

ADVENT ATTITUDE PREPARATION
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Advent is about a time to choose: COMMERCIALISM or SPIRITUALITY. Jesus told us we cannot serve two masters. We will love one and hate the other, or we will serve one and despise the other. Which is the master in our lives: COMMERCIALISM or SPIRITUALITY? Many of us try to balance the two but that leads to neutralism which doesn't work and leads nowhere. Scripture tells us that if you are neither hot nor cold, I spew you out of my mouth. The Lord wants commitment! Love demands commitment!

Holy Mother Church has warned us for many centuries of the dangers of mortal sin. We should be very aware of this. Many judge their goodness by what they did not do, rather than what they should do. ADVENT is a time to choose.

Because of the teachings on mortal sin, which is condemning, venial sin seems to be unimportant or at least tolerable, and that becomes a great deception. They are disgusting to behold, and worthy of purgatory. Bickering, grudges, foul language, snide comments, threats, unfriendliness, impatience, intolerance, unforgiving, un-prayerfulness, and so much more. Jesus told us to be perfect as the Father is perfect. This is our goal as a Christian.

Many at Christmas will come to the crib to see the baby Jesus, to kneel and pray. We see the perfect Son of God. But what does the baby Jesus see as He looks back at us?

Let me tell you a true story that might well make the point. When I was working for the State of New York in a hospital for the mentally handicapped, one of my clients was a forty-year-old man who was diagnosed with a condition called PICA, the persistent eating of nonnutritive substances. He would fight anyone in order to stuff his mouth with cigarette butts anywhere he could find them. There were so many butts in his mouth at one time he would drool a golden juice from the corners of his mouth. It

was a rather disgusting sight, but he would not give them up, even to eat food. One day during a visit from his mother, I asked her what he was like as a child. She told me he had a great fondness for licorice candy. This gave me an idea; did he still like licorice enough to trade the cigarette butts for it? At first he was adamant in refusing to trade, but gradually he gave in and would trade the butts for the licorice. He never stopped seeking cigarette butts, but it became easier to trade.

Because of the years of fighting for cigarette butts, his facial features were heavily scared and disfigured. One day while sitting with him he asked me a question: "Why did God make me this way?" I was startled by the question. What could I say? I responded, "Because He loves you in a very special way." He replied, "When I see God I'm going to tell Him it wasn't very nice of Him to do this to me." I said to him, "When you see God, He will have a very special reward for you." He looked at me and asked, "Will he give me licorice?" I replied, "He will give you all the licorice you can eat and more." He smiled and said, "Oh, that will be very nice."

The cigarette butts didn't kill him, but they sure made him un-kissable. When he looked in the mirror he saw himself as he really was; rather beat up. But he didn't blame himself, he blamed God. Don't we do the same thing? Venial sins are the PICA in our lives that beat us up unknowingly. Venial sins are like the cigarette butts. We stuff the mouth of our souls with them. These are the small everyday sins that have become imbedded in our way of life that we enjoy too much. They won't kill us, but they sure don't improve our holiness. They gradually eat away at us and have the potential to lead us astray.

Can you picture yourself kneeling before the infant Christ child, and as He looks back at us, He sees the cigarette butts stuffed in our hearts with a golden juice dripping from our chin? Wouldn't we be embarrassed if we realized this about ourselves? He still love us, but we sure aren't KISSABLE.

What would it take to make us change; what LICORICE would entice us to trade our venial sins? The licorice that will cause a change in our lives is the Grace of GOD in the HOLY EUCHARIST. Jesus offers HIMSELF to aid us in perfecting our lives; so that when we approach the CRIB, we become

more kissable. The strength of the EUCHARIST will strengthen our souls and wipe away the gold juice that drips from the chin of our souls. Take advantage of ADVENT to improve holiness in our lives, to overcome the PICA in our lives. For we all have many imperfections and carry around many cigarette butts in our hearts that we l refuse to disgorge.

This advent, seek the JOY of Christmas, the satisfaction of having chosen correctly and wisely. [compare happiness versus joy] The seeking of happiness over Joy as a goal in life could be one of our venial sins. Let us take a lesson from the three wise men who brought valuable gifts to the newborn King. As we look at the Christ child in the crib, let us bring Him the gift of a clean and contrite heart to welcome Him to our world. The JOY of Christmas is that God proved He loves us; and we must love him back with as clean a heart, that the licorice of God's grace can provide to our souls. And we then can say, as my friend said; "Oh, that will be very nice! " Because we are now KISSABLE. Have a Joyous Advent!