

Blessings

SACRAMENTORS®: A Process of Sanctification for Catholic Men and Women

December, 2004

HOW TO AVOID ADVENT AFFLUENZA

by Fr. Bob Camuso



Ad-vent Af-flu-en-za *n.* 1. The feeling of anxiety and stress accompanied by a sense of weariness, exhaustion and dread as a result of efforts made during the four weeks leading up to Christmas to please relatives and loved ones. Fear over the indebtedness you will face in January.

Symptoms 1. Loss of a sense of the real meaning of Christmas. 2. An inability during Advent to experience the Fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and, especially, self-control (Gal 5: 22-23). 3. A sense of emptiness and of not being able to hear the voice of God within. 4. Preoccupation with superficial distractions and purchasing gifts; going to parties along with fear of not being invited to certain parties. 5. Nervousness over family expectations.

THE CHRISTMAS
STORY DID NOT
HAPPEN ONCE.
IT HAS HAPPENED
MILLIONS OF TIMES.
WHEN A BROTHER
OR SISTER REALIZES
THAT THEIR HEART
IS THE LOWLY, SIMPLE
MANGER AND ASKS
THAT CHRIST BE
BORN IN THEM.

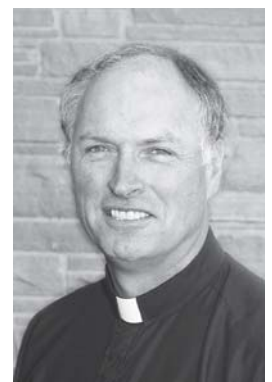
BOK II, Day 24

Recently, the National Retail Federation published its 2004 holiday spending survey which predicts that the average consumer plans to spend \$702 over the Christmas season. This is up 4.5% from last year. Total spending during the weeks leading up to Christmas this year is estimated to reach \$219.9 billion.

In the next few weeks prior to Christmas, there will be frenzy in our culture on shopping, parties and other holiday events. As in previous years, we may wonder what happened to the main focus of the Christmas season—the Incarnation of God. We may miss the joyful anticipation, the inspired expectation, the heartfelt yearning for the birth of God here on earth in the form of a baby named Jesus.

Advent Affluenza season is upon us, and there are no shots to prevent it. But there is divine prevention. It comes in the form of prayer, almsgiving and fasting, along with the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist.

But how does prayer, for instance, help us avoid Advent Affluenza? Let's imagine that you are experiencing some of the symptoms mentioned above. You find yourself impatient, feeling empty and distracted by Christmas lights, songs, ads and gifts you need to purchase. Then, suddenly, you stop for ten minutes and sit in your car before entering the mall. You leave the car running to keep yourself warm. You start pray-



Father Bob Camuso

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ing the Rosary—the Joyful Mysteries. You find the knot in your stomach begins to loosen. Your breathing slows and is deeper. You feel warmth in your heart and soul. You sense and feel God’s presence within. Now you are there, there again, where you are meant to be. In the arms of our loving Lord who does not care if you don’t get the perfect present for your spouse or child. Right now you are the perfect gift to God. Your presence is all that God wants from you. And those who love you know that is all they ever really wanted as well. Even with all their expectations of you.

But saying one Rosary is, of course, not enough against the wall of sound, sights and smells of the holiday season. That is why I recommend a daily dose of Eucharist. Early morning is best for this treatment. If your parish does not have an early morning Mass that fits your schedule, another parish will. There may be an early morning Mass near where you work. Start your day with Mass, at least two days a week during the Advent weeks. This will especially help ward off the common and dreaded Advent Affluenza symptom of loss of the Fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Giving alms to the poor is a sure killer of Advent Affluenza. Just one check written to a charity that serves the poor will help ease any guilt you have about spending all of that \$702 on gifts that will be reciprocated. A gift to the poor is a gift to Jesus himself because he said that as we gift the least among us we gift him (Mt 25).

Fasting is an odd cure for Advent Affluenza, but it actually works. As we fast, our mind, body and spirit begin to be purified. The evil spirits of greed and envy are cast out. We find ourselves once again united with the suffering of Christ and his promise of redemption. We find ourselves in solidarity with the hungry and the poor, and nearer to that cave and the crib where the infant Jesus reaches out to us with light and hope.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the best cures for Advent Affluenza ever inspired by God. Sadly, this remedy is seldom used. Which is good for you because there will be few, if any, lines at the confessional. You won’t have to go to Canada for this treatment! Check out times in your parish bulletin for Reconciliation, or call your pastor and make an appointment. We need to confess our sins, especially the common sin against the Tenth Commandment (“You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor”). This sin occurs as we see the gifts that others are buying for Christmas. We envy them, covet what they have, and wish we could spend more. But the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps us realize that God loves us as we are, and that God always provides what we need, even if we don’t always get what we want.

