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**Annie:** Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today. Happy Thanksgiving to all of our friends here in the States celebrating today. Top of my list of things to be grateful for is having friends like y'all, getting to have conversations with these amazing guests who join us here on the podcast, and knowing that we are all on this journey together. I'm so grateful. We have got a great show in store. One of our favorites is here and we're thankful for that too.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to let you know that this episode is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). Pretty much on the daily we're faced with challenging moments that have us thinking, "Couldn't we have had a class on this in high school or somehow coping with difficult decisions and tough emotions didn't make coach so and so syllabus but here we are having to deal with it anyway.

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And just a reminder that all the links to our sponsors, the transcript of this show, a link to sign up for our weekly email newsletter, the AFD Week in Review, and all the details about our Advent series, all of those links are conveniently available in the show notes below right where you're listening. So make sure you check that out.

**Intro:** Today on the show I get to talk with our friend Father Mike Schmitz. Y'all know Father Mike. You probably remember him from our Christmas party last year where I cried a lot. It was Episode 11 of those 12 days if you want to go back and listen.

Well, Father Mike is a Catholic priest, the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries in the Diocese of Duluth in Minnesota. He's a speaker and an author. And his primary ministry is to the college students at the University of Minnesota in Duluth.

He's also the host of the podcast The Bible in a Year (with Fr. Mike Schmitz), in which he reads the entire Bible and gives his own commentary and prayers every day. Y'all, he is such a wise and thoughtful friend. And I just couldn't think of a better voice to both celebrate Thanksgiving with and to have our final episode before our Advent series begins.

And also friends, if you've already signed up at [anniefdowns.com/advent](http://anniefdowns.com/advent) in your Advent library, you can watch this conversation with me and Father Mike. We recorded the whole thing. If you guys have not joined up yet and you want to, it is not too late. Just head to [Anniefdowns.com/Advent](http://Anniefdowns.com/Advent). And there you will be able to watch this conversation as well.

So here's my conversation with Father Mike Schmitz.

[00:03:28] <music>

**Annie:** Well, welcome back to That Sounds Fun, Father Mike. Let's go.

**Fr. Mike:** We are on.

**Annie:** I'm so happy you're here. Let's do it. Let's do it.

**Fr. Mike:** This is us AFD. We're back.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right, we're back. How does it feel to be back on That Sounds Fun? Did you think you got away from us forever?

**Fr. Mike:** No. AFD and TSF-

**Annie:** That's it.

**Fr. Mike:** I am so grateful. I don't know if I've ever communicated this to you after the last time I got to be on your show. But I was so moved. It was one of the best fruits that has come out of The Bible in a Year for me after the whole thing, where just being able to have a connection with you, to be able to be on your show.

And then also there were so many people... I know a lot of Catholics who listen to your show and I know a lot of... and they were like, "Oh, my gosh, you're on Annie Downs, dah, dah, dah." Like, "You made it." And I'm like, "I know."

And then there were a number of people who they listened to the one where I was on and they started listening to the Bible. And I'm just so grateful. Also, just for you, Annie, yourself, you yourself, so when you asked could I be on, I was like, "Oh my gosh, whatever we need to do, just you need to, I need to because I'm just so grateful for you."

**Annie:** Wow, you're kind. I know your schedule is wildly insane. And so you setting aside time to help us think through Advent in a way that... I'm just thrilled about this. a) I love being your friend, but b) I love learning about how Catholics and Protestants are similar. I think so much is taught and said about how different we are and I love when we have similarities. And I also can't wait to learn about what I don't know about Advent. So we're gonna dive into that.

But first, year of Bible in a year, people are going through... that has been my favorite feedback after you being on the show besides everybody wants to be your friend is that people started listening to the Bible.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, yeah. Same with me. It was incredible. The number of people who responded to your just opening that invitation, I think, to the Bible and to that particular podcast, I think, for a lot of people, they trust you so much because you're so trustworthy. You've earned their trust, our trust.

So I think when, you know, you gave really, really high praise... I think about it almost... well, at least once a week about how at least for... I think you've said something along the lines of "at least for the year 2021 I was kind of your pastor in that sense." And I think about it... Really, truly I think about it almost every week. And every time I record because now I'm recording a new daily podcast, I think about it, I think, "I wonder what Annie would say about this."

**Annie:** "What's Annie gonna say about this?" Don't do that to yourself, Father Mike. Do we get to talk about the new podcasts you're recording? Or is that kind of under-

**Fr. Mike:** If you want, yeah.

**Annie:** Okay. So we've done two years of Bible in a Year. Will they release that again in '23? Was there another round?

**Fr. Mike:** Yes.

**Annie:** Okay, so if anybody hasn't listened to the Bible in a year, they can listen to that starting with you on January 1. But then you're also doing the Catechism for '23?

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Fr. Mike:** The history of the Catechism goes back, we were talking before we started this, it goes all the way back to the first couple centuries of the church. There was this thing called the Jerusalem Catecheses. And so when someone became a Christian, there was the proclamation of the gospel, proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Lord, and calling people into a relationship with God. And yet afterwards, there's this period called mystagogy where the mysteries of the faith were unpacked.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Fr. Mike:** So in order, too, for people to understand, in fact, that it's really remarkable, there is a description. It's "okay, so last night, you were baptized, here's what happened. Here's what that meant."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Fr. Mike:** So it's almost even like after the fact you were lowered into the waters and then this is what happened and then you received the Eucharist. And this is what happened. And it's almost like they waited to explain the mysteries until after someone was brought into the family.

**Annie:** Oh, that's cool.

**Fr. Mike:** In some ways it freaks people out because like, "Wait a second, I want to know."

**Annie:** "I did that yesterday?"

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, exactly. "That's what that was?" So that is unpacking the teaching, right? So that's what Catecheses mean. It takes the Lord's injunction in the Great Commission, baptize, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father's Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that commanded you.

