

BULLETIN -- DECEMBER 3

Parish Advent penance service. Don't wait till Christmas! Our penance service is right where it should be: at the *beginning* of Advent, so you can "clear the decks," as it were, and get rid of the flotsam and jetsam that weighs the soul down and throws you off balance. Your sins and the guilt they cause are all useless baggage. They help you accomplish nothing. The evil one points them out to you to discourage you from thinking you can ever change. And yet the solemn teaching of the Church, echoing the call of Christ himself, is a challenge to each of us: "Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect" (Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, the Constitution on the Church, no. 11). Holiness of life is not expected solely from the "religious specialists," bishops, priests, deacons, and religious women and men. The fact is, we are *all* religious specialists from the moment of our baptism. We have all met people in various walks of life who made an impression on us by their integrity, their joyful spirit, their dedication, their perseverance. You can do it, too. Decide now to start again this Advent living the Gospel in an everyday sort of way. Get yourself Advent-ready, not just for Christmas, but for the rest of your (eternal) life! We'll have several priests on hand this coming **Saturday, December 9, at 10 a.m.**, eager and waiting to pray with you and help you respond to the Lord's call to holiness through the sacrament of penance.

Advent-ready? Sure. It's like making sure your car is road-worthy for a long trip, like around Lake Superior. The service stations up there in Canada are few and far between. You want to be able to rely on your vehicle to make your journey trouble-free and enjoyable. Better than having to have a wrecker driver come out and tow you about 60 or 70 miles, eh?

Advent is one of those special check-up times the Church provides us during the liturgical year, which begins today. Lent is the other, of course, and is more strictly penitential in nature. We might compare Advent to a comprehensive once-over of our alert or alarm system. For many years after two-way radios were first installed on our fire equipment back in 1951, the Grand Rapids Fire Department conducted a radio test every morning at 8 a.m. to make sure the units were all working properly. That didn't necessarily mean they would work properly, of course, the next time they had to be used; but at least they were checked and working and thus *presumed* to be in good condition. Nowadays the fire companies are so busy that the frequencies often sound like AM radio, and the daily radio test is a thing of the past. But you and I can learn from that kind of vigilance.

Being Advent-ready means being ready to respond whenever you detect a challenge from the Lord coming across your spiritual air waves. Your conscience will often tell you in no uncertain terms: smile, offer to help, flee, get off this website, ask permission, spend some time listening, calm down, reach out, be pleasant, tell the truth, act enthused even if you're not. All of these things are those split-second decisions that can mean responding like a disciple of Jesus or shirking your baptismal duty. Advent is

the time to make sure you're "all systems go" to be an agent of the Good News. Want to make a difference in the world? Advent is for you.

Catholic high schools State champs! Once again, our two local Catholic high schools have done us proud with victories on Thanksgiving weekend. The Catholic Central Cougars held onto their Division 4 State title by defeating Edwardsburg 42-31 on Friday. The next day, our West Catholic Falcons became the Division 5 State champs for the 5th year in a row with a 34-7 victory over Saginaw Swan Valley. CONGRATULATIONS to our players and their coaches. I can testify from my pastoral contacts with West Catholic how impressed I am at the well-rounded approach Coach Hyland brings to the gridiron, holding faith and witness to Christ at the forefront for his talented team. In the tackles and interceptions as well as in the touchdowns of life, Christ is King, and his divine care for us is never diminished.

Old news by now, too, but CONGRATULATIONS anyway to parishioner Kent Burns, who plays trumpet for the 318-member award-winning Rockford High School marching band. He and his fellow band members had the privilege of going to New York and marching and playing in Macy's annual Thanksgiving Day parade. What a great honor, and a tribute to all their hard work. They were on TV at precisely 11:44 a.m., just as scheduled. If Macy's ever encounters a problem keeping its retail business going in the online age, we'll have to look into hiring them to run the airlines and the railroads. At any rate, GO, RAMS!!

Ever notice? That the people who have recently become the most incensed at "inappropriate" sexual behavior in our society are the very same ones who have spent decades ridiculing, mocking, and debunking all codes of sexual behavior which have been handed on to us by people who knew what harm lack of restraint would produce? That, for instance, those who fought mightily to have an Alabama judge remove the Ten Commandments from his court house are the ones who are loudest in accusing him of violating them? That those who thought they could change human nature for the better by getting rid of standards that were rooted in religious belief are now reaping the whirlwind of desires that know no control? That the people who actually think that the dialogue on many TV situation comedies is sophisticated and high-brow are shocked when their own children begin modeling their behavior on the characters?

And yet, many of those same people continue to demean anyone who professes belief in Christ and strives to live an integral moral life. After all the recent disgraces of numerous entertainment and political figures because of moral turpitude, it is still expected that if one is going to "make it" in Hollywood, it's best to be part of the drug culture, support Planned Parenthood and the LGBTQ madness, embrace agnosticism, and hate the current President. It's like they're still pushing the kool-aid on everybody when it's abundantly clear that it's the kool-aid that leads to the scandalous behaviors at which they profess to be shocked.

The Church recognizes how easily human hearts can be led astray by the evil one, because many of its own have been guilty of serious wrongdoing. It gives us no satisfaction to suggest to those who enjoy calling Church people hypocrites that we apparently have no corner on the market. In spite of our own sinfulness, Christ entrusts

to us the task of calling ALL people to integrity and holiness of life. Our life's work is cut out for us, no matter our occupation! God bless you.

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: Let us pray for the healing and reconciliation of all those impacted by the sins of Church leaders, to realize that they should never let the actions of *any* human person prevent them from encountering the eternal-life-giving Eucharistic Lord (cf. John 6:51-58). It's never worth allowing ourselves to be paralyzed by the evil that may have been done to us.