

Perhaps you've heard the story of the man in desperate need of powerful intercessory prayer. He pulled up to the closest church he could find and entered. He saw a priest, a Franciscan, and approached him with the request: "*Father, I'm really hoping to get a Tesla for Christmas. Could you please pray a novena for me?*" A look of confusion washed over the priest's face, then he asked, "*What's a Tesla?*"

Believing the Franciscan priest was not going to be of help, the man left and went to the next church he could find. He entered and found the priest, a Jesuit, and asked, "*Father, I'm really hoping to get a Tesla for Christmas. Could you please pray a novena for me?*" Equally confused, the priest then asked, "*What's a novena?*"

I remind you that a novena is a prayer that is offered over the course of nine days with a special intention in mind or in preparation for a great feast¹. Advent is more than nine days, but it's not so different. It's meant to be a period that offers us daily prayer and quiet meditation, as we prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming.

I say that, with full awareness of what this season is like for most of us. The Church calls this season Advent, but for the world around us it's the *Christmas rush*. If we are not vigilant and intentional in making it a season of prayer, Advent never happens.

Instead of quiet reflective hope, it becomes an all-guns-blazing stress-fest: a season of anxiety, filled to the brim with the myriad of things the Christmas rush demands: parties, gift buying, decorating, school events, writing cards, baking, travel and everything else. And everywhere we go, instead of giving us the quiet peace Advent calls us to, our senses are bombarded with flashing lights and Christmas tunes from the current crop of contemporary artists.

How on earth can we celebrate Advent, when the world around us doesn't have much of a clue or an interest to know what Advent is? The fact is, it will truly be Advent only if you have a plan. Christmas day will have spiritual meaning, only if you have a plan. *Do you have a plan?*

Today's first reading reminds us that God had a plan. The prophet Jeremiah says that God held a promise, to restore right-relationship with His people: "*I will raise up for David a just shoot*". In other words, from King David's family line, would come one who was to be the agent of that promise. We see the image of that promise passed through that family line, beginning with King David's father, Jesse, at the bottom of the image, and moving upward through the family tree, ending at the very top-center: the child held in the lap of the Blessed Virgin Mary. God had a plan.

But even more, God *has* a plan. Even beyond the event of Jesus' birth that we will re-live in this month, God has a plan for the end of our age, when Jesus—the Son of Man—will come again to usher in the next world. The birth of Jesus that we will soon celebrate, is really a step toward that: what's beyond the end of days.

And that's where we begin Advent: contemplating that we were made for another world, that world. C.S. Lewis once said it this way, "*Creatures are not born with desires unless something exists to satisfy those desires. A baby feels hunger: and so there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: so there is such a thing as water....So, if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy—and isn't that true of us?--the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world....I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same.*"⁴ⁱ

God has a plan for us, but we also need to have a plan. *Do you?* Jesus warns in today's Gospel, "*Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life...*" For us, that means, don't get too caught up in the Christmas rush, that you lose sight of what it's truly about.

Get your resources to help you make some moment in each day, a time of prayer, of quiet contemplation. Unburden your heart of whatever sin it bears through confession. Let us prepare our souls to welcome Jesus' when he is born to us, but let us also prepare our souls ultimately to welcome when he comes to usher in what is beyond the end of days.

ⁱ Fr. Joe Robinson, *Guiding Light: Centered in Christ*

ⁱⁱ *Mere Christianity*