That second part, that teaching them to observe all that commanded you as part of the catecheses. So the idea was, well, okay, here's the Bible, here's the word of God. Again, unique, completely unique, right, obviously, and then here's a summary of what, in this case, Catholics believe. So that's what the Catechism is.

And the most recent one was, the most recent universal catechism and took a couple of decades to write and to assemble, and it was promulgated or published, I think, in 1991 or so, somewhere in... I was in high school. I remember seeing this big honkin book come out. I thought, "But there's a lot of good info in there."

**Annie:** Yeah, but that's gonna take a long time to read.

**Fr. Mike:** Yes. Maybe a year.

**Annie:** Who can believe? That's awesome. So it is something that like... Sorry that I don't know this. But I'm going to ask you all the Protestant questions I don't have the answers to or the Catholic questions vs Protestant that I don't have an answer to. Does everyone have a catechism in their house like we have Bibles in our houses?

**Fr. Mike:** That's a good question. That's not a dumb question. That's a really good question. I'm a firm believer in the fact that there are no dumb questions, only dumb answers.

**Annie:** Okay, get ready then. It's on you.

**Fr. Mike:** A lot of people do, not everyone does. It's one of those things where it's more or less a reference book rather than something that you would... I mean, if you wanted to say, Okay... There's a great index in the back. So if you just say, "I want to read about hypostatic Union" — Why not? Why won't you want to do that? — Look under HY and find that. Or something like, what's the teaching on something like the death penalty? So you'd look up "death penalty". And then, "Here's the a summary of the Church's teaching on the death penalty." It's really in-depth. As I said, it's a chunk of change. But I really believe it's really beautiful. The first couple weeks of the podcast will be relatively dry. And it's all like preamble stuff-

**Annie:** Yeah, the learning part.

**Fr. Mike:** It's kind of like, "Here's why the Catechism exists, and here's why it's important." It's all nice. But then we get into the depth of like, here's the mystery of God. One of my favorite paragraph 222 I think, it says, "Jesus reveals the innermost mystery of God. And it's just things like the Son of God, Jesus, revealed the innermost mystery of God."

And I remember when I first read that I pause because there's a colon there. And I remember thinking, "What's the animal's mystery of God?" And then it says that He is an eternal exchange... that God is an eternal exchange of love. That's the innermost secret of God, the innermost mystery.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Fr. Mike:** And that Father loving the Son, the Son of the Father. The Holy Spirit is so real that it's a person. So things like that. There's four parts to it. Maybe you're getting more than you wanted.

**Annie:** No, I'm all the way in on this. I'm learning.

**Fr. Mike:** There's four pillars. There are four parts. The first part is what we believe. So it's the Creed. It's based off of the Apostles Creed and it refers a lot to the Nicene Creed too. Second part is how we worship. And so it's like sacraments and things like this. Then it's morality, how we live, based off the ten commandments. And then the last part is how we pray. It's on prayer.

And all of those next three sections... I mean, the first section on the Creed is powerful and beautiful and gives us a lot of info. Like it takes everything from Scripture and can distill it into "this is what then we can say about God that He's revealed, this is what He's revealed to us. And it puts it in a way that articulates it in just kind of a different way. So hopefully it kind of penetrates our minds and hearts in a new way. But that last section, that last pillar on prayer it was written by a priest-

**Annie:** A whole pillar on prayer?

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah. It's incredible. It's amazing. It is my favorite. Also, I'll mention this in the podcast, but it was written by - where does he live? He was in Beirut when Beirut was being bombed out in the, I think, the 80s. And he was in a cellar in a basement with candlelight on a typewriter. And he was writing out this incredibly beautiful pillar on prayer. This is how we have a life of prayer. This is how God calls us to pray, how He gives us His grace so we can pray. It's amazing.

And then you realize the context of "Oh, this was written in a cellar by candlelight as above him bombs are raining on his hometown. And you think, Yeah, that's when we need to pray. Not just praying on sunny days, blue sky days, we need to pray when the bombs are going too.

**Annie:** And if he can have a discipline of prayer, why can't I?

**Fr. Mike:** Well, I don't we have a cellar, Annie. That's why.

**Annie:** That's why. I live in a condo. I don't have a downstairs. That's what it is. So what after you and I talked last year, I got the... Or it may have gotten it right before. But I got the Ascension Press Catholic Bible. And one of the things I noticed when I'm thinking about the catechism and thinking about what meets what I believe as a

Protestant, for starters, some of the psalms are numbered differently. Why is that? How did that happen?

**Fr. Mike:** That's a great question. The Latin translation called the Vulgate and the... what was the next translation? But the Vulgate numbered things differently. Because the Bible isn't number to chapters and verses until - what was it? 1600?

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Fr. Mike:** I would have to go back on that. I'm not sure. But it took a while. And so, because of that, there were a couple of different versions that just numbered them slightly differently. Kind of like the commandments. There's the way that Catholics number the commandments that separate the last two, which would be "Do not covet your neighbor's ox or his property or his wife" would be nine and 10. Verses in the Protestant the way it number that is those two are together and the first two are split up.

**Annie:** Yes, that's right.

**Fr. Mike:** But all the words are there.

**Annie:** Yeah, all the words are there. That's what I figured out.

**Fr. Mike:** Just the numbering.

**Annie:** Like when I look on Blue Letter Bible or when I looked on the Bible, the YouVersion app, and I compare the versions I read with the Catholic version, I'm like, "Well, the words are there. That's just 84 instead of 86. That's all. The words are there."

And I'll tell you, the other big thing you've done in my heart is when I take Communion, now I kind of say, "Jesus, I don't know if this becomes your body and your blood but I'm interested in the idea of it."

