact, the better word here is charity which is kind of the love that God shows – a totally selfless love – which we are called to participate in. This kind of love involves sacrifice because it means putting our own needs on the back burner. The saints are legendary for their heroic acts of sacrifice, many of them quite dramatic. In less dramatic but no less heroic ways, ordinary people practice this kind of love day in and day out: parents setting aside their own needs to care for the needs of their children; spouses setting aside their own needs to care for one another; older siblings setting aside their own needs to tend to the needs of younger siblings; workers setting aside their own needs to tend to the needs of a customer or co-worker, and so on.

Above all things, this attitude of selflessness is the most noticeable attitude of Kingdom dwellers who are basking in the glow of the ultimate act of selflessness: God giving us his own Son: Emmanuel – God with us. So much so that Tertullian, a 2nd century Church Father, reported that the Romans often commented when observing Christians, “See how they love one another.” This doesn’t mean that the early Christians “love-bombed” one another with hugs and expressions of affection (although such displays were common) but rather, that they were known to consistently and without inhibition act, not in their own interests, but in the interests of others.

The only thing that Black Friday and Advent have in common is that they both emphasize saving: the former is about saving money while the latter is about Jesus saving us! It is the presence of Emmanuel – God-with-us – and the overflowing abundant grace that has busted down the door of sin that has ushered in an era of unbridled selflessness to effectively save us from ourselves!



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2: LIGHTNESS OF BEING

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Practicing a Lightness of Being

1. Who do you know personally that can light up a room? How does he/she do it and how can you imitate that and authentically incorporate it into your personality?
2. Take a moment before each opportunity you have to interact with people and ask for the grace to bring joy to that interaction.
3. Identify 3 things you can do on a regular, daily basis to maintain and “feed” your spirit of joy, whether it be a daily prayer routine, a walk outside, an exercise routine, time spent with someone who lightens your mood, time before the Blessed Sacrament, or any other way you can think.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Phil 4:4)



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I’m no papal scholar or historian but I’m willing to bet that Pope Francis is the first Pope to use the word “sourpuss” in an Apostolic Exhortation!

Gotta love this guy.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis says that, “One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “sourpusses”.” (85)

In other words, he’s telling us NOT to be a “Debbie Downer” – a favorite character from recent years of Saturday Night Live.

Christians are called to spread joy. Which brings us to Advent Attitude #2: A Tendency toward a lightness of being; not flippancy, but the ability to brighten up a room.

Happiness and joy are not the same thing. Followers of Jesus are not people who put on rose-colored glasses and sing, “Don’t worry. Be happy!” No, we are filled with joy which is no flippant, fleeting, feeling of euphoria (say *that* fast 3 times!). This joy is a deep-down gladness that is abiding – it is an inner peace and serenity that flows from being secure in God’s love. And nothing makes us more joyful and secure than the knowledge that God is with us – Emmanuel!

As a result, joy is capable of withstanding anything that life tosses its way, even suffering. Joy is at the very heart of the Kingdom of God. If we are inviting someone to consider relocating to the Kingdom of God, we had better show them joy. In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster emphasizes the need for joy in the Christian life because “it is an occupational hazard of devout folk to become stuffy bores. They should not be. Of all people, we should be the most free, alive, interesting. Celebration adds a note of festivity and hilarity to our lives.” While joy may not always be expressed in smiles and laughter (although those are major manifestations of joy), it is most definitely characterized by a lack of cynicism and negativity.

Joy leaves no room for despair. In one of his homilies at morning Mass, Pope Francis insisted that “long faces cannot proclaim Jesus. Joy alone and praise of God are the only way to advance the Gospel.” (May 31, 2013). This is precisely why it is no coincidence that there are more feast days than fast days in the Christian calendar – joy trumps sorrow!

So, this Advent, make sure that when you enter a room or join in a conversation, things brighten up just a notch!