



Vox Populi - Voice of the People

24 November 2022

This Sunday, 27 November marks the start of Advent. It is the beginning of the Church's liturgical year and encompasses the four Sundays (and weekdays) leading up to the celebration of Christmas.

It is a time of reflection, anticipation and preparation when we can direct our minds to Christ's second coming at the end of time, and to the anniversary of Our Lord's birth on Christmas.

The exact origin of the celebration is not known, although it was being practiced as early as the 5th century.

Saint Gregory of Tours wrote about his predecessor Saint Perpetuus decreeing a fast three times a week from the feast of Saint Martin (November 11) until Christmas.

It's unclear whether this was a new custom or the reinforcement of an existing custom.

Either way, the custom began to spread beyond the Diocese of Tours, and soon all of France was observing three days of fasting each week between the feast of Saint Martin and Christmas. However the practice of fasting went beyond France, and many chose to fast every day of the Advent season, not just the three days prescribed.

By the 13th century, the fast of Advent was not being as commonly practiced, and so it was reformed, shortening it to a four-week cycle.

The liturgical season of Advent (which comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming") is now spread over four Sundays, with the readings and teachings focused on the preparation for the Second Coming and the Last Judgement.

People are often fascinated by Jesus' promise to "come again". But the scripture readings during Advent tell us not to waste our time with predictions. Advent is not about speculation. The Advent readings call us to be alert and ready, not weighted down and distracted by the cares of this world (Lk 21:34-36).

During the season of Advent, the liturgical colour is violet which represents penance, preparation and sacrifice.

It serves as a beautiful visual reminder to the faithful, that they should carry this spirit of repentance and penance throughout the season, remembering that Christ's birth was the beginning of his earthly mission, preaching the faith and eventually dying for our salvation. However on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, or Gaudete Sunday, priests wear rose-coloured vestments, just as it is during Lent, which represents the joyful reward that comes from offering sacrifice with patience.

During Advent there are four candles, one each week, followed by the white candle at Christmas.

The first one, violet or light purple, represents God's People. It is the candle of Hope.

The second, also violet, represents the Old Testament Prophets, and is the Candle of Peace.

The third represents John the Baptist, and is the Candle of Hope. This is rose-coloured.

The fourth, again violet, represents Mary the Mother of Jesus, and is the Candle of Joy.

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day, we who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.