**Fr. Mike:** "I'm interested. I'm interested."

**Annie:** If that's a mystery I've never known before, let's go. That sounds great to me. I say that almost every time I take communion. I say, you know... I think I say your name Father Mike as I'm sitting here thinking about what I say to Jesus. I'm always like, "Father Mike says this becomes your body and your blood in me. So I'm interested."

Advent, same or different between Protestant church and Catholic church? Do you know?

**Fr. Mike:** It's a great question. It's a great question because I only know about the Catholic version.

**Annie:** Okay, good. Well, that's what I want you to teach us and I'll just thumbs up, thumbs down whether that's what we know too. The four candles. What are the four candles? I guess there's five if you count Christmas Eve.

**Fr. Mike:** Right. So we have four. And I guess there are some Advent wreaths, so you know, to have a fifth for Christmas day. That's a great point. So, yeah. Gosh, how do I start? So how did Advent even come about is a big question.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Fr. Mike:** So one of the things we have is we have a liturgical... The people who listen to your podcast, those who come from like a liturgical background... When I say liturgical, I mean that there's kind of a format when it comes to the way they celebrate on Sunday that goes back, you know, further than a couple decades, typically. And then we also have a liturgical calendar. So like it's not just on Sundays and weekday services or weekday masses, we call them. It's a format there.

But also we have liturgical calendar where the new church year begins on the first Sunday of Advent. And the Sunday before Advent, the church Year ends. And it always concludes, well, as of the, I think, 1950s with the feast of Christ the King of the Universe. Actually the official term I think is Christ the King, Lord of the universe is the feast.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Fr. Mike:** Which I remember as a kid going like, "Okay, whatever." But I did enter into that and realize, yeah, actually, the last few Sundays leading into the end of the Church year, this Feast of Christ the King, Lord of the Universe, are all about when we read about how Jesus saying, "Hey, wait, watch, stay awake. You don't know what the hour."

So what we're given at the end of the year is we're given that reminder of we don't know the day or the hour, we don't have the time. So we have to be awake, we have to watch, we have to be prepared. Because the Lord is coming back. And that's the thing is so easy for us to forget unless we hold that in front of our eyes.



It's one of the reasons why I love the liturgical calendar is because there's, okay, here's the time for feasting. Here's a time for fasting, here's a time to remember of God's intimacy, His closeness. Also, it's time to remember that He is the Lord of the universe. There's a time to remember that's what He did back then, and there's also a time to be reminded of what He's going to do still. And I just love that. And even if I forget, the church reminds me. And that's one of the reasons I love that circular nature of-

**Annie:** Yeah. We actually created one with our Advent series. We created a liturgical calendar that has Eastertide and Christmastide and Advent and Lent and Pentecost and all the things. But you know me. I wait for Christmastide and Eastertide. I was like, Eastertide is two days longer than Lent, we need to talk about it. We celebrate two days longer than we grieve.

**Fr. Mike:** It was amazing. Right? That's that reality that we were reminded just what you said. We feast longer than we fasted. We can celebrate the resurrection longer than we prepared to enter into the passion. And I think, you know, to have both is to have balance in so many ways.

[00:17:58] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [BEIS](#). It can be hard to fit everything in especially when it comes to luggage, as you heard me say on Monday's episode. But with BEIS there's room for everything. Even if you're like me and prefer to bring along your whole closet, four pairs of shoes for a weekend trip is not a problem. A couple extra pairs of pants? Bring it all with BEIS.

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**Sponsor:** And I want to tell you about another one of our incredible partners, Athletic Greens. I don't know about y'all, but knock on wood, I'd like to do whatever it takes to stay healthy this holiday season. And Athletic Greens is one way to do that.

So wait, what is Athletic Greens exactly? It's this powder that you mix into really cold water and just one scoop delivers 75 high quality vitamins, minerals, Whole Foods-sourced superfoods, probiotics, and adaptogens to help you start your day right. This special blend of ingredients supports your gut health, your nervous system, and your immune system. And we already talked about how it helps you with energy recovery and focus. Yes, please.

Tons of people take some kind of multivitamin, it's important to choose one with high quality ingredients that your body will actually absorb. This is one thing that you can do every single day to be a really good friend of yourself. And your subscription comes with a year supply of vitamin D, which is so important to add in, especially now that the time change means we don't get quite as much sunlight.

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And now back to our conversation with Father Mike.

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**Annie:** But I did not know that the Christian calendar starts on Advent. So the last Sunday before people are hearing this on Thanksgiving, Last Sunday was the last Sunday of the year, this coming Sunday is the first Sunday of the new year.

**Fr. Mike:** Right. Yes.

**Annie:** Fascinating.

**Fr. Mike:** And first Sunday of Advent. First Sunday of Advent, yeah. It's great.

**Annie:** So when you teach on the first Sunday of Advent, which is the first end of the year, do you treat it like a New Year conversation, like New Year, new you kind of thing?

**Fr. Mike:** I have said those things, yes.

**Annie:** Really?

**Fr. Mike:** I definitely have. One of the things that I've tried to do is have that context. You know, it's crazy... not crazy. The difficult part of this is it always happens at the end of the school year and at the end of the calendar year. And so you're trying to think, Okay, here we are. It's New Year, you guys, let's start. And people their minds are "End of semester." They're at the end of the calendar year.

And so one of the things I'll try to do is say, What are some of the other purposes of Advent? You might say classically, I think going back to like 4AD, the two dual purpose for Advent was preparation and penance.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Fr. Mike:** So all of it is oriented toward preparation. And so there's kind of this big talk about what they call the three comings of Christ. So it's preparation for those three comings of Christ. So the first coming obviously at Christmas time. And so we're preparing to enter into the celebration of Christmas. And in that season of Christmas, you probably know this already, but so... what ABC Family's *25 Days of Christmas*, whatever it is that happens from December 1st to December 25th. So the 12 days of Christmas actually start on Christmas Day and go 12 days after that.