Are you prepared for the Advent Affluenza season? I have given you some sure ways to prevent this dreaded disease. Don’t wait until the middle of Advent to try them. By then it might be too late. Begin them now and God may bless you with the most holy, happy and Affluenza-free Advent you have ever had.

FR. BOG

MISSION STATEMENT

*“To create in parishes
small faith communities
of men and of women
committed to supporting
each other in living
a Christian life
characterized by
acts of love, kindness,
appreciation, and
forgiveness.”*

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Recently, I received an email from one of our SacraMentor brothers telling me about an interesting experience he had while shopping at a local store. The store is one that our brother has used

regularly for six years and he therefore recognizes many of the employees. While in the produce department, one of the employees who our brother regularly sees asked, "How's the SacraMentors program going?" Somewhat taken aback by this question, our brother asked, "How do you know about SacraMentors?" The employee replied that he heard a witness talk our brother gave at their parish a few weeks earlier, that he remembered the talk, and that he had seen our brother by the SacraMentors registration table after Mass. Our brother then spent several minutes talking about SacraMentors and about his faith.

The email concluded by noting that "you never know who is watching or when the Holy Spirit will reveal Himself." How very true! Each of us is called to evangelize yet, for a variety of reasons, we frequently fail to spread the good news of our faith. One reason cited by some is that they don't have the time. Others say they don't know what to say. Our brother's experience, however, is at odds with those excuses. If you think about it, you'll realize that every day God brings people into your life who are in need of a kind word and your blessing. That's evangelization! We have the time. We just must make the most of each opportunity that God presents to us. We should also realize that only some of the many daily opportunities presented to us by God require the use of words. Frequently, all that is required is for us to open ourselves up to seeing with the eyes of Christ and being God's instrument of love and blessing. So don't worry about what, if anything, you will say. Just open yourself up to God's love and grace. He will take it from there!

As we go through Advent, I would challenge each of you to look for those situations where, like our brother, God presents you with an opportunity to spread the joyful news of Christ's birth. The opportunity may require the use of words. Most likely, however, it will only require you to act in a loving, kind and appreciative manner.

May God's peace and blessings be with each of you,

Jeff

CAUTION! BOOK OF KINDNESS II MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR EGO

By Mike Ulrich, Blessings Editor

It had been a tough week for me and my wife Cyndie. Her daughter had been causing problems and she moved out under the guard of the Redmond Police Department on Sunday. No good-byes, no talk, she just loaded up the truck and left. Cyndie was crushed. Another person in her life had abandoned her.

We went to the Life Teen Mass that evening. Ten minutes into the service, Cyndie, with tears in her eyes, said she had to leave. The gospel came and went - no Cyndie. The sign of peace, which is always special for us, happened - no Cyndie. Then Communion, where we walk up together and receive the body and blood of Christ together - no Cyndie. I was getting a little irritated. The end of Mass came and I left before the recessional song. I found Cyndie in the chapel still crying.

We drove home in silence and we didn't go dancing as we'd planned. We watched "60 Minutes" in silence and went to bed early.

As I lay in bed, my mind was racing. How could she run away from me in her time of need? Aren't we married? Does that mean anything to her? My anger was still there when I woke up in the morning. I was going to let her have it.

But first, I sat down to do my spiritual readings and opened up the Book of Kindness II. It was the thirteenth day. The lesson is, "I am willing to be a little grateful to those I have grudges towards today." I sat there stunned for several minutes. I was called to do something I didn't want to do.

I wrote in my journal that I was angry and I didn't want to follow the Book of Kindness. Yet, as I continued writing, I made the commitment to follow the reading.

Later that day I sat down with Cyndie and I told her how I felt and what had happened with the Book of Kindness. She shared with me her feelings and we both felt better.

As I look back I'm so glad it happened this way. The fight we would have had was not worth the pain that would have occurred.

I hope you have learned something from my story. I'm sure you have stories, too. Why don't you write them up and send them to me? Share your story with others so we can learn from your spiritual experiences.

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WHEN THERE IS
GOOD WILL
TOWARDS
OTHERS, THERE
WILL BE PEACE
ON EARTH. THIS
GOOD WILL AND
PEACE CANNOT
OCCUR WITHOUT
YOU. BE AWAKE!
BE READY!
BE OPEN!
BE ACCEPTING
OF THE BIRTH
OF CHRIST
IN YOU.

