

Perhaps the correct way to greet people in December should not be “Merry Christmas” but “Blessed Advent”

There was so much controversy when schools, government offices and other sectors of the secular society stopped using “Merry Christmas” in greeting friends and acquaintances in the month of December. Perhaps unwittingly the people and entities that stopped using “Merry Christmas” and other Christian terms are just following the early believers of the Redeemer.

Since my stint as an altar boy in 1956 (then as a fourth grader in a public school) at the Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral in the capitol town of Sorsogon Province, I noticed that my religious mentors used “Advent” (and not “Christmas”) in the church liturgy. And in their homilies. I observed the same when I proceeded to take up high school at the parish-run Lyceum of Sorsogon that was renamed the Divine Word High School after it was taken over by the SVD Fathers. I found the same experience when I went to study at San Beda College, as run by the Benedictine monks. I had the same lessons when I studied at the Ateneo de Manila College of Law, a Jesuit school.

In my nearly-12 years of studying in Catholic schools, I was taught that the season of commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ is called “Advent.”

Written by Bobby M. Reyes

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Recently I came across a bulletin of the St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church in Brentwood., Los Angeles, CA. In his Pastor’s Message on the First Sunday of Advent on Nov. 27, 2016, Rev. Ben Le, an American priest of Vietnamese descent, wrote a brief but well-researched piece. It was a good summary of what was taught to me by my religious mentors about this season from 1956 all the way to the 1970s. No priest could have said it better.

Fr. Ben Le said: “The Advent season begins our new liturgical year. This is a great time for us to reflect on what Advent is all about. Advent means ‘coming’. Many Christians believe that Advent is a time of anticipating of Christ’s birth at Christmas. However, there is more to Advent than just Christmas. Beginning in (the) 6th century, Christians began celebrating Advent as the anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ, not the First Coming in the manger in Bethlehem! The First Coming was included by the Middle Ages.

“Advent is our pilgrimage through the events of salvation history, beginning with the preparation for the birthday celebration of Jesus and concluding with the anticipation of and reflection on his glorious Second Coming. We are encouraged to meditate on Jesus’ humble first coming as a baby in Bethlehem, his coming daily into our lives through the mystery of the Sacraments, the Word of God in the Bible and the worshipping community, and finally his *Second Coming* at the end of the world.

“During Advent, the Church looks back to celebrate Christ’s First Coming, and at the same time looks forward to the Second Coming when the Kingdom of God will be established. Just as what God has done in the past we confidently hope during the Advent Season, that is what He will do for us in the future.”

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As Googled, QUOTE. These days, it's common practice to wish “Merry Christmas” to one another around the 25th of December, the day of Christmas. The origin of this practice is a little obscure. However, it's believed that an English admiral first used the term Merry Christmas in an informal letter, way back in 1699. In 1843, Charles Dickens used the same phrase in “A Christmas Carol.” However, notwithstanding the veracity of its origin, “Merry Christmas” has become a sort of universal term to communicate joy and good wishes.

“The term ‘Merry Christmas’ doesn't have any religious bias and is often used by people of all races and religious backgrounds, during Christmas time. It reflects that messages of love, joy and well wishes can be communicated irrespective of belief systems. It's a greeting that makes total strangers make instant connection. It's a message that dissolves anger. It's a message that evaporates misunderstanding between loved ones and creates a bridge to the beginning of a new relationship. It's amazing that these two simple words ‘Merry Christmas’ can have this profound effect. UNQUOTE. To read the entire article, please go to this URL: <http://www.allthingschristmas.com/traditions/merry-christmas.html>

Perhaps to us, Christians, especially the Catholics among us, the correct way to greet kin, friends, acquaintances and associates in December should not be “Merry Christmas” but “Have a Happy and Blessed Advent Season”. Or simply, “Blessed Advent”. What say you, mortals? #

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