**Annie:** So Epiphany, my favorite day of the year, Father Mike.

**Fr. Mike:** Exactly. Epiphany.

**Annie:** I love Epiphany. It's my favorite day of the year.

**Fr. Mike:** You know this already?

**Annie:** Oh, I love it.

**Fr. Mike:** So what we're meant to do is okay, take these four weeks, and prepare a) to remember what God has done for us—to prepare to enter into the celebration for what He has done. But then there's these other two preparations. That's what I think a lot of us focus on.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Fr. Mike:** It becomes like, Yeah, how do I get ready? And I know for myself too, there's so much nostalgia, when it comes to Christmas. There's so much goodness when it comes to all of the things surrounding it. We can lament a little bit how it's become more of a secular holiday than a Christian holiday. At the same time, whatever we can use to get us to this place, I think sometimes is really, really helpful.

**Annie:** Getting the room with the gospel. Just getting the room with the gospel.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, yeah, exactly.

**Annie:** I love that idea.

**Fr. Mike:** I mean, there's some things about like, yeah, okay, hot cocoa and the Bible is good and whatever, and peppermint, and getting ready for Jesus's birth.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Fr. Mike:** So the first thing is, how do we prepare to celebrate what God has done for us? So enter into that. But then the other two comings of Christ, that the Church invites us to prepare for, one is how He comes to us every day and so particularly how He comes to us as we celebrate as Catholics in the mass. So he comes to us in the Eucharist.

So it's that sense of, okay, how do you make a home for the Lord because He arrives, He shows up, He is He's present, He's with us, Emmanuel.

**Annie:** Right.

**Fr. Mike:** God is with us.

**Annie:** Right.

**Fr. Mike:** And so do we actually live like that? So here it takes Him four weeks, and I'm only prepared to remember what he's done and celebrate the birth of Christ. But also He constantly is coming to us. And so it's this four weeks of an awareness of He's here. He didn't abandon us. He sent His Holy Spirit to be with us. And the Holy Spirit continues to bring His presence into our lives, His power into our lives, His healing, His mercy, His love into our lives.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Fr. Mike:** So are we numb to that? I just love the pause of Advent.

**Annie:** So that's the second coming... Not the second coming. But that's of the three... Because I was like, How's He gonna get three out of this? But the second one is every day. It's every day.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Fr. Mike:** And then the third, of course, is when the Lord will come at the end of time. One of the things I love about that is two things. One is, yeah, the Lord will come at the end of time and He'll set all things right. That we know that we have absolute faith. And we try to grow in that faith, right? That all the injustice in the world will be made right and all the pain in the world will be redeemed and will be taken away.

And here the Lord will actually be the one... He is the Lord. He is the one who has conquered death and sin, that He will establish His everlasting kingdom and He will come again. So one of the things that I love to enter into about Advent is okay, I want to get ready for Christmas. Because I love Christmas. It's one of my favorite holidays because of all the things that go wrong with it.

Also, I know that in my prayer on a daily basis... I don't want to miss the Lord showing up on a daily basis. I don't want to miss that. He's always calling us. But the third thing is, okay, so if I'm preparing for the end of time, what does that look like? And I would say here's what I think when... Because as Jesus said, none of us know when that will be. None of us know when He'll come. But I do know that He is going to come in my lifetime. Either He's coming to me or I'm going to Him.

**Annie:** Right. Right. The end of my story is with Him. It just depends on who's traveling. Okay. Okay.

**Fr. Mike:** Exactly. And so with that, a couple years ago, I started having this practice of okay, what if I knew that December 25th I would wake up dead?

**Annie:** Father Mike, I love this.

**Fr. Mike:** And so here we go. This first Sunday of Advent coming up, you have a date, you know the day you're gonna die. It's December 25. Well, how do you live? Like, what do you do? Okay, I want to celebrate Christmas. That's beautiful. I want to recognize that He's present in my life. So necessary.

But His second coming at the end of time or at the end of my time is so off in the future. I can't even grasp it. But what if I knew that December 25th was the last day in my life? What would I do? What would I do today? Who would I forgive? Who would I ask for forgiveness?

When I went to pray, would I just kind of show up and pray or would I show up with like, "Okay, Lord, I'm going to see you soon, I need to know you. I want to know you. I want to just hear your voice because pretty soon, I'm going to be standing right in under your gaze." And so there's these things and it's not...

That's one of the things I love. It's a time of preparation for these three comings of Christ. And that third one is the one that really rocked my heart.

**Annie:** I mean, the phrase "what if I wake up dead on Christmas?" is it like the most joyful, the most like holiday hallmarky? But I love the idea of if Jesus comes back, if there is a world where December 25th is the end of life as I know it, how do I want to live this Advent?

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Annie:** I mean, I say that to people a lot, Father Mike about when God answers their prayers. What if you've been waiting to get pregnant and you get pregnant on Christmas? What if you've been waiting for that job or that spouse or that thing? What do you want to do the last month before God does the thing you've wanted Him to do?

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** It's the same idea, right?

**Fr. Mike:** It totally is. Because it takes this... we all know, intellectually, that the most precious commodity we have is time.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Fr. Mike:** And yet, very, very few of us live like that's true. We all know it. We all know we're not gonna get a second back we're not gonna get a heartbeat back and yet, so few of us live as if that's true, as if we actually know that Yeah. And so to give yourself a kind of a deadline, literally-

**Annie:** Yeah. Sorry, everybody. Sorry.

**Fr. Mike:** I think it's important. We need to reflect that. But to have that is to say, Okay, here's a conviction I sometimes have. So every morning we go into the chapel, and we have like about an hour of prayer and-

**Annie:** Like with students or just your staff?

**Fr. Mike:** Well, if it's summertime, it's just me. And if it's school year, its students and our focus missionaries and stuff like that. So we go in there and so an hour or so of prayer. And then, you know, we have mass every day and other different prayers throughout the day.

