



INVITING JESUS INTO OUR HOMES

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We recall the Gospel account of when the Holy Family could find no one to welcome them in the city of Bethlehem and were required to take shelter in a stable with the animals. It was here that the Son of God was born on Christmas Day.

In the life of every Catholic, we are called upon to bring the Gospel to life in our own lives. In our hearts and souls, we should have a place for God, so that we can say with St. Paul that Jesus lives within us. From deep within us Jesus inspires us to work with the Holy Ghost and renew the face of the earth – at least our little portion of this earth (our homes). Our homes may be humble and poor in material aspects, but there is no excuse for them to be spiritually poor. Even if our homes are as humble as an old stable, when God enters in it becomes Heaven here on earth.

In homes where children live or frequently visit, we should make sure to inspire them with the spirit of Advent and Christmas. These little souls are most precious to Jesus and the best gift we can offer to Him on His Birthday is holy and innocent little souls sincerely loving Him. Of these is the Kingdom of Heaven made. We, too, must ever strive to become like these loving children.

The season of Advent is often impressed upon children as a burden or cross imposed upon us by the Church. It should not be this way. In our homes, we should develop the attitude and impress it upon our children that Advent is a time of preparing and getting ready to celebrate the Birth of Jesus. We are given four weeks to prepare. Preparing for a celebration or party is work, but it is fun work. Invite the children to help clean and decorate and especially help put up a Nativity Scene in our homes.

We can turn all our material sacrifices into spiritual gifts to present to Jesus for His Birthday. Giving up candy or making some other sacrifice for a few weeks is hard, but it is much easier when we think about being able to give these sacrifices to God on Christmas day. This is the greatest gift that we can give Him – lovingly sacrificing for Him and in imitation of Him. He sacrificed for the love of us it is only fair that we make some sacrifices for the love of Him.

These precious gifts that we can offer Him do not require any money. We do not need to go shopping. Poor little children do not have to worry that they have nothing to give. The gift of small daily sacrifices is more pleasing to Jesus than the most precious diamonds and gold. Little children are really in the best position of giving to Jesus. Their innocence makes them nearer to the heart of God than most grownups. Let us help those children in our lives to offer these loving gifts to Jesus. They will be richly rewarded because it is more rewarding to give than it is to receive. The Peace Prayer of St. Francis says: “It is in giving that we receive ...”

We need to make Advent a happy and loving time of penance – not a long, dull, and burdensome one. Our sacrifices should be embraced willingly and lovingly as precious gifts we can offer to Jesus. Perhaps it will help us to make a list of our daily sacrifices – even the smallest ones – then we can offer our list to Jesus on His Birthday. We can help the little ones with their lists of daily prayers, penances, or sacrifices. If this is done well, the generous hearts of children will soon be seeking ever greater sacrifices and penances to make and give. It would be wonderful if adults were forced to step into moderate overzealous little hearts so that they do not physically harm themselves for the love of God. Help them to be proud of

their list. Perhaps write them neatly on special paper or help them to write them out, or even type them and print them out with a nice special font. This way they have something physical to place in the manger on Christmas Day.

We too often underestimate the sacrifices that children can make. We, also, often underestimate the joy they will receive in making these sacrifices when they are truly motivated with love.

Many of our children have more material things than they know what to do with. Some of the more mature ones might appreciate sacrificing getting some of these presents on Christmas Day so that they could have the money to donate or to buy a gift for someone less fortunate. The discussing, planning, and perhaps shopping and donating will bring more happiness to them, and the adults helping them than just adding another box to unwrap and set aside on Christmas morning.

We should strive to help our children experience the joy of giving. Maybe in the process, we could learn a thing or two, also. We can make the sacrifice of our playtime to clean and decorate for Jesus' Birthday. We can sacrifice our candies and treats to give to someone else for the love of Jesus. We can make a sacrifice of our pain when others do not understand us or take advantage of us. We can sacrifice our favorite entertainment and perhaps spend the time saying a few more prayers. We can offer up our sicknesses or physical pains. The list we can make is only limited by our imaginations. Children have great imaginations if we will patiently allow them and direct them.

We should also, strive to impart upon them the grace to lovingly and humbly receive gifts as well as give them. What we receive may not always be what we want, but the love with which it is given is much more important than the thing given. God often gives us crosses and we should receive these well because He loves us and wants to help us become better so we can go to Heaven with Him. The physical present is merely a symbol of the gift of love. Love is the true gift that is given and received.

Advent is the happy time of giving. May we whole heartily embrace this and help our children to do so, also. Then, on Christmas Day we will have the most valuable offering to give to God. This Christmas will be the best ever when we and those we love (especially the little ones) have the joy of experiencing the grace of lovingly giving of ourselves to God and each other.

To the Infant Jesus in the Crib

Oh, how I love Thee, Lord of Heaven above!
Too well hast Thou deserved to gain my love;
Sweet Jesus, I would die for love of Thee,
For Thou didst not disdain to die for me.

I leave Thee, faithless world, farewell! depart!
This lovely Babe has loved and — won my heart.
I love Thee, loving God, Who from above
Didst come on earth, a Babe, to gain my love.

Thou tremblest, darling Child, and yet I see
Thy heart is all on fire with love for me:
Love makes Thee thus a Child, my Savior dear;
Love only brought Thee down to suffer here;

Love conquered Thee, Great God, love tied Thy hands,
A captive here for me, in swathing-bands;
And love, strong love, awaits Thy latest breath,
To make Thee die for me a cruel death.