

Ask St. Andrew

By the time Advent rolls around, my kids have long been preparing to joyfully celebrate the birth of Christ. They do this by poring over websites and toy catalogs, flinging their “needs” across canvases like Jackson Pollock did with paint.

After months of indiscriminately jotting down everything they saw or heard about (me: “sorry, you don’t need a saddle for the dog”), when they finally turn in the final drafts, the lists aren’t handed to us as much as they are unspooled like the Magna Carta scroll. So my wife and I realized we might have a problem with our children asking for things – especially around Christmas.

Yes, we had options. We could have put our well-educated heads together to brainstorm solutions, mapped out a rollout strategy and held a family pep rally to get everybody on board and excited about the new initiative. But, as busy and fairly unoriginal parents, we decided to turn to others much wiser than ourselves for advice. Why reinvent the wheel, right?

Seeking inspiration to limit the kids’ early onset secularism and consumerism (and probably a few more “isms” we don’t even know about), we did what any good parent would: We let them ask for whatever they wanted, but to someone else. No, not their grandparents: St. Andrew.

Last year, we started what I hope will become an Advent tradition that will be passed on from generation to generation in our family – like that ugly Christmas ornament or caroling on Christmas Eve. If you’re unfamiliar with the St. Andrew Christmas novena, it consists of one short, simple prayer, prayed for any single intention you’d like: health, finding work, healing, whatever.

Before we began, we had the kids think about the thing for which they really wanted to pray. They could tell us what it

was or keep the intention within their hearts. What they couldn't pray for was Santa to bring them the Star Wars Lego set (or the dog saddle) on their wish scroll. But there is a slight catch. This isn't a traditional nine-day novena. Tradition claims that St. Andrew will intercede for you if you pray the prayer 15 times a day for 25 days, starting on Nov. 30 (St. Andrew's feast day) and ending on Christmas Eve. With printed copies, we recited the prayer 15 times in succession. And, amazingly, we didn't miss a day (frankly, a Christmas miracle in itself).

I don't know whether or not the kids received the wish they were praying for, but, for my wife and me, seeing them all sitting still and praying intently throughout Advent was gift enough.

St. Andrew Christmas Novena

Pray 15 times a day from Nov. 30 (the feast of St. Andrew) until Dec. 24

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires [here mention your request] through the merits of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of his blessed Mother. Amen.

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