But I know if my relationship with the Lord is growing or if it's stagnant or receding because it can't stay stagnant longer. Either you're growing or not — the opposite. Is if I in the evening time go back into the chapel or... You know, not a lot of people have chapels in their place where they live.

**Annie:** Right.

**Fr. Mike:** Or like the your quiet place, or even just like... I know for myself if I don't go into the chapel at night, and just rest with the Lord and just kind of reflect on His word and what He's done throughout the course of that day and how He's moving in my heart, I know that... If I do that, I'm like, "Yeah, we're cruising, Lord. We're moving." And if I don't, it's like, "Mm, something's up."

And I think about this: How often I say, "Oh, yeah, this week, you know, I guess I didn't go on the chapel like three nights." I have to pause and say, "Wait, I'll never get those three nights back." I keep acting as if I have an unlimited quantity of these nights where I can go into a chapel and be with the Lord or even just go into my whatever prayer space and be with the Lord or even crack open my Bible and be with the Lord. I don't. And I know I don't have an unlimited quantity of these nights and yet I kind of treat it like I do.

And so I like being convicted by that by saying, "Okay, on December 25th, I won't have any more of those options left." This is just me. I know that there's other

people who are parents, and they have other obligations, people, that you're like, "Yeah, try to stay up after my kids or whatever." But there's something okay... I missed the 19th. Well, I will never get the 19th back. So maybe it's okay if I just stop by and just quiet my heart and visit the Lord for 10 minutes. Because I don't want to miss that chance. You know what I mean?

**Annie:** Yes. The seasons of the liturgical calendar, Advent, Lent, etc., do those help you focus on those evening opportunities? Sometimes my brain needs short finish lines.

**Fr. Mike:** Yes. Oh, my gosh, Annie, yes, 100%. I'm so glad you even said it like that, too. Because there's sometimes, okay, for the rest of your life then, here's what you need to do.

**Annie:** Right. Right. Were are you to live past Christmas, you have to continue.

**Fr. Mike:** Right. Exactly. You keep it going. You did it for one month, why not two?

**Annie:** Right.

**Fr. Mike:** No, absolutely. I think that helps me a ton because then I get permission to reassess. Because I think one ingredient for really healthy prayer life is consistency. I think a lot of us we put so much emphasis on intensity, which is fine. But I will say this and I'll say it again. Consistency beats intensity every time.

**Annie:** Yes. That's good.

**Fr. Mike:** I can go into prayer time for 40 minutes and just have an abundance of just like, "Okay, Lord, I love you, my hearts on fire," which is wonderful. It's a gift. Or I could show up 10 minutes a day for a week and you just showed up, I just showed up, I just showed up and I listened to your voice, Lord. I didn't feel anything, I showed up and I was distracted. I showed up and... But just that consistency of showing up is so vitally important.

So I am a big proponent of consistency. But at the same time, to have built in a seasons where you get to say, "Okay, that's what I did for the last week, six weeks, whatever it was, last season. Let's reassess. Was that helpful or do I need to change things?"

And I think that not only has it keeps it fresh in some ways, but even more powerfully it reminds me to listen to what the Spirit is doing. It reminds me to listen and say, "Okay, I was just showing up. I was just checking the box. That kind of prayer that someone had shared with me that was really powerful for them, I



believe that it's powerful, but it really wasn't helping me. I'm gonna go and do something else in my prayer." And it gives us kind of a freedom to do that.

I don't know if you're a duty-bound person, but some of us are like, "No, I need to do the thing." I broke all the rules. And this is a rule that says, you can change, it's okay. Before you pick something else up, you can put the other thing down. But it's a really good thing. You can put it down. It's okay.

**Annie:** Even the 10 minutes is really helpful. Because for any of our friends who are going to observe Advent for the first time, you know, there's a ton of Protestant churches who don't really talk about it as a season more than just the Sundays when some cute family comes up and lights a candle in front of everybody. Right?

I think it's really hopeful to hear you say like, Hey, if you can take 10 minutes and read or 10 minutes and listen in the evenings or 10 minutes, that is all it takes to get into a rhythm. Correct me if I'm wrong. My theory in my life has been if I get into a good rhythm, three days, it may be just a rhythm that I'm doing and on the fourth day I either need it more than I did the other three, or God has something really profound for me that I wouldn't have found if I wouldn't have had the first three days.

**Fr. Mike:** Oh, that makes so much sense. Yeah, absolutely.

**Annie:** Advent always feels like such a good invite in for me and for my friends of like, Hey, you're already going to celebrate Christmas. Why don't you dig a little deeper for these four weeks?

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, yeah. So something about me, Annie, is that I don't like surprises.

**Annie:** Okay. Noted. Notice.

**Fr. Mike:** So when people think, "Oh, wouldn't it be great..." In a couple years... two years? Two years. In two years I'll turn 50. Maybe I'll have a surprise party. Please don't.

**Annie:** Everyone, nobody do that.

**Fr. Mike:** You'd ruin my day.

**Annie:** Uh-uh.

**Fr. Mike:** Because there's some.. because many reasons. One is I probably have something else planned. When someone's a "Hey, surprise, we're here." Like, okay, I was going to be doing five other things than this. And I've loved very much but... The

other reason is because I think kind of like... You know the anticipation of suffering is sometimes worse than the suffering itself?