BOK II, Day 24

◆

The Holy Spirit At Work

3rd Annual Leadership Retreat Held

By Jeff Smith, Executive Director

On September 11th, forty-five of your SacraMentor brothers and sisters gathered at the Palisades Retreat Center to participate in the discernment of a new SacraMentors board to serve for the next two years. We were blessed to have Leigh Stringfellow, who is the Assistant Director of Leadership Services with the Office of the Vicar for Clergy, serve as our facilitator for the retreat.

The morning began with a delicious breakfast provided by some of our sisters from Sacred Heart and St. Michael, allowing us to fellowship with each other, renew old friendships and meet new friends. Following breakfast, we began the retreat with an opening prayer that involved going around the room and having each person say how they have been blessed by SacraMentors. Everyone was moved and touched by hearing how God has worked through SacraMentors to draw us closer to Him, heal our lives and improve our relationships with others.

Following the opening prayer, I had the privilege of recognizing the outgoing board members who volunteered their time and talent to serve God and SacraMentors these past two years. In describing each person's contributions, I was struck by how God had brought the outgoing board members together and how their talents and abilities complemented each other so well, creating a unified board. Truly an example of the Holy Spirit at work! In relating the different ways God used each board member, I realized how lucky I was to serve with them on the board and to count each of them as a friend.

After a brief description of each board position, Leigh had everyone go off on their own for personal reflection on their talents and abilities and how they could use their gifts to support SacraMentors. Following a lunch break, everyone divided into small groups to discuss the various board positions and to determine if anyone felt a calling from the Holy Spirit to serve. After that small group sharing, we reconvened for a large group process to discern the board. After placing large sheets of paper on the wall with a board position written at the top of each sheet, everyone was invited to write their name or someone else's name on the sheet if they felt called to do so. In a matter of minutes, each board position was filled with the exception of the Expansion and Development Coordinator, where three men felt called to serve! After some large group discussion, the men went off with Leigh for additional time to discern God's will. They returned in a few minutes with one man designated to serve on the board and the other two agreeing to serve in a supporting role. We concluded the retreat with a hands-on blessing of each member of the new board, asking God to bless and lead them in their new position.

One aspect of the retreat that struck me was the ease with which the board was discerned. It reminded me of Day 21 from the Book of Kindness: "If it is easy, I am doing it with God. If it is difficult, I am trying to do it alone." To me, the ease with which the board members were discerned affirmed that we were following God's will, not our own. Although it took a little longer to discern the Expansion and Development Coordinator, I believe that indicates the importance of the position and that God intends to use that position in some special manner these next two years.



Another sign of God's hand at work was the final structure of the board. The outgoing board considered discerning only half of the board positions to insure we had continuity and experience on the new board. The board eventually rejected that idea, concluding that we needed to trust the Holy Spirit and follow the Spirit's guidance and direction. At the retreat, God took care of that concern as the new board consists of five members from the outgoing board and five new members, which is the exact result we considered trying to manufacture. That is one more example of what happens when we let go of our expectations and concerns and trust God.

The 3rd Annual Leadership Retreat was truly a Spirit-filled day that left all of us who participated uplifted and blessed by our involvement. I was especially moved by the servant's heart possessed by everyone who attended. Not only did they agree to spend an entire Saturday participating in the discernment process, but virtually everyone present also volunteered to assist the new board members in some manner or another. Truly, God is great all the time and all the time, God is great!

COMING SOON TO A PARISH BULLETIN BOARD NEAR YOU...

Our SacraMentor poster (in full color) includes Parish Coordinator contact information as well as a way to announce upcoming events. The following is an explanation by designer & SacraMentor sister, Mary Anne Reynolds.

The Holy Spirit - Who infuses all of what we do. The spaces between the blocks of color imply our need to leave space for God to fill us - to empty ourselves for Him.



Gold - a royal color to remind us we are God's beloved children.

A process of sanctification

Red - Used on the feast days of martyrs. Appropriate as we work to quiet our egos and live from our True Selves. Red is also the color of Pentecost.

SACRAMENTORS[®]

for Catholic men & women

Purple - the color of waiting during Advent and penance during Lent - to remind us we are a people on a journey - that sanctification is a process.

Green - the color of hope. And what, if not hope, does SacraMentors profess? What other program could propose to heal the world by blessing?

The shapes together form a cross - SacraMentors on the horizontal plane to help us live as God's children in the world, yet open to the vertical plane, connecting us to God.

The shape as a whole can be seen as a window - indicating how SacraMentors changes our view of the world. The shape also may be seen as a wrapped package - also appropriate since faith is a gift from God, often left unwrapped.

