

Pastor's Column

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"The Choice Is Ours!"

Today with the First Sunday of Advent, we begin our new Church Year, and we spend the next four weeks in preparation for the Christmas Season.

Yet, we are mindful that the culture and the world in which we live is already "full speed" ahead into the Christmas Season.

As we look around us, we easily see fewer signs of Jesus, and more of the generic signs of the Holiday Season. How do we react to this reality?

We can whine and complain that "Jesus is no longer the reason for the season," or we can take the energy that we would use in criticism, and instead, make positive witness to Jesus in our own actions, attitudes, rituals, and celebrations.

It is easy to put a "Keep Christ in Christmas" magnet on our car, and not heed the advice in our own life. To whom are we addressing the request, "Keep Christ in Christmas?" Is the message for Wal-Mart's, our neighbors, or school administrators?

We should take responsibility for our own actions, rather than trying to change the actions of others. As Jesus said, "Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7: 3-5)

We can moan and criticize that businesses and their employees are saying "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." Or we can respond to their greetings with a gentle and loving, "Merry Christmas to you and yours." ***The choice is ours!***

We can whine about the fact that we can't get our Christmas Cards at Wal-Mart, or we can drive a short distance somewhere else, to a Christian Book Store, support a small business owner and buy the cards that we desire. ***The choice is ours!***

How will we decorate our lawns and our homes—with Santas and Snowpeople and twinkle lights on palm trees, or will we make sure that there is a manger scene, depicting the birth of Jesus, somewhere in the house, or even better, on our lawn, visible for others to see? ***The choice is ours!***

We can make sure that any parties we host and coordinate this season with family and friends will have a moment when all will spend time in silence and that you as host or hostess will lead in a meal prayer that is thankful for the gift of Jesus. ***The choice is ours!***

We will spend more than a few times in restaurants sharing meals with friends and family. Will we pray in public before that meal? Will we sign ourselves with the Sign of the Cross, hold hands, and utter a prayer of thanks for Jesus, the reason for the season? Or will the fact that others will see us and know that we are Catholic, stop us from doing so? ***The choice is ours!***

We need to stop asking shopping and business establishments, and governmental agencies to do what we should be doing, and then using them as an excuse for not doing what we should be doing, because they are not doing it.

One day we will stand before Jesus, the Word Incarnate, the Word Made Flesh, and there will be a judgment, there will be a questioning.

Jesus will not ask us, "Did you change the culture of the United States of America in December 2007?"

But He will ask, "In the culture of the United States of America in December 2007, how did you personally witness to me, your Lord and Savior?"

We do have choices. ***The choice is ours!***

F. n. Mike