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Fr. Mike:** Likewise the anticipation of joy sometimes amplifies the actual experience of joy itself.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Fr. Mike:** The anticipation, getting ready for the celebration is part of the celebration.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Fr. Mike:** Again, that's why I say. So it sounds like I'm a - what? Party pooper if I don't like surprises. But really what I mean is I want to look forward to your visit. Like I want to look forward to you being here. And Advent gives us that chance to, again, not celebrate—this is the double-edged sword—not to celebrate Christmas before Christmas is here but to enter into the preparation for the celebration of Christmas before Christmas is here.

That's one of the things that like people in my line of work oftentimes complain about is like, Oh, my gosh, people start celebrating Christmas so early that by the time December 24th, 25th rolls around, they're just tired of it and they want to put everything away, they want to get over it and move on to the next thing.

**Annie:** Right.

**Fr. Mike:** As opposed to let's enter into the preparation for the celebration, which leads us to a place of hey, now on the day I am not tired of this, I'm ready for it.

**Annie:** Yes, yes.

**[00:37:23] <music>**

**sponsor:** Hey friends! Just taking a quick break from this conversation to tell you about another one of our amazing partners, [The Chosen](#). Okay, so if you follow me on Instagram, you saw how much our team loved getting to see the first two episodes of season three in the theater. Y'all, it is so good.

If you're not familiar, *The Chosen* is a series of shows based on the Gospels. It's an incredible visual retelling of the story of Jesus' life. The first two seasons have been

out for a while and just this past Friday, Season 3 released into theaters. So your Thanksgiving weekend plans are sorted out.

The theme of Season 3 is from Matthew 11:28, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy, burdened and I will give you rest. Season 3 picks up right where Season Two left off, and Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount. And then we get to see how things start to pick up. The group of people following Jesus and the group who are upset by His teaching are both growing and both getting riled up in different ways. But in the midst of all this craziness, Jesus brings peace and rest. Isn't that just what He does?

So you can go see episodes one and two of Season 3 in theaters right now and then be on the lookout for episodes as they start releasing for free in *The Chosen* app before Christmas. And you can head over to our YouTube and see me get to tour Capernaum. Well, the set of Capernaum that they have built for *The Chosen* so where these episodes are being filmed, you get to see the behind-the-scenes. So go check that out.

And for more information about seeing these two episodes in theaters, visit [thechosentickets.com](http://thechosentickets.com). Again, that's thechosentickets.com for all the info.

**Sponsor:** And I want to tell you about one last incredible partner, [ButcherBox](http://ButcherBox). I know lots of our friends really getting into the Black Friday shopping fun and that's just not my ministry but I love it for y'all. I love it for y'all who love it. And if you'd rather grab those good deals and good eats from the comfort of your couch like I would, then may I direct your attention to the fact that ButcherBox has amazing deals year round?

But this Black Friday your search for amazing deals on high quality protein ends with ButcherBox. ButcherBox takes the guesswork out of finding high quality meat and seafood that you can trust. It's 100% grass-fed beef, free-range organic chicken, pork-raised crate free and wild-caught seafood. It's all humanely raised, no antibiotics or added hormones.

And y'all it is just so convenient. Get what you want delivered right to your doorstep. They offer free shipping for the continental US and no surprise fees. You get to choose from a variety of box plan options, from curated to customized and change your plan whenever you want. You are the boss.

These are high quality cuts that aren't always available at the grocery store and ButcherBox offers them in an amazing value. They have exclusive member deals so you can save big on your favorite cuts. And just in case you need them, they're

gonna give you recipe inspiration guides, tips and hacks—some are even personalized—so you can cook up mouthwatering meals.

I just don't have enough of the extremely good words to say about how amazing the bacon that I got from ButcherBox is. Good bacon makes any meal better. Am I right? And convenient affordable delicious bacon delivered to my house, okay, just call me a happy Annie.

This Black Friday ButcherBox is offering our friends one of their best steak deals. So get two 10-ounce ribeyes free in every box for a whole year when you join, plus an additional \$10 off. So sign up today at [Butcherbox.com/tsf](https://Butcherbox.com/tsf) and use the code TSF. That's free ribeyes for a year plus \$10 off at [Butcherbox.com/tsf](https://Butcherbox.com/tsf) with the code TSF.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Father Mike.

[00:40:45] <music>

**Annie:** So in the Catholic calendar, are the candles still hope, peace, love, joy?

**Fr. Mike:** You know, it's really interesting because I would say that there... Yes.

**Annie:** Yes, and...

**Fr. Mike:** Yes, and I had to look that up.

**Annie:** Oh, really? You don't say it.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah. It was one of those situations where I'm like-

**Annie:** Fascinating!

**Fr. Mike:** Oh, yeah. No, because we'll follow the readings for any given Sunday are going to be... there's a three-year cycle. So year A, B, and C. They follow the same theme. And so I don't necessarily think of hope and peace and joy and love as much as I think, Okay, the first week the first candle is written and we always read from some of the prophecies about how the Messiah will come.

**Annie:** Yeah. Because another thing the internet says it's called the prophecy candle, the hope.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, exactly.

**Annie:** So were you like prophecy, shepherd, angel? Do y'all say those things?

**Fr. Mike:** We could.

**Annie:** The internet said that to me, too. It said the other option for the candles was like the prophecy candle and the angel candle and the shepherd candle. But I was like, "That must be Catholic. That's not Protestant." That's what I thought.

**Fr. Mike:** Then there is something in there because there is the... there's like the prophecy candle, the Bethlehem candle-

**Annie:** Yeah, Bethlehem candle.

**Fr. Mike:** ...new shepherd's candle, angel's candle. At the same time, again, what I get when I focus on is... Those are great ways to handle. I have a little hook to hook what you're kind of reading about. Yeah. But sometimes as a preacher in Advent, I'm thinking, "Okay, when are we going to get to John the Baptist and the story of Angel Gabriel coming to Mary? And it's like, Well, yeah, that's week three. Like, ooh, come on. Week three and four.

