

Tuesday of the First Week of Advent 2020

Do you know what the nine dots puzzle is? I did not until recently.

The nine dots puzzle dates as far back as at least 1914 but probably it dates back into antiquity as it appears in various forms in architectural design and ornamentations.

It is simply nine dots set on paper equally spaced in three rows of three dots each, nine dots arranged as a square. The task is to draw four continuous line segments that go through the center of all nine dots without taking the pencil off the paper.

You can Google the solution, if you want to, or, better, try it yourself.

I found the puzzle when I came across an advertisement in the London Review of Books for The Nine Dots Prize, which is an essay contest with a 100,000 GBP prize, about 133,000 USD.

The contest is open to anyone 18 years of age or older and must respond in some fashion to the question, What Does It Mean To Be Young In An Aging World?

The idea is to get innovative thinking applied to facing problems in our world, to get you to think “outside the box,” which if you learn the solution to the puzzle you will see where that phrase likely originated.

This Advent can be a lot like answering the question posed in this contest, What is it like to be young in an ageing world.

We have to be creative and innovative in keeping Christmas without many of the rituals and customs that we have come to observe and participate in over the years.

I want to get as many people to Mass as possible this year but that is going to be very difficult as so many want to attend only the 4 PM Mass and the capacity of the Church is set as of now at 100 give or take a few.

I am thinking about having another Mass in the hall at the same time, 4 PM, would anyone come, though, that is the question.

Could you see yourself celebrating Mass at another time, Christmas Day, for instance, or during that week if we offered a Mass on those other days or making Sunday Mass your Christmas Mass this year.

I know it isn't that same as our previous rituals and I do not believe that anything is better than nothing, but I really, really think that missing the connection between Christmas, Church, and Mass completely will not be good.

I am sure that every parent has a hard time when they realize that their kids have grown up and moved away and are ready to start their own traditions at Christmas.

But I am also pretty sure that when those kids start their own traditions they sneak a cookie recipe, ham and sausage, nut roll, sweet potato pie, cookies and milk for Santa, or any number of other ritual elements from their past into their new traditions.

I am also painfully aware of all of those people raised in households afflicted with poverty or alcoholism and other addictions who do not have the happy memories that I do of Christmas.

So take some time this first week of Advent and think about what it is like being young in an aging world and come up with an innovative way to "keep Christmas" this year even when you cannot keep it as you used to keep it, if for no one's sake but your own.

Do not lose heart!!!!!! Christmas is the beginning of the story that gives us every reason in the world to not lose heart even when it seems that we have lost everything!!!!!!

I know that there will be those who defiantly keep to those rituals in spite of the dire warnings not to, and I hope that they are able to keep their defiance and not suffer any consequences, although, in this regard I do believe that the actual significance of Christmas may indicate that defiance on our part might need to be tempered by justice to our health care workers and the systems that they tend to or defiance might yield to love of neighbor, just about anyone

who we might, however technically innocent, cause to become ill or die because we are defiant.