

## The importance of waiting

This year, the Christmas Tree and decorations at my local Sainsbury's appeared on 12<sup>th</sup> November. The shelves were still stocked with Hallowe'en and Bonfire Night Treats as people had barely finished with October and November festivals and the supermarket was launching into Christmas.

It strikes me as troubling that the Christmas 'hard sell' from retailers creeps earlier and earlier each year.

We experience life in the twenty-first century in a rapid and intense way.

Mobile phone apps mean that food can be ordered and delivered more quickly than before, and brought straight to our doors.

We do not have to wait to buy a book or a new piece of music – in a click or a tap they can be delivered to our devices. The same applies to feature films which appear in the blink of an eye via streaming services.

At the Vatican City (for the Sistine Chapel) and at Disneyworld (for all the exciting rides) you can pay to 'skip the queue'.

In modern sport, there are competitive football matches nearly every evening of the week. Fans don't have to wait long to see their superstars again, and in the gaps between games there is a constant stream of replays and reviews.

How does living in a world in which their wishes can be satisfied so quickly effect our children? In comparison to children growing up forty or fifty years ago, children have to wait for things a lot less.

In the 1970s, before feature films appeared on screens instantly, everyone had to wait to see a new release at the cinema. It added to expectation, and as a result, excitement.

In the same way, all books were in physical form, and sold in shops not via the internet, so seeking out new titles and waiting for new releases meant that we had to make more careful choices.

Fast food meant beans on toast.

Everyone joined the same queue and waited. British people were quite famous for this.

Most sports fans watched their heroes in person, at the stadium, every fortnight. Until the 1980s, the only football match live on television was the FA Cup Final.

There is a school of thought that suggests that the speed of the modern world is not healthy for us, and ultimately can be quite troubling. Our children experience the same disconnection with authentic experiences and confusion about the way in which everything is available to them, at a price, twenty-four hours a day. We live in an unsleeping society. Logic suggests that the intensity of our experiences makes a genuine pause, and rest, more difficult. The proof is the growth in 'mindfulness', meditation apps on our phones, and the need to switch off.

This Sunday is the solemnity of **Jesus Christ, King of the Universe**, known to many of us as 'Christ the King'. It marks a change in the Church's year and precedes the season of Advent. Advent is a time of waiting and preparation.

We owe it to our children to reflect and act on the true meaning of Advent. Despite the external pressures of the society in which we live, Advent is a distinct and special time that

stands separately to the holy feast of Christmas. Advent should not be a period of scrambling to obtain all the things to make 'The Perfect Christmas'.

The truth is that the things needed for a 'Perfect Christmas' are already with us: our children, parents and family.

Advent is a time to stop, instead of accelerating, and prepare our hearts for Christmas.

As a community, we do not need apps to teach us how to stop. We already have the best method for this – we are a community of prayer. Prayer is the perfect way to stop.

In school, and at home, it's important that we help our children to understand the importance of waiting. Children are well able to understand how God's people waited in anticipation for the coming of the Messiah. A useful thing to do in Advent is to study the First Reading carefully each week, and share Old Testament stories about those who longed for the arrival of the Messiah.

If we stop, disconnect from the modern world for a while, then there is time for prayer. On the important solemnity of Christ the King we can ask ourselves and our children a searching question that I read last week from a Diocese in Melbourne, Australia: 'How is Christ King of my world?'

It is a difficult question to answer, and as Advent begins, perhaps one everyone would do well to keep in mind.