The first couple of weeks are typically... let's go back to the Old Testament. This is great. I'm grateful for it but I'm also sometimes frustrated by it.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Fr. Mike:** Is that it starts out by talking about, what are the promises of the Lord? Like what are the promises of God? And that part is the Old Testament. And it gets fulfilled in the stories of John the Baptist and the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary. But until then, it's like, "Okay, we can't discard the old. The new can't be fulfillment unless it's for the fulfillment of the old. So it's kind of a big piece.

**Annie:** Yeah, one of the things we're going to talk about through Advent is almost treating hope, peace, love, and joy like gifts God's given us at Christmas to take with us into next year. And so will you talk a little bit about how an Advent rhythm can set us up for 2023?

**Fr. Mike:** Oh, yeah, for sure. Oh, man. Well, how an Advent rhythm can set us up for 2023. That is wonderful.

**Annie:** I love when I stump you. And that's the kindness you say back to me, "That's wonderful. I don't know. You didn't prep me for that, Annie."

**Fr. Mike:** Well, because I think there's an element too kind of like we were just talking about, where it's okay for this season I want to get into this rhythm of showing up. And I'm getting to this rhythm of listening to the Lord's voice in a particular way. And that's one of the great things about a shorter, as I said, liturgical season, is there's a lot of materials out there that's like, "Here's a journey through Advent."

The company I work with, Ascension Press, every year for the last four or five years, they put out this kind of like, "Hey, just walk with us." And so they did something like, you know, a journey through Advent with Joseph, and Journey Through Advent with Mary and this kind of like... And it takes this big, big concept of the Christian life and of Advent and makes it like, okay, here's an individual, here's a person that... just walk with them and kind of just enter into the season with them. So that is very helpful.

The challenge is going to be this. The challenge is going to be if you have something like, I don't know, the That Sounds Fun Advent edition podcast-

**Annie:** Certainly.

**Fr. Mike:** ...and that's your go-to For Advent, the question is going to be, okay, after Advent, here's the Christmas season. I found something that was really a helpful tool to walk with me during this time but now I don't have a tool anymore. So what is the thing that I can have in my hands or have in my ears and just keep walking?" That's gonna be the big challenge I think for a lot of people who are on this journey. At the same time, to know that ahead of time is to be prepared.

**Annie:** That's right. Luckily, there's things like you reading the Bible that they can immediately hold hands with into the new year. And I haven't even told you this, but I'm gonna read the gospels next year in a month.

**Fr. Mike:** Oh, you are?

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Fr. Mike:** That is awesome.

**Annie:** I'm gonna do the Gospels on the podcast in 30 days.

**Fr. Mike:** Are you going to start in January or when are you starting?

**Annie:** Yeah, January.

**Fr. Mike:** Oh, perfect. Then people-

**Annie:** So they can do the Bible with you, they can do the Gospels with me. I mean, before you let go of the rhythm you're in, grab hold of the next rhythm. Yeah. That's what I have to do.

**Fr. Mike:** That's exactly it. Because that's the big fear is people are joining with you over Advent, "That was wonderful. What do I do now?" And you're giving them the... What a great gift. That's awesome.

**Annie:** I mean, that's what I need too. Okay, speaking of Joseph, I read a devotional yesterday that we don't have a single word Joseph ever said.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Talk about that.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah. He's silent Joseph.

**Annie:** We don't have a single word Joseph ever said.

**Fr. Mike:** Well, he's on my mug right now.

**Annie:** Oh, is that him?

**Fr. Mike:** Cartoon Joseph on my mug.

**Annie:** There he is. I didn't recognize him. I've never seen his picture before. So...

**Fr. Mike:** Artist's rendering.

**Annie:** Yeah, yes. So what do you think about that? I mean, it's one of the most faithful characters in all of Scripture... I think. I'm a big fan of Joseph and Mary. But no words from him.

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah. There's so much to learn from that, to gather from that and realize, "Okay, so what can I learn from Joseph silence?" Especially, as someone who talks a lot, what can I learn from Joseph's silence and his obedience?

You know, there are a number... Even back in the early church, there were a number of different theories of why Joseph... The angel who appeared to Joseph to say, "Don't be afraid to take Mary into your home." And because he didn't say anything about it, we don't know. All it says is because he was a righteous man yet unwilling

to expose her to shame decided to divorce her quietly. You're like, "Okay, what does all that mean?"

And sometimes people believe that kind of what, I think, maybe we assume, which is, well, yeah, he was suspicious. I mean, here's this one you're betrothed to and she is pregnant, and you know that you're not the father. So you're suspicious, but you also want to be righteous man, but unwilling to expose her to shame. So that could be part of it.

Another actual from the early, I mean, gosh, second century, maybe at this point, theory was that Joseph believed her. And that he actually believed that when she said, He knew her character, and he knew that she'd be telling you the truth... I mean, it's a small town, Nazareth. But at the time of Joseph and Mary, it was what? 300 people, something like this.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh.

**Fr. Mike:** That he actually believed when she said, "The Holy Spirit, the angel Gabriel appeared to me." And he was like, "I'm not worthy. I can't do that." And he was afraid. And so Angel Gabriel says, "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home." And so we don't know.

**Annie:** I love that so much.

**Fr. Mike:** I think it's worth praying about because there is that sense of like, "I don't trust you so I'm wanting to divorce you." That also could be "No, I trust you but I can't do this."

**Annie:** "I don't have what it takes." Yeah. Father Mike! That makes me love them all the more. That makes me love Joseph all the more.

**Fr. Mike:** And again, we don't know but these are just theories. And they are not the recent theories. Sometimes the recent theories are like, "Well, okay, sure." But others are like, No, these are people who from the very beginning of the story, were like, "Wait a second. Maybe he actually knew that she was telling the truth." And he was like me who had to say, "Oh, I am sorry, I can't do this because it's too much."