Preparing the Soil of the Heart

By Craig Schlattmann

Recently at Mass, the Gospel Liturgy centered on Jesus' parable of the Sower and the soil. (Luke 8:4-15; also see Mark 4:1-20; Matt:13:1-23). In it, Jesus describes the resultant harvest after the seed (God's Word) fell amongst differing types of soil; on a pathway where birds ate the seed, in rocky soil where the seed took little root, among the thorns where the seed was choked, and finally on good soil where the seed produced a bountiful harvest.

Like many people, I've listened to this parable a number of times in my life. I don't know about you, but each time I hear the description of the seed among thorns, I hear the Lord speaking directly to me. When Jesus describes those thorns as "anxiety, riches and the pleasures of life," I have to admit that each of these has occasionally choked the fruitfulness of God's Word in my life, and left unchecked, will continue to do so in the future.



As I reflected on the truths the parable illuminates, I was struck by the parallels offered in SacraMentor's understanding of the process of sanctification. It seemed to me that the ego's focus on past memories of pain, lack and fear, and future plans of attacking and getting are indeed "thorny weeds" that separate us from God's love and choke our ability to bear fruit by loving God and blessing others. If I allow the ego's harvest of "anxious" memories and plans for "riches and the pleasures of life" to occupy the soil of my heart, how will I be ready to receive God's love and then share it in blessing others?

So the question becomes, "How do I respond to this 'weed' problem?" Well, when I have weeds in my lawn, I first get out the old Weed and Feed herbicide/fertilizer and sprinkle it across my yard (much easier than removing each weed separately; I'm a lazy gardener).

My intent is to ward off or kill the weeds while feeding the lawn and strengthening the grass. The SacraMentors analogy to this weed-feed dynamic is the process of joining with each other to release the "weeds" (grudges, pain, worries, etc) which our ego offers us and allow the Holy Spirit to replace our fear with love, our anger and attack thoughts with peace, and our guilt and shame with happiness. I know that if I can do that, the soil of my heart will be ready to accept God's Word and His love, and I'll be ready to bear real fruit by fulfilling the function God gave me, to love Him and to bless others.

Since becoming a SacraMentor I've accepted that the process of releasing what my ego offers me, and accepting what the Holy Spirit wishes to give me, will require an ongoing effort throughout my life. I suppose that means that unlike spreading Weed and Feed across my lawn once each Spring (again, my laziness), I'll continually be in the spiritual weed-feed mode since the weeds my ego offers me are pretty persistent. Likewise, rather than preparing my heart's soil all in one treatment, I'll need to uproot each of my ego's weeds one at a time and replace it with what the Holy Spirit will offer me at that moment. Clearly the work I must do to weed and feed the soil of my heart will never end. But the motivating hope I need to continue this "gardening" comes from the certain knowledge that preparing my heart for the Sower's seeds can result in a fruitful harvest in my life. And remembering that I share this same work with my SacraMentor brothers reminds me that I'm never alone as I prepare the soil of my heart.

— SPIRITUALITY SERIES SCHEDULE —

SacraMentor Series

**All Series are held on:
Sundays, 2:00 to 5:00 pm**
(unless otherwise indicated)

■ **MEN'S SERIES**

St. Olaf, Poulsbo *(concurrent with women)*
Jan 30, Feb 6 & 13 from 1 to 4 PM
Sacred Heart, Lacey *(concurrent with women)*
Feb 13, 20 & 27
St. John Vianney, Kirkland
April 10, 17 & 24

■ **WOMEN'S SERIES**

Sacred Heart, Enumclaw
Jan 23, 30 & Feb 6
St. Olaf, Poulsbo *(concurrent with men)*
Jan 30, Feb 6 & 13 from 1 to 4 PM
Sacred Heart, Lacey *(concurrent with men)*
Feb 13, 20 & 27
Holy Family, Kirkland
April 10, 17 and 24

Saturday Sanctum

**All Sanctums are held on:
Saturdays, 9:00 am to 7:30 pm**

■ **MEN'S SANCTUM**

St. Olaf, Poulsbo *(concurrent with women)*
Feb 19
Sacred Heart, Lacey *(concurrent with women)*
March 5
St. John Vianney, Kirkland
April 30

■ **WOMEN'S SANCTUM**

Sacred Heart, Enumclaw
Feb 12
St. Olaf, Poulsbo *(concurrent with men)*
Feb 19
Sacred Heart, Lacey *(concurrent with men)*
March 5
Holy Family, Kirkland
April 30

SacraMentors®

c/o Jeff Smith, Executive Director
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