

Week 1, Monday
Finding peace in the rush to Christmas, let's get started!

1. How do you feel about the build-up to Christmas? Do you find December stressful? Enjoyable? Spiritually rich? Like you're caught in a blizzard?

2. Do you have any special spiritual practices during Advent? How do you find the time for them? What makes this time of year special for you?

3. How do you feel knowing that so many people feel pressured to act happier than they really are during the holidays?

Week 1, Tuesday

1. There are 5 commonly cited reasons for stress during the holiday season: 1) financial strain of gift buying; 2) overloaded "to do" lists; 3) complicated family dynamics; 4) unrealistic expectations for a "perfect" holiday; 5) the physical toll of interrupted sleep, overindulgence in food and drink and insufficient exercise.

   Can you identify with any of these sources of stress?

2. C.S. Lewis rightly recognized the link between our bodies and our spirits. *"We must accept and embrace the body, in all its glory and buffoonery, remembering that whatever our bodies do affects our souls."* Does this quote give you pause?

3. What do you do to calm down and recharge yourself mentally, physically and spiritually as you prepare for Christmas?

Week 1, Wednesday

1. We read in the prophet Micah (chapt 5) that "He shall be peace." Are you looking for peace in a special way this December? Maybe peace in your family, or peace of heart in relation to certain misfortunes or painful circumstances in your life this year? Can you bring these sufferings to Jesus in prayer, and confide them to him?

2. How can you be an instrument of peace among your family, friends and co-workers?

Week 1, Thursday

1. Would you say that your celebration of Christmas has become more "cultural" than "spiritual?" How do you feel about that?

2. Does it surprise you to realize that despite all the commercialism around us, most Americans wish that our Christmas celebrations were more spiritual?

3. Can you think of small ways that you could introduce more spiritual time or practices into your family's celebration of Christmas? Here are a few suggestions: prioritizing listening to religious hymns and carols rather than secular ones; giving spiritually-oriented gifts such as books, religious jewelry or a rosary, or a decoration representing the nativity scene.

Week 1, Friday

1. Do you find consolation in St Francis de Sales' words advising us not to be troubled by our failings, but simply to humble ourselves before God and start over?

"Start in the morning, prepare your heart for peace; take great care throughout the day to call it back often to that peace and to take your heart again in your hand. If you do something that causes you distress, do not let it scare you, by no means trouble yourself; but, having recognized your fault, humble yourself gently before God and try to restore your spirit to an attitude of calm."

2. Do you find Eucharistic adoration or the rosary helpful in maintaining your peace of mind and heart? If you feel you don't have time for these efforts, could you find a way to pray in the car, or out on a walk?