**Annie:** Wow. Okay, any final encouragement for any of our friends Catholic or Protestant who are thinking about stepping into Advent for the first time?

**Fr. Mike:** Oh, 100%. It's going to be consistency beats intensity every time. It's just like the Bible in here. Keep pressing play. Yeah, let's just have that the first... Like you



mentioned, Annie, the first three days are like, "Okay, I'm making this decision." By the time you get the fourth, fifth day...

Actually, the weekend is gonna be kind of maybe a challenge. You got your rhythm of the days and whatnot and then kind of the days get kind of messed up a little bit because of the weekend or because of Christmas parties or whatever kind of things are happening. But just to be able to say don't be discouraged by those days. I always just say the hardest day to pray, hardest day to read your Bible is the day after the day you don't read your Bible.

**Annie:** That's exactly right.

**Fr. Mike:** It's the day that you don't pray. But that's the day you need to press play. That's the day you need to show up and just reset, restart.

**Annie:** That's great.

**Fr. Mike:** You're never done.

**Annie:** So today's Thanksgiving when everybody is hearing this. So, Happy Thanksgiving to you.

**Fr. Mike:** Thank you. You too.

**Annie:** I'm very thankful for you. Okay, the last question we always ask. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, Father Mike, tell me what sounded fun to you these days. If you say CrossFit... You can't say CrossFit. That was last year's answer.

**Fr. Mike:** Okay. So I just was in a competition a couple weeks.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh! Were you really though?

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, I was really.

**Annie:** Did you win?

**Fr. Mike:** We had a team of four people. We didn't win. We get in a place like we're where we wanted to. But our effort was good. Our team was two guys, two girls, and one of the girls is my older sister. And she's just a beast. She's amazing. She's always so much fun.

What do I do for fun? Well, on Thanksgiving Day, I am so grateful because typically for parish priests, they are in the parish and they get to do all this stuff in

the morning and they maybe can zip away at night to be with, you know, their extended family.

Because I'm on an academic calendar still, I get to be with my family. And I just get to like spend the entire day and the day after and the day after, so Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, just with my siblings, and my parents and my nieces and nephews. I love it so much. It is just an incredible gift. They're awesome. That's pretty fun for me.

**Annie:** Yeah, I agree. Anything we didn't say that you wanna make sure we say?

**Fr. Mike:** Oh, wow. Also, I did mention that it's two points of Advent. One is preparation. The other is penance. But penance is meant to be oriented towards preparation. And so that sense of like, "What am I willing to go without so that my heart is more free to love? What am I willing to do as a kind of taking on a burden on myself so that I can be more prepared?"

Sometimes people make arbitrary penances in the sense of it has no connection whatsoever to your actual growth or your actual life. It's just "I'm going to give up sweets." Like okay, if that's something that's been keeping away from the Lord, then wonderful.

**Annie:** Right.

**Fr. Mike:** But it would make more sense to say, Okay... I don't know. Something else. Something that's more that you realize, this is an area where I know the Lord is calling me to grow. Okay, what some kind of... I don't wanna say challenge. But what's something...

**Annie:** Like less time on social media maybe?

**Fr. Mike:** Right.

**Annie:** Something that you make more time in your day?

**Fr. Mike:** Right, right. And it could even be something like, "Okay, I'm gonna substitute this podcast, this other podcast for That Sounds Fun Advent podcasts because I don't have all the time. Actually, you know what? I'm not even gonna listen to that one all of December. I'll start listening maybe again in January. But for this month I'm just going to not listen to it, so I have room now in my life for the Advent preparation.

**Annie:** Man, the interesting thing is it sounds like for Advent preparation... So penance leads to preparation. And then for Lent, it's a little bit reversed, right?

**Fr. Mike:** Yeah, it's very similar.

**Annie:** That is fascinating.

**Fr. Mike:** So we see both of those seasons as both... Both are seasons of preparation, and both are seasons technically of penance as well. I made a video once about how I was like, "Advent really isn't a seasonal penance." And I got some people mad at me. That's not true. They wanted to also point out that, well, technically it also kind of is but I can see your point. They were very kind.

**Annie:** I mean, were they very kind Father Mike or were they...?

**Fr. Mike:** I choose to interpret their words as being very kind.

**Annie:** You're such a kind person.

**Fr. Mike:** I think whenever you lead someone to a deeper sense of truth, deeper awareness of truth that is a kindness.

**Annie:** It's a kindness. Clarity is kindness. You win.

[00:53:48] <music>

**Outro:** Oh, you guys, isn't he just the best? We're so lucky to be friends of Father Mike. What a gift he is. one of my all-time favorite pastors in my life. I just think the world of him. So let's all be sure to follow him on social media, tell him thanks for being back with us and helping us usher in Advent.

Remember that all the details about our admin series, which starts on Sunday are at [Anniefdowns.com/advent](http://Anniefdowns.com/advent). And remember you can watch this conversation with Father Mike there as well. If you want not just to listen, if you want to watch it, it's also at [Anniefdowns.com/advent](http://Anniefdowns.com/advent).

And if you're subscribed to the podcast, the daily episodes Monday through Friday will start dropping in your feed. But first, we'll drop in here on Sunday to start Advent. If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Well, not this weekend because I'll be very occupied chasing my nephew around and hanging out with people I love and enjoying a pause to be grateful. But usually you can find me at Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, eat some green bean casserole and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, yeah, being with my family. I can't wait.

Y'all have a great Thanksgiving weekend, watch a lot of football, do a little turkey trot. Whatever you love to do this weekend I hope you get to do it. We'll see you back here on Sunday as we light the first candle of Advent and step into our first week of the Advent series focused on hope. Oh y'all, I cannot wait. Happy Thanksgiving and we'll see you back here on Sunday.