



27 September, 2010

My Dear Brother Priests,

The first cool breezes of fall are in the air, but it is not too early to think of the coming seasons of Advent and Christmas! These liturgical moments, which recall the meeting of time and eternity, are also privileged moments in which the people of God has the opportunity to encounter the mysteries of salvation. Our task is to open for them the treasures of our faith, so that they may meet the Lord who comes to meet them.

In doing this, it is worthwhile to consider the dual meaning of Advent – the celebration of the “coming” of the Lord in the middle of time, and again at the end of time. Indeed, the liturgical readings have already begun to emphasize the themes of Christ's final return. One way to emphasize the mysteries of the end times that press so profoundly on each of us, is through an expanded celebration of the feast of All Souls' Day. This might be the occasion for a special mass for the dead, or perhaps the solemn celebration of Vespers from the Office for the Dead.

The themes of waiting and anticipation of Christ's coming are celebrated in the Advent season through a certain restraint in the ceremonies. Moderation is called for in both floral decoration (GIRM 305) and the use of musical instruments. (GIRM 313) Other liturgical or paraliturgical celebrations, including the celebration of the Divine Office sometimes called “Lessons and Carols,” may assist the faithful in perceiving the spiritual character of the season.

The celebration of Christmas in the western tradition focuses on the historical events of the incarnation, while also embracing the theological significance of the Savior's birth. Vigil Masses for Christmas can begin after 4 PM on Christmas Eve. This year, Christmas falls on a Saturday, meaning that the following day, Sunday, December 26<sup>th</sup>, is the feast of the Holy Family. If desired, anticipated masses for the feast of the Holy Family can be celebrated on the evening of Christmas day. Second Vespers of Christmas, does, however, take precedence over First Vespers of the feast of the Holy Family.

Two other liturgical coincidences mark this coming Advent and Christmas. The feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe coincides with Gaudete Sunday. Because Gaudete Sunday has precedence over the memorial of Our Lady, Archbishop Gregory has authorized the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the preceding Saturday, December 11<sup>th</sup>. Also, because January 1<sup>st</sup> falls on a Saturday this year, the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God is not a day of precept. It should still be celebrated with fitting reverence, however.

I wish you all of God's many blessings in these coming seasons of grace!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Theodore Book  
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**Office of Divine Worship**

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