Calculating Your God Point Average (GPA)

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If you have the opportunity to visit the Christian Brothers University campus over the next two weeks, you will find many tired and nervous students as the end of the fall semester approaches, finishing just prior to Christmas. I see these young faces in every corner of campus; dashing to study groups, chatting with professors, preoccupied with the business of the closing out the spring semester. As I reflect on this change in campus culture every December, it reminds me of how many people often approach preparation for Advent in similar ways.

As final exams and papers loom and the all-important Grade Point Average (GPA) is at stake for students, I find that students fall within three major categories. There are the students who worked diligently all semester, completed all of their assignments and turned in all of their homework on time. They approach the end of the semester the same way they began it – with hard work and quiet confidence, knowing that their GPA will be indicative of their entire semester's efforts. There is a second group who did not work very hard during the semester, but think that in the next two weeks they can put on a fantastic finish with all-nighters and non-stop studying to garner an outstanding GPA. The final group of students left their grades to chance (thankfully, they are few in number on our campus), expecting professors to give them a good grade just because they are good people. As you recall your college days, into what category did you fall?

As we approach Advent, this holy season when Jesus Christ was born, have we been preparing daily for his arrival? Have we waited until the last few weeks and are now busily playing catch-up? Or have we neglected to plan any preparations at all, believing other things are more deserving of our time and attention? In a way similar to the first group of students that I described, many approach this season with the same holiness that they approach every day. Advent and the Christmas season are a celebration and commemoration of the presence of Jesus in their lives, which is demonstrated in their daily actions. The second group approaches the Advent season with fervor, doing everything possible to demonstrate their good works as the year ends. They sprint toward the finish line of December 25 and may think that all they have to do is make it through Christmas and then return to their normal lives. Finally, there are the individuals who feel that a loving God will provide as promised no matter how they act.

As we prepare for Christmas, how should we conduct ourselves during Advent? In scripture readings, we hear phrases like "the night is far gone, the day is near," "the son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour," "prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his path," "be strong, do not fear" and "be patient." How and when do we apply these phrases in our everyday lives?

One measure of academic success for the CBU student is their grade point average or GPA for short. Maybe during Advent, it is time to calculate a personal GPA, a "God Point Average." Will we be "A" students with a 4.0, or in the "D" range of 1.0? Let me propose that the GPA of students who have done their work throughout the semester will be higher than the other two groups of students I described. In a similar way, individuals who do good works throughout the year will have a very high GPA, making the celebration of Christmas a time to rejoice in those good works. May each of you experience the blessings and peace this Advent season that are derived from fully preparing for Christ's arrival.