Pastor's Pen: Advent 2025: I Was Too Busy

Over the course of 30 years of service to Christ and His Church, I have countless occasions to go to skilled care facilities and hospitals. Many times I will hear from staff or from the patient how their family never visits or calls. Most of the time, despite the fact that they are deeply wounded at being shoved aside or forgotten, they will make excuses for their children and grandchildren. Now, I know sometimes that abandonment comes as a result of a poor family life, but sometimes the parents did all they could within the means they had. The most common excuse: they love me, but they have their own lives and are too busy. It cuts my heart every time I hear that. I will notice many times (not every time) that the lack of time they had for their loved one does not transfer to the time they will spend fighting over whatever estate might be left behind. Many, though, will acknowledge their neglect, but after it is far too late.

It is the human condition. It certainly is the dominant condition in this society. We are a society geared not just to consumption, but to overconsumption. In such a society, we are so programmed from an early age to equate happiness with possessions and the accrual of possessions, that the pursuit supplants all other endeavors. Our families suffer the consequences. Our parishes suffer the consequences. When the pursuit of money and what it can buy becomes the main goal, all other relationships suffer for it.

We have entered what has become the high holy days of our over consuming society, ironically they are high holy days for the Church as well, but for a completely different reason. Our preparation for the secular high holy day of Christmas is all consuming and happiness is equated with just how much of a haul there is sitting under the Christmas tree. We spend hours shopping, wrapping, decorating, cooking, partying, and other things in our celebration of the earthly celebration of overconsumption. Consequently, and ironically, the reason Christmas exists at all, is eclipsed and reduced and its preparation, which is of far greater consequence, is minimized if it is done at all.

However, it is the Word becoming Flesh that opens the door to the Kingdom of Heaven. This is our ultimate inheritance. But like a dysfunctional family, we minimize or ignore our Lord and His family but presume that we have been left a generous inheritance. Our excuse? More often than not: I am too busy. This usually means I have my own concerns to worry about. Whether it is the job, the duties, the secular obligations, and then the rest I take from such duties (TV, doom scrolling, addictive behaviors…) we simply don't have the time for prayer, worship, and our parish family, which all sound as dull as dust.

Of course, for all our pursuit of stuff, none of it quite satisfies. We even measure faith by the same measure; faith, worship, and prayer are meant for me…to make me feel thus or so. That it is directed as an act of love towards God is secondary. No wonder so

few find church boring. Even if they are physically present, their consumer mind never rests.

In last week's pastor's pen, I suggested a reset for Advent. It should be a time where we reconnect with what is truly lasting. Certainly, the readings of Advent beg us to do as much. To be ready, a theme we hear often, isn't just to mimic how we are ready for the secular holiday. For the secular holiday Christmas Day is the end of the holiday: the grand finale of the purpose of secular Christmas (the opening of gifts) is done and everything comes down. Life goes back to its dreary self. In preparing for the actual celebration of Christmas, it is the renewal of a covenant bond that we keep long after the Christmas Season ends (Baptism of the Lord…some keep it until Presentation of the Lord on Feb 2).

How do we prepare?

Consumption is replaced with generosity.

Our use of time is reordered to make daily space for prayer, time with our family, and growing faith. Time is taken to worship and build up the bonds with the parish family. I am not saying don't buy the gifts or decorate; I am saying don't let that eclipse the preparations for eternity.

Our attitudes change about what is truly important. I pointed out some time back, that I notice in obituaries, that the vast majority of the obituaries focus on the relationships the person had. If they belonged to a faith, that is there. Their careers are almost said in passing. Nowhere have I seen an index of the person's wealth, holdings, investments, or other matters financial. In death we recognize what is important. Shouldn't we in life?

I am pressing full steam ahead on actively destroying all vestiges of the parish as a business. WE ARE NOT A BUSINESS. Our baptisms are not the equivalent of getting a members only shopping card. God set up a family of faith in creating His people through the covenant bond of the Cross; He did not set up a multinational corporation with a franchise near us. As the spiritual dad of these places, I want to see each of us in the kingdom of heaven: I want each of us to share in the inheritance. But I know that our pursuit of overconsumption, especially at the cost of faith will jeopardize that. So, again, use this Advent as a time for a great reset. So much eternally hinges on it.