

Getting Ready for Advent

Have you started thinking about your New Year's Resolutions?

I have, mainly because the new church year begins on the first Sunday in December. In certain ways I prefer the Advent celebration to the New Year's festivities. Advent, to me, is quiet. There are no big parties, no loud celebrations. Advent arrives with the words "watch" and "be ready." If there are any Advent celebrations, they are done in moderation because that is the only way we can watch and be alert. Most New Year's celebrations are about surviving to the end of another year. They are about forgetting the past.

Advent is about expectation. Watch. Be ready. Be alert. We hear these words with hope as the New Year begins. We look forward, not back. The resolutions we make are for the future to make ourselves and our lives better in the future. I guess resolutions are prayers. We do not say "God grant me," or "God hear my prayer" when we make resolutions. We say "I am going to..." fill in the blank.

Funny thing is with most of our resolutions or prayers, we have control over our destiny. We say God's work, our hands. We do not like to think that we need to take control of our own lives at some times. But we can do it. I want to lose weight. But I know that no matter how much I pray, God is not going to send some fat-sucking insect to me or suspend the rules so bread has no calories. Nope. God's work, our hands, and minds and hearts. Losing weight means watching what I eat and controlling my bread and snack impulses, and working out. It means an Advent mindset where I will watch and be ready.

Another "resolution" I am going to work on this coming year is showing more gratitude. I have started reading a book called *The Magic (The Secret)* by Rhonda Byrne. The magic and the secret of the title is gratitude. The book calls on us to look at all the things we are grateful for and make lists of them. The first day you make a list of ten things you are grateful for.

You increase your list by 110 items you are grateful for each day for 28 days. You make the list. You read your lists and say "Thank you" three times as you read your list. This sounds like a lot but it focuses your heart and mind on the things you are grateful for so you do not focus on the negative. The premise is that if you are looking for items to be grateful for you will not count or notice the bad or negative things. You are retooling your mind and spirit to be thankful for what you do have rather than spiteful or angry about what you don't have. In the Advent practice, you watch for items you are thankful for, you are ready to be thankful for them. You acknowledge the gifts you have been given.

Have a blessed Advent and a joyful Christmas.

Robert Arndt