

Advent is a time for spiritual preparation

Nov. 27 will kick off a season of new beginnings for the Catholic Church in the United States. Not only is it the start of Advent and a new liturgical year, it also will mark the introduction of the new English translation of the Roman Missal.

Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski noted that the word “Advent” comes from the Latin for “to come.” The first two weeks of Advent focus on the Second Coming of Christ, he said, while the last two weeks center on the first coming of Christ at his birth in Bethlehem.

“Without his birth into our world,” Bishop Rozanski said, “we certainly wouldn’t have that hope to look to his second coming – so, it’s a season that fits together the first and second comings of Christ. It points us to Christmas and helps us to prepare ourselves not only to celebrate the birthday of Jesus, but to open our hearts to receive him each day.”

Lighting the candles of Advent wreaths are a traditional way to celebrate each Sunday of the season. Catholics are also encouraged to go to confession.

“One of the ways we prepare our hearts for the light that comes into the world is to dispel the darkness from our hearts, which is sin,” Bishop Rozanski said. “Through the sacrament of reconciliation, we open our hearts to the light of Christ and make room for him and him alone.”

The bishop noted that many parishes offer reconciliation services during Advent, along with parish missions and other spiritual gatherings. Reaching out to the poor and vulnerable through “giving trees” and other activities are other means of spiritual preparation, he said.

“In that way,” he said, “we identify with the Holy Family who had no room – no place for Jesus to be born, little food and shelter. We are conscious of those in our world today who still have very little food and shelter to make their lives livable.”

Just as Advent is a time of waiting for the coming of Christ, Bishop Rozanski said the wider church has been through a period of waiting for the coming of the new translation of the Roman Missal. It will be an opportunity for Catholics to appreciate the fullness of the liturgy, he said, and to understand how the words of the liturgy call them to be closer to God.

“It’s an opportunity to really think about the words that we pray,” he said.