



On the top shelf of a cabinet, in our school sacristy, our students can see a box that contains a Nativity set. The picture on front of the box vividly depicts all of the Nativity pieces that lay within the cardboard container. The image alone always drums up some memories for our students, which they freely share, no matter what time of year it is. They definitely have a positive and joyful connection to the Nativity, as so many Catholics do. The image of the Nativity reminds us that, during Advent, we can live an Advent culture in the midst of a commercialized holiday season. The empty crèche before Christmas reminds us that Advent is a season of spiritual preparation, marked by an eager longing for the birth of Our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is the image that holds a strong contrast against a secular view of Christmas, that dismantles anything that is connected to the Christian faith. When the Nativity set appears in the Chapel during the first week of the Advent, the students are always glad to see it, and proceed to talk about the one they have at home, or at a relative's house, or the one that resides at the parish. It is as if the students know that they are going to hear their favorite story, that has been told and retold for two thousand years!

The Nativity reveals something very special about God: that He was prepared to be with us and live among us. When we reflect on our new theological theme, "Do you love me?" it is impossible not to think about the Nativity scene, since it remains the best reminder of the infinite gift of love that God gave us at Christmas! Pope Francis, in one of his Advent homilies, spoke about how important the visual image of the Nativity set is for Catholics, as it helps us contemplate and reflect on baby Jesus' infinite love. Pope Francis said that, "the figure of the holy infant in His simple crib invites people to adore the child Jesus, and to contemplate the mystery of the incarnation as a revelation of God's saving love. In order to grow in the faith, we need to reflect more often on baby Jesus, who came into the world in such a humble way for us" (Pope Francis, December 2016).

The Pope's message is clear! We should not only place the Christ Child in His crib at Christmas, but we should also place Him at the center of our lives every day. Advent is a great time to figure out how we are going to place Jesus Christ at the center of our lives! Once we do this, it is at this point we will find ourselves at the center of God's love; not only during Advent but all year. It is no wonder why the Nativity set drums up good feelings when we see it as it truly reminds us that God is the source of love and serenity in our lives! The baby in the crèche is not only a child but the Son of God, who came to save us and show us the will of the Father; so full of love and mercy.

The message that is derived from the image of the Nativity is so profound in terms of our faith, that it makes one want to keep the Nativity out all year. Maybe it is a good thing that our school Nativity box is stored on a shelf for all to see, instead of behind closet doors! So, in the midst of decorating for Christmas, don't forget to set up a Nativity scene as a reminder to live Christlike lives of love, humility, and generosity, not only during Advent but all year round!

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