

From the desk of Rob Costante, Principal...

December 25, 2011

A mere four weeks ago, our school community began our daily devotion along the Advent journey. Our Catholic tradition believes the illumination of Advent candles serves as a symbol of hopeful anticipation for the coming of our Lord. The glow from the candle light signifies Christ as the ever-present Light of our world. Since Advent is a time to awaken our faith in God, the wreath and its prayers provide us a way to strengthen our special preparation for Christmas. This tradition reminds our faith community not to lose sight of the true meaning of Christmas.

As we consider the many religious and cultural beliefs of the Advent season, we are reminded that this journey will joyfully lead us to Christmas day. Over time, our personal beliefs form our family traditions. Author Susan Lieberman once affirmed, "*Family traditions counter alienation and confusion. They help us define who we are; they provide something steady, reliable and safe in a confusing world*". As we consider the specific customs which embody our cultural beliefs, it is the consistent devotion of maintaining these customs which allow our beliefs to evolve into cherished traditions. While these cultural customs may arrive in many forms, they only become a tradition if they consistently remain, year after year. Our Christmas identity becomes bound to these traditions. In my home, an Italian Christmas Eve tradition known as the ***Feast of the Seven Fishes*** serves as a culinary custom to unite a celebration of faith, family, fellowship and food. As folklore goes, the feast sprang up as a response to the Church's decree against eating meat on certain holy days. The season of advent leading up to Christmas was this type of fasting time. So, Italians turned this fast into a feast of fish and seafood items. The significance of *seven* is fairly unknown, though many have pointed to the religious significance of the number 7: seven sacraments, seven virtues, and seven days of creation. No matter what legend one may believe, the feast endured, and when Italians began to immigrate to the United States, the feast came along and became an Italian-American tradition as well.

As my own family prepares its traditional Christmas Eve dinner, I eagerly await the broiled crab cakes, steamed shrimp, pan seared scallops, fried flounder, grilled tuna, baked grouper and fried clams. Some of these "seven fishes" are items that my grandfather enjoyed while in Italy; others were favorites my father enjoyed growing up in West Virginia; while still others are a result of a blended assortment of eastern shore delicacies I have enjoyed while growing up in Maryland. Even though I spent most of my adolescent years complaining to my father that "no one else I knew had to eat smelly fish on Christmas Eve", I am grateful that my father endured and required that the custom my grandfather brought from the San Giovanni province in Italy would continue today for my own children to curse. Ms. Lieberman was correct, "Family traditions help define who we are". For the past forty two years, I have complained, cursed and cherished my family's Christmas Eve tradition. But the truth is, I wouldn't have it any other way!

We pray in thanksgiving for the beliefs and customs that our school, parish and family communities faithfully follow. May the Lord bless you with great joy on Christmas!

As we enjoy our vacation, I would like mention a couple of noteworthy items:

- **School will re-open on Tuesday, January 3rd.**
- **Volunteers are needed to assist in the Christmas clean-up of the Parish Center. If you are available, please stop by at 10:00am on Wednesday, December 28th.**

Have a blessed and enjoyable week!

PENGUIN PRIDE Lives Here!