From the Pastor's Desk

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul."

Each week I wanted to write a note of **Thanks**, but I waited to the end of my column and either didn't remember or didn't have space; so I am going to write it first before I think about Advent. The anniversary party you all threw for me was an absolute shock! When I stepped in the door, my first thought was "Oh my gosh, what did I forget?" Of course, the same instant that I'm having this thought, you're shouting "Surprise!" My next thought was, "what did I do?" (It was very clever of you to hold off the party so I would not suspect a thing.) Anyway, what I mean to say is "**Thank you.**" Thank you very much! It is an absolute joy and a privilege to serve as pastor of both parishes. May God bless you powerfully for accepting and putting up with me. I may not be the most organized or efficient pastor, but I could not love you more. God has been so good to me and so have you. Thanks for the love and the memories.

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Can we have a Spiritual Advent
By Fr. Martin Pable, OFM Cap.

Advent is the most countercultural season of all for Christians. The whole secular world is bent on buying-and-selling, partying, rushing around, and worrying. Psychiatrists say this time of year is the most stressful of all. People worry about what kind of decorations to put up. They're afraid of feeling guilty if the gifts they give are not as good as the ones they receive. Or if they invite some people but not others. Isn't it ironic? We have so much fear and guilt over the birth of the One who came to take away our fear and guilt!

So the Church offers us a whole other way to move through this season. What are the great symbols of Advent?

Quiet — as opposed to noise. What if each person or family would take fifteen minutes a day to stop talking, turn off the radio and TV (computer), read a brief passage from the Bible or a spiritual book and then just spend some time in quiet reflection and prayer?

Darkness — December is the darkest month of the year. It reminds us of the darkness and cold of the world without Jesus Christ. That's why we love to turn off lights, light candles and make Advent wreaths. It should be easy to do that at the evening meal.

Fasting — opposed to stuffing. When we don't open that box of candy or give up dessert once in a while, we remind ourselves that we have those deeper, spiritual hungers that only the Lord Jesus can fill.

Waiting — as opposed to rushing around. It's so easy to practice impatience during Advent. It seems we have to wait longer than ever. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could redeem those moments? If we could start a cheerful conversation with the people in line, offer to help someone struggling with packages, say a quiet prayer for the people in the cars around us?

After all, the Lord we are waiting for is already present in the people we are waiting with. And the whole purpose of his coming is to make us more peaceful and more loving.

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I encourage each family to create a simple Advent wreath for your home. It could be something as simple as a branch off a cedar tree with four small candles, or even just the four candles. This could provide a wonderful invitation (lighting candles) to a few minutes of family prayer, perhaps before supper or bedtime. ———

St. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians would be good to keep in mind during the busyness of the season. *"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all."* When we are too busy, it can help to think of why we are doing what we are doing and of the love we have that prompts all that doing.

Fr. Bob
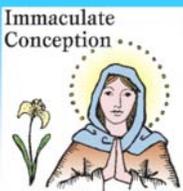
The **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, on Saturday, Dec. 8th, is a Holy Day of Obligation, celebrating Mary being conceived free from sin in St. Anne's womb.
Mass times: Friday, December 7th, 6:00 PM at St. Francis
Saturday, December 8th, 8:30 AM at St. Stephen
*Going to regular mass on Saturday evening (4:00 or 6:30 PM) **DOES NOT** satisfy this Obligation.*

Immaculate
Conception