



During Advent the Church sets aside four weeks before Christmas to long intensely for Jesus' coming and prepare our hearts for His arrival. The whole "Holiday Season" and all that has come to signify may indeed be the most wonderful time of the year, but even with the Christmas cookies, the beautiful carols and the family gatherings, Catholics are asked to recognize the fact that we're not really home yet. Instead, we are longing for Jesus to come back and preparing our hearts for that day.

As I reflect on this season of waiting, I'm reminded a lot of my engagement to Sara. There was so much excitement, so much joy and many graces poured out on us while we were engaged. But the most prominent feeling of all was one of deep longing while undergoing an intense period of preparation. At the end of each night when we would say goodbye, I wanted so badly to simply come home to her and remain there with her. I longed for the sacramental grace that our wedding would bring - though I wasn't sure exactly what that would be like. But most of all I wanted to be in my vocation. Our engagement was like an Advent anticipating the sacramental coming of Jesus into our relationship through our wedding.

The wedding day came and went and it was more wonderful than I could have imagined, partially because the months of "Advent" before our wedding day prepared a place in our hearts to receive each other, and most of all to receive the sacramental coming of Jesus into our relationship. Yes, Advents are very important and not just in December.

Now that we are married, I see how the day-to-day living out of our vocation is a strange mix of little glimpses of Heaven and a more intense Advent, this time for the fullness of Heaven.

How is marriage like Heaven? God's presence abides in any place where love dwells. Love, no matter how weak and imperfect it may be, is a participation in the love of God, which is something permanent, creative and eternal. Sometimes that love is also creative in a literal sense when God blesses a couple with a child. But all love, whether it is fruitful in this way or not, is always fruitful and always creative because love comes directly from God who is eternal. In a very real way I think we can say that when we love we participate in eternity. So, the love that any

married couple has for each other and the small and big ways they show that love every day give them a tiny glimpse of the beatific vision. Of course we're a long way from the fullness of that vision, which is where the Advent comes in.

The life's work of each and every married person no matter who they are (or how many children they have) is to get their spouse to Heaven. I am Sara's sanctifying cross and she is mine. With this goal in mind and the magnitude of it, we long for the coming of Christ with a new intensity and new zeal. As Sara said the other day, she knew the work of every Christian on Earth is to spread the good news of Christ to the world, but now that work has a clearer focus. Our vocation gives us marching orders: get your beloved to Heaven.

May God bless us all this Advent season with a deeper longing for His Son and a renewed intensity of the slow, loving work of salvation within every marriage.