

As we begin this reflection, we are approaching the third Sunday of Advent. This Sunday, we will be lighting the third candle on the Advent wreath in our church sanctuary.

The third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudete* Sunday because in Latin, the first words of the opening antiphon for that day's Mass are "*Gaudete in Domino semper*" ("Rejoice in the Lord always"). On this Sunday, Rose-colored vestments are permitted and the rose-colored candle is lit as a reminder that we are called to rejoice.

For Karen, the rose colored candle is often called the "panic" candle. By the third Sunday of Advent, the secular and materialistic preparations have hold of me like a magic potion from a fairy tale. My heart is tired and overwhelmed and there is little room left to rejoice in the coming of the Infant Jesus.

Over the years, I have looked for ways to prepare and rejoice for the coming of the Christ Child on December 25th. Some years are more meaningful than others, but I continue to battle the commercialism of the Christmas season. For the past two years our parish has sponsored an evening healing retreat for women during Advent. It starts with a simple supper in a quiet area of the social hall and progresses to the church sanctuary in a procession as we sing Taize prayer. The soft lit area is already prepared to receive us. We listen to several women, of all ages relay their stories of recent struggles and then witness to the hope in their life. As we share our struggles and hopes and dreams with the women around us, I am keenly reminded of the power of Christ's love for all of us. We end the evening by blessing one another with water and receiving a lighted candle to remind us of the light of Christ in our lives. I was refreshed and renewed. I pray when the rose colored candle is lit on the Advent wreath in our church this Sunday, I will not feel panic, but rejoicing of a joyful heart. My prayer for all of you and your families is this "rose Sunday" finds you preparing your heart for the Baby Jesus and Rejoice!

Our parish also offers a retreat for men during Advent. This year the goal was to help put Christmas and Advent into perspective so that we could enjoy these rich traditions of our church. We started with a gathering time to share a meal and then spent the rest of the evening sharing on the reflections offered by a priest. The reflections centered on the origin of Christmas, the meaning of Advent, Advent spirituality and strategies for celebrating the season. Our presenter offered that Christmas is not just about the baby Jesus being born but His Lordship and His second coming. The first calendar mention of Christmas being celebrated was in 336 AD. Christmas being a celebration of the Son of God was a replacement of the pagan holiday celebrating the Winter solstice and the victory of the sun over the shorter days of daylight. My personal reflection turned to the hardships of the Holy Family at the time of the birth of our Lord Jesus. I considered how blessed I am to have a God who loves me so much. We were encouraged as we left the church that night to use Advent as a time to ponder the true meaning of Advent and Christmas. To consider it as a time when the Son brings light into our lives as we celebrate His birth as an infant many years ago and anticipate His second coming.