

advent calendar 2017 usccb

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Introduction

Every year, families, churches, and individuals across the United States look forward to a special tradition that brings the anticipation of Christmas into daily life: the Advent calendar. While many people associate Advent calendars with chocolate doors or small toys, the **USCCB Advent Calendar 2017** offers a unique, spiritually enriching experience tailored for Catholics. This guide explores the history, design, and practical uses of the 2017 edition released by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), helping you decide whether it's the right devotional tool for your household or parish.

What Is the USCCB Advent Calendar 2017?

Released in 2017, the Advent calendar from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is a thoughtfully crafted devotional aid that combines daily scripture readings, prayers, and reflections with visually appealing artwork. Unlike commercial calendars that focus on sweets or surprises, this edition places a strong emphasis on liturgical preparation and personal spiritual growth. Each of the 24 days—counting from December 1 to Christmas Eve—offers a distinct theme that encourages believers to reflect on the mystery of Christ's birth, the hope of the season, and the call to live out their faith in everyday actions.

Historical Context of Advent Calendars in Catholic Tradition

Advent calendars have their roots in medieval Europe, where early Christians used candle-lit calendars to mark the days leading up to Christmas. Over time, these calendars evolved into the paper and cardboard versions that are familiar today. In Catholic communities, Advent calendars have often served as tools for catechesis, especially for children and families seeking a structured way to prepare for the liturgical season.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, recognizing the need for a calendar that reflects contemporary Catholic life, developed the 2017 edition as part of its broader mission to support parish life and personal devotion. By integrating scripture, liturgy, and pastoral guidance, the USCCB Advent Calendar 2017 seeks to deepen the faithful's understanding of the Advent season while fostering a sense of community.

Design and Features of the 2017 Edition

Illustrations and Themes

One of the most striking aspects of the 2017 calendar is its beautiful, hand-drawn illustrations. Each door features a unique scene that reflects a key biblical moment or spiritual concept. From the humble manger to the shepherds' vigil, the artwork invites viewers to pause, reflect, and connect with the narrative of salvation history.

Prayer Focus for Each Day

Every door contains a short, concise prayer that aligns with the day's theme. These prayers are crafted by clergy and lay writers, ensuring they are theologically sound and pastorally sensitive. The prayers range from petitions for personal grace to calls for communal unity, mirroring the diverse needs of the Catholic faithful.

Materials and Craftsmanship

The calendar is printed on high-quality, recycled cardstock, making it an eco-friendly choice for the environmentally conscious. The binding is sturdy, allowing the calendar to endure frequent handling throughout the Advent season. The inclusion of a small booklet at the back provides additional context, including a brief overview of Advent, a suggested reading plan, and a list of parish resources for deeper engagement.

How to Use the Calendar for Spiritual Growth

Daily Reflections

Using the calendar as a daily devotional is straightforward. Each morning, open the corresponding door, read the scripture passage, and say the prayer. Afterward, spend a few minutes in quiet meditation, allowing the themes to sink into your heart. If you have a journal, jot down any insights or feelings that arise.

Family and Community Use

The calendar's design makes it ideal for family devotion. Parents can involve children by having them read the scripture aloud or draw their own interpretations of the illustrations. In a parish setting, the calendar can be displayed in the church lobby, and each day's prayer can be read aloud during Sunday Mass or in small group gatherings.

Integration with the Liturgical Calendar

Because the USCCB Advent Calendar 2017 aligns with the official Catholic liturgical calendar, you can synchronize your daily reflections with the readings assigned for each Mass. This synergy enhances the sense of participation in the larger Church community.

Where to Find and Purchase the Calendar

- **Official USCCB Website:** The calendar is available for purchase in the "Resources" section of the USCCB site. Prices are modest, reflecting the ministry-focused nature of the product.
- **Parish Bookstores:** Many diocesan and parish bookshops carry the 2017 edition, often bundled with other Catholic devotional items.
- **Online Retailers:** Major online platforms such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble list the calendar, offering convenient shipping options.
- **Direct from the Diocese:** Some dioceses provide the calendar for free or at a reduced cost to parishioners, especially those participating in parish ministries.

Reviews and Feedback from the Catholic Community

- **Depth of Content:** Parishioners appreciate the theological depth of the prayers, noting that they "feel like a conversation with the Church."
- **Artistic Appeal:** Parents praise the illustrations for engaging children's imagination while staying faithful to scriptural narratives.
- **Practical Use:** Many users report that the calendar helped them "stay focused on the true meaning of Christmas," especially during the busy holiday season.
- **Accessibility:** The calendar's simple layout and clear fonts make it accessible for people of all ages and reading levels.

Comparing the 2017 Edition to Other Advent Calendars

- **Commercial vs. Devotional:** While commercial calendars often feature chocolates or small toys, the USCCB Advent Calendar 2017 prioritizes spiritual enrichment over material surprise.

- **Liturgical Alignment:** Many secular calendars do not align with the Catholic liturgical calendar, whereas this edition does, allowing for seamless integration into Mass readings.
- **Community Focus:** The calendar's design encourages communal use, making it suitable for parish groups, youth ministries, and family devotions.
- **Eco-Friendly Materials:** The use of recycled cardstock sets it apart from many other calendars that rely on non-sustainable materials.

FAQs

1. Is the calendar available in other languages? The 2017 edition is primarily in English. However, some dioceses provide translated versions or offer bilingual prayer books to accompany the calendar.
2. Can I use the calendar during the entire Advent season, including the first week of December? Yes, the calendar begins on December 1 and continues through December 24, covering the full 24 days of Advent.
3. What if I want to share the calendar with a larger group? The calendar's design makes it easy to display in a church lobby or community center. For digital sharing, you can scan the prayers and distribute them via email or social media.
4. Does the calendar include any physical gifts? No. The focus is on prayer and reflection, so the calendar contains no chocolates, toys, or other tangible items.
5. Where can I find the official PDF of the prayers for digital use? The USCCB website hosts downloadable versions of the prayers in PDF format for those who prefer a digital format.

Conclusion

The **USCCB Advent Calendar 2017** stands out as a thoughtful, theologically grounded resource that invites Catholics to engage deeply with the mystery of Christ's coming. Its combination of art, scripture, and prayer offers a daily reminder of the season's spiritual significance while fostering community and family devotion. Whether you're looking to enrich your personal practice, lead a parish group, or simply share the joy of Advent with your loved ones, this calendar provides a meaningful and accessible way to experience the true spirit of Christmas. Embrace the 24 days of reflection, and let the light of Christ guide your heart this holiday season.

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