

# Holiday glitter doesn't outshine Christmas spirit

For many people, December is a month of great challenge. The minutes of daylight continue to decrease as we approach the first day of winter. The pressures of sending Christmas cards, buying Christmas gifts, decorating Christmas trees and preparing for Christmas get-togethers can all converge to make people feel overwhelmed and even depressed.

Whether we place unreasonable expectations on ourselves or allow others to make us feel guilty, this is hardly the spiritual journey that the season of Advent envisions.

People will wait on long lines at toy or electronics stores for the latest gadget or gizmo to please their children, spouse, relative, or friend, often only to learn that the item is sold out by the time they get to the front. Fights frequently ensue. The joy of the season evaporates in an instant. By contrast, the lines tend to be much shorter at parish penance services and reconciliation rooms, although people always find themselves renewed and refreshed after such a sacramental encounter.

Maintaining perspective goes a long way to surviving the holidays. Keeping Christ in Christmas is more than making sure we get a retailer to acknowledge that God's gift of Jesus is the real motivation for the shopper's purchase. It also means conducting ourselves in such a way that our own relationship with Jesus is evident to everyone around us, be they customers or merchants, strangers or friends.

*December is a month of hope and promise—a special time to see love put into action.*

Of course, December is also a month of hope and promise. By the time Christmas actually arrives, the moments of daylight are already beginning to overtake the darkness once again. Fleeting thoughts of spring and summer temper the cold winds blowing across our faces.

Midnight Mass and other masses remind us anew of the great mystery of God in our lives, even if we have not always made as much room for Him as we might have. New Year's Eve gives us yet another opportunity to put the past behind us and start all over again (as long as we don't overdo the scope of resolutions we make.)

In most parishes, December is a special time to see love put into action. Hundreds of people come forward with gifts for struggling families and nursing home residents. Parishioners provide bags of food for the poor. Members of social concerns committees, who usually labor faithfully behind the scenes all year long, work extra diligently to ensure that all donations are sorted, packaged, distributed or delivered to as many as possible. Liturgy committee members volunteer extra hours in the midst of their own busy schedules to beautifully decorate our sanctuaries and crèches. Youth Groups, school children and choirs provide uplifting renditions of seasonal tunes, both sacred and secular, in pageants, concerts, liturgies and services.

May the spirit of Christmas, which celebrates the mystery of love made real through the reality of the Word made Flesh, fill our hearts during this holy season and motivate our actions throughout the New Year as we give witness to the miracle of God with us!

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## SEEING & BELIEVING

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