

Twice a year, once during Lent and once during Advent, we have the option of wearing either the traditional violet vestment of the penitential season, or one like this, which people commonly call “pink.” During most of my years as a pastor, I was in large parishes where I had an associate pastor. Invariably the associate would wear this color, and I would stubbornly stick with violet. We often got a chuckle out of it as I would say, “real men don’t wear pink,” and they would question whether I was insecure about my masculinity!

So what am I doing today?? First of all, *it’s not pink!* The color, in fact, is called “rose.” It is a subtle difference, but it has a more subdued shade than pink. Liturgists will tell you that it signifies rejoicing, and signals a spirit of joyful hope during Lent, and now, during Advent. It breaks the more somber tone of those penitential times of the year. But thinking about that, I would argue that other colors convey that joy too—for example, why don’t we wear yellow or gold?

To be honest: I don’t know. But I did some Googling and found someone who does. And what I found, I think, puts Advent and this particular Sunday, into a beautiful context. This comes from Father Hyacinth Cordell, a Dominican friar in Washington, D.C., who wrote about all this online several years ago. Father Hyacinth—by the way, his own name “Hyacinth” is a beautiful spring flower which often comes in a shade of rose—Father Hyacinth noted that nature’s cycle is comprised of two things: life and light. *The seasons revolve around that*—the rejuvenation of spring and summer, the desolation of fall and winter. And our *liturgical* seasons follow a similar pattern.

“The dark color of violet in Advent,” he wrote, “harmonizes well with the diminishing sunlight late in the year.” It also points to royalty, and Christ as our king. But what about rose? Father Hyacinth described it this way: “Rose is a softening of violet. It is violet *approaching white*. In this sense, it *anticipates* the pure white of the Birth and Resurrection of Christ.”

Think about that, and all that it signifies. The fact is: I stand before you today, wearing this vestment, bearing witness of what is to come. Week after week, I proclaim the gospel from a pulpit, reading from a book. But this week, in a sense, I proclaim it not only with words, but also with what you see before you: a color. Rose. It is a bit like Jesus’ answer to John’s disciples today. He did not so much answer the question “Are you the one who is to come?” with words, but “Look at what you see...”

So we see *Rose*: A color that foreshadows the miracle of God’s incarnation, the purity of Emmanuel.

Rose: a color that is named for a delicate and sweet-scented blossom of hope, a symbol of eternal love – the kind of love that would bring into the world, in the most humble of places, and the most unlikely of times, the Son of God.

Today’s reading from Isaiah speaks of a flowering in the desert: “The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with a joyful song.” The Gospel, too, points to a kind of flowering in the desert—a flowering of prophetic hope in John the Baptist, the forerunner.

For us today, the color rose is *a sign of life* in a place that is parched—the desert of human existence, *our* human existence, the very place that Jesus came to redeem. These vestments echo that. And we also see it here near the altar, where the Advent wreath has

one rose-colored candle bringing more light as we draw closer to Christmas, closer to our Savior.

Here and now, the solemnity of Advent gives way to joy. Light breaks through. Everything in this sacred space suddenly bears the color and the promise of new life. That is what we cling to and hope for in the final days of Advent.

The beautiful words of a great 15th century carol say it better than I can—reminding us that the color we wear today points to a promise about to be fulfilled.

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!

Of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung.

This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,

dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere...