

Surfing on the Seasons

*Using the Liturgical Year
to grow into
constant interaction with
Jesus as Savior*

*For the seasons of
Advent and Christmas*

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A Three-legged Stool

This booklet is meant to support you in your spiritual life. But there are three legs that support this booklet! If one is missing, the whole idea falls over. The three legs are:

An intentional spirituality : This plan only works if you have decided to take some control over your spiritual life: to be proactive rather than just reactive. Assuming you don't have a positive plan already, the choice is either to just keep going along as you are now or to choose deliberate, conscious, planned forward motion. Which do you want?

The Five-Step Plan: The suggestions in this booklet are meant to implement a specific five-step plan of spiritual growth, a “fitness program” for living the Christian life in its fullness. The five steps are simply five commitments that are implicit or explicit in the commitment of our Baptism. These suggestions will help you if you decide you want to *simplify* your spiritual life — and at the same time and *intensify* it — by concentrating it on these five commitments. Do you want to follow the five-step plan explained in ***Reaching Jesus: Five Steps to a Fuller Life?***

Using the liturgical seasons: Do you want to use the *liturgical seasons* (Advent, Lent, Easter, Ordinary Time) to help you focus successively on each of the Five Steps? And vice-versa, do you want to use the Five Steps to enter more fully into the spirit of each of the liturgical seasons? This booklet assumes you want to “surf on the seasons” of the liturgical year to put unity and diversity into your efforts to grow spiritually.

If all three legs are under the stool, let's sit down and get started!

“Surfing on the Season”

GOAL: To use the Advent and Christmas seasons to appreciate more the Good News of Jesus the Savior.

DOCTRINAL FOCUS

Try to understand more clearly the doctrine of the *Incarnation*: God made flesh in Jesus — and in us — to save the world.

LITURGICAL FOCUS

Enter more actively into the *Introductory Rites* at Mass. Try to *appreciate* more the Good News through conscious *praise*.

SACRAMENTAL FOCUS

Seek to understand and appreciate more the Sacrament of *Baptism* as giving us the identity and mission of Christ.

Attitude Adjustment

Using the liturgical seasons is mostly a matter of *awareness*. During each of the seasons you want to keep a particular focus, to cultivate an abiding awareness of one particular theme characteristic of our religion. This will help this element of our faith become part of you, an abiding element of your consciousness and a lived response.

During Advent and Christmas focus on the theme of *evangelization*; specifically, on the “good news” that Jesus is God who became human to be “*Emmanuel — God-with-us*” as the Savior of the world, and he is continuing his saving work in and through you. During Advent look forward to his coming. During the Christmas season look at who he is and what he wants to do for us. Consciously try to grow in *appreciation* of the Good News and of Jesus as Savior.

How can you do this? Here are some things that will help:

Keep the season in the senses:

- ***Color for Advent:*** Dress and decorate using a lot of blue or the “bluer shades of purple” or violet — for anticipation, like the lightening of the sky before dawn.
- ***Colors for the Christmas season*** (ends on the Baptism of the Lord): white and red and green.
- ***Make an Advent wreath*** (or wreaths) and light one more of its four candles each week. You can also make smaller wreaths to put around the house, in your office or car etc., Or just use a sprig of greenery with a dark blue or purple ribbon.
- On ***Christmas Eve*** put up a Christmas tree. (If you put the tree up sooner, use only blue or purple lights until Christmas Eve).
- ***Sing***, hum or play Advent music during Advent, Christmas music during the Christmas season.

Prayer focus:

- ***Prayers of praise and thanksgiving.*** Give time whenever you can to quiet, grateful dwelling on the mystery of our redemption through Christ’s birth. Reflect on the Good News with appreciation. Think about Jesus as Savior. In moments when your mind is unoccupied, gravitate to these thoughts.
- ***At Mass during Advent and Christmas*** make a special effort to enter enthusiastically into the *Introductory Rites*. Give yourself to *the prayer of praise* — rejoicing in Jesus the *Savior* and *thanking* God for the Good News. Participate in Mass like a truly *evangelized Christian*. Recall the *Good News*, focus on it, proclaim it, celebrate it, echo it in your heart. *Sing* to get into the spirit of praise To paraphrase St, John of the Cross: “Where you don’t find enthusiasm, put enthusiasm and you will find it.”

Interaction with Jesus:

- ***Meditation on Scripture:*** If you give just *five minutes* to this daily it will begin to transform your life. You can do it while you drink your coffee! (The booklet “*Prepare the Way of the Lord*” gives reflections on *being Christ* based on the Lectionary readings during Advent-Christmas).

- **Daily Mass:** This is the greatest undiscovered treasure in the Catholic Church. For many people it is impossible because of scheduling. But for those who can make it, there is no better way to consecrate the day.
- **Practice:** *Consciously let Jesus the Savior act in you and through you all day long to save every activity and situation you are involved in from veering off toward destructiveness or distortion. Let him lift everything you do above mediocrity and meaninglessness. Take him with you wherever you go, trying to involve him in everything you do: at home, at school, at work. Talk to him, be conscious of what he thinks.*
- *Form the habit of remembering Romans 12:1 before every action: “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice to God,” and say,*

***“Lord, I give you my body;
do this with me, do this in me, do this through me!”***

A Rhythm of Prayer Throughout the Day

It only takes a few minutes at a time to begin , end and punctuate the day with the prayers suggested below. Try them and see how easily they fit into your schedule — and transform your day.

Waking prayer:

As soon as you awake, consciously recall your Baptism, when you “offered your body as a living sacrifice to God,” and say,

“Jesus, I give you my body. Live this day with me; live this day in me; live this day through me. Let me think with your thoughts and speak with your words and act as your body on earth.”

If you are young and energetic, and are alone in your room, say this on your knees with your arms extended. This puts passion into your prayer.

Morning prayer:

Once out of bed and dressed, *begin the day* by reciting with feeling the ***Benedictus*** (Luke 1:68-79). Let it set the tone of your day:

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior,
born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old
that he would save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight
all our days of our life.

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Add: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Prayer throughout the day:

Before every action recite Romans 12:1: **“Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice to God,”** — which means that wherever your live body is, you will be “sacrificed,” dedicated, to doing God’s will and carrying out the mission of Jesus — and pray, **“Lord, I give you my body; do this with me, do this in me, do this through me!”** (Use **WIT** — “with, in, through” — as a memory aid, and “keep your *wits* about you”).

Noon prayer:

Sometime around noon, even if it is just a bathroom break, take a time out to “check in with God” and review your day so far. See if, on some days at least, you can answer these questions:

What do I have to be grateful for today? (Say thanks to God).

Did I remember to say the WIT prayer? Did it make a difference?

What is the best decision I made today? Did I involve Jesus in it?

What is the worst decision I made today? Did I involve Jesus in it? What have I learned from it?

Say the WIT prayer again:

***“Lord, I give you my body;
do this with me, do this in me, do this through me!”***

Evening prayer:

Before or after supper sit alone or with your family in front of the Advent wreath or Christmas tree. Light the candle(s) for the week. Sing an Advent hymn or Christmas carol. Take a moment of silence to ask yourself what is the best thing you have experienced today through your relationship (interaction) with Jesus Christ. If others are with you, then after reflecting let all share their experiences.

Recite reflectively the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55):

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed.

The Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel,
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his children forever.

Add: the Hail Mary

Night prayer:

Keep the Bible on your pillow. Promise God that every night, before you go to sleep, you will read *one line*. This is a commitment you can keep. Most nights you will probably read three or four lines. Then put the Bible on the floor, on top of your shoes, and when you get up in the morning, read another line and put the Bible back on your pillow.

Before you go to sleep, recite with peace and gratitude (Luke 2: 29-32):

Now, Master you may let your servant go in peace;
according to your word,

for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and glory for your people Israel.

(If you feel like it, add the *Our Father*).

Sacramental Focus

Focus on living out the Sacrament of Baptism. as the “Incorporating Sacrament,” the sacrament that gave you a share in God’s divine life by making you a member of the Body of Christ. Try to *live out your Baptism every day* by consciously *being Christ* in everything you do. Specifically, try to let Christ the Savior, acting in you, raise everything you do to a higher level — a divine level — of truth and love. As often as you can, remember and recite to yourself the words of St. Paul: **“Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice to God,”** and say, **“Lord, I give you my body; do this with me, do this in me, do this through me!”**

See *Living the Sacraments*, by Fr. , chapters 1 and 2 (on Baptism).

Doctrinal Focus (Discipleship)

Recommended reading:

- Vatican II's document *The Church in the Modern World*. The Latin title of this document is *Gaudium et Spes*: "Joy and Hope." Read it to grow in both. Read also Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*.
- Read Step One of *Reaching Jesus: Five Steps to a Fuller Life and Why Jesus?*, both by Fr. David M. Knight.
- Read *Living the Sacraments*, by Fr. David M. Knight, chapters 1 and 2 (on Baptism).

Guide to Reading Scripture during Advent and Christmas (following the Mass readings in the Lectionary)

During Advent, read the *Gospel of John* and:

- Advent Sundays 1-4: *Isaiah*, chapters 1-39
- Weekdays: No pattern. Read *John's Gospel* and *Isaiah*.

During Christmas Season Read the *Gospel of John* and:

- Sundays: *Isaiah*, chapters 40-66
- Weekdays: the *First Letter of John*.

During Ordinary Time from the Baptism of the Lord (Sunday after January 6) until Ash Wednesday:

- Year A: Read *Matthew's Gospel*;
Year B: Read *Mark's Gospel*;
Year C: Read *Luke's Gospel*
- Sundays also read: *1 Corinthians*.
- Weekdays (first reading) Year I: read *Hebrews*.
Year II: read *I and II Samuel*