

Five priests share their advice for slowing down in Advent

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The Christmas season is referred to in song as the most wonderful time of the year. For many, it means decorating the house and trimming the tree, spending time with family and friends from near and far, wrapping presents, special foods and traditions. But all that activity can mean a hectic time.

In an effort to keep Christ at the center of this Advent and Christmas season, five priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore provide ways to reflect and prepare for Jesus' birth.

Pray

Capuchin Franciscan Father Gregory Chervenak,

pastor of Our Lady of the Mountains in Cumberland

"How about this Advent we keep a rosary in our pocket, purse and in the car. When we have to wait, we can intercede for all those people and situations that are on our hearts. We can pray for pregnant couples, for our service people in Afghanistan and throughout the world, for prisoners, for people with cancer, for people who are dying, for people who are watching a loved one die. I am sure that all of us have children, grandchildren, relatives and friends who are in great need of our prayers. We can give them all the best and most precious gift this Advent - our time, our waiting time. The most precious gifts you can give this Christmas."

Be selective

Father Gerard C. Francik,

pastor of St. Mark in Fallston

"The way I encourage people to slow down is to eliminate one chore that they do not like to do at Advent that really isn't necessary. For example, if someone sends out lots of Christmas cards but dreads writing all of them, I advise that they cut down on the number of cards, maybe only sending to people they will not see over the

holiday, but to write a nice note in them. Or, if it's too burdensome, drop the activity all together. I encourage people to think of Advent/Christmas activities that they do alone and ask a good friend, who would make the activity fun, to do it with them. For example, if you dread shopping for gifts, invite a friend who is upbeat and helpful to go shopping with you and to make it a fun adventure with coffee or lunch in the midst."

Be patient

Father Stephen E. Hook,

pastor of St. Ursula in Parkville

"Advent is a season of expectation. It's that sense of how do we wait for something in a world where we don't want to wait for anything. Advent reminds us that good things come to those who wait. We need to slow down and prepare ourselves for something great. Advent helps us to remember that."

Weigh the costs

Monsignor Robert J. Jaskot,

pastor of Holy Family Catholic Community in Middletown

"There's a cost involved with Advent. If I truly spend more time in prayer, some things aren't going to happen. What is the cost, what do I want to do, how is that calling me to be closer to God?"

Simplify

Father John A. Williamson,

pastor of Church of the Ascension in Halethorpe and St. Augustine in Elkridge

"In terms of the message of materialism that has taken over Christmas, as well as simplifying our own lives, realize that more does not always mean better. What can I simplify about my schedule, gift giving, holiday celebrations, etc., that will take some of the stress and pressure off this time of year and give me more time for quiet, prayer, family and simply enjoying the season rather than just a blur of activities? If we simplify Advent and our schedules and lives, then it can become the joyful season of anticipation it is supposed to be, instead of the blur of stress and obligations it often becomes."

Also see:

Experts share 26 ways to focus on Advent