

PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
FIRST SUNDAY of ADVENT (B)

28 -29 NOVEMBER 2020



FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

O Lord, stir up Thy might, we beg Thee, and come that by Thy protection we may deserve to be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins and saved by Thy deliverance. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY REFLECTION

A small fringe Christian group took flight to live in caves deep in the hills. They feared an imminent nuclear Armageddon, hoping to be survivors when the disaster would mean the day of the Lord had arrived. Yet, the 'BE prepared' of today's Gospel was not meant as a fearful threat – rather a glorious opportunity for new life, in Jesus Christ. His second coming in power and glory will, though, catch us unawares, unless we are permanently ready for His arrival. After 2,000 years of waiting perhaps it is not unexpected that a degree of flabbiness and lack of expectancy is sometimes seen in the Church. Many forces are turning people away from the practice of the faith itself: the pressures of modern living (How are we going to meet the mortgage, or pay for the children's education?); the materialist outlook, now rampant, which suggests to people that the present world is all there is; a political approach which suggests that the good life is all we really want; the attacks on Church teaching which suggest that Christian teaching is somehow old-fashioned: 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die' is preferred. Life is like the disposable society in which we, for far too long have lived. Interestingly, it is the young who are teaching us the value of re-cycling so as no longer to pollute the world. The world of Noah's day was business as usual, but it was only Noah's family, awake and alert, who were prepared to face the crisis when it came. That is why the Gospel today tells us to be prepared since the master may return home at any moment and will expect to find all things ready for His appearing.

Advent contains both promise and warning. The first coming of Jesus as a baby was sudden and it inaugurated the new age. He also comes every day, for every day is a Day of the Lord in which we must keep awake. Do we sufficiently recognize Him in our human encounters? Jesus taught that He was mysteriously present in the poor, the sick and the hungry, just as He is mysteriously present in the Elements of the Eucharist.

The Russian writer Turgenev tells how once a man came up from behind him in church and stood beside him. He had an overpowering sensation that the man was Christ; yet, when he turned around, it was just a face like any other. 'What sort of Christ is this?' he says, only gradually realizing that Christ's face is the face of any of His people.

Advent Wreath The Advent Wreath, which has German origins, is probably the most recognized Advent custom. It is a wreath made of evergreens that is bound to a circle of wire. It symbolizes the many years from Adam to Christ in which the world awaited its Redeemer; it also represents the years that we have awaited His second and final coming. The wreath hold four equally spaced candles, the three purple ones lit on the penitential Sundays and pink one for Gaudete, the joyful third Sunday in Advent.

The Empty Manger Each child may have their own individual manger, or there may be one manger for the whole family. The idea is that when acts of service, sacrifice, or kindness are done in honor of Baby Jesus as a birthday present, the child receives a piece of straw to put into the manger. Then, on Christmas morning, Baby Jesus is placed in the manger. Encourage your children to make Jesus' bed as comfortable as possible through their good deeds. In the process, explain Christ's incomparable self-gift at Christmas and Easter that enables us to be part of God's family.

The Jesse Tree The Jesse tree tells about Christ's ancestry through symbols and relates Scripture to salvation history, progressing from creation to the birth of Christ. The tree can be made on a poster board with the symbols glued on, or on an actual tree. For further information read, *Advent and Christmas in a Catholic Home*.

St. Nicholas Day The feast of St. Nicholas is on 6 Dec. it is a highlight of the Advent season. Each child puts out a shoe or hangs a stocking the night before St. Nicholas Day in the hope that the kind bishop with his miter, staff, and bag of gifts will pay a visit and leave a surprise. The current Santa Clause is modeled after St. Nicholas, but commercialism has tarnished the true story.

The Christ Candle Any large white candle can be used for the Christ candle. The idea is to decorate it with symbols for Christ. Use old Christmas cards, sequins, holly, etc. the candle can be lit on Christmas Eve to show that the Light of the World has arrived. Then continue to light the Christ candle throughout the year at Sunday dinner to remind your family of our waiting for Christ, as well as celebrating His birth and Resurrection.

The Mary Candle Some families have the custom of decorating the Christ candle with a blue veil on December 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On this great feast, others place a candle with a blue ribbon before a statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin, whose yes to God enabled our Lord's coming at Christmas. The candle is lit during meal times to serve as a delightful reminder of Mary's eager expectation of the Light of the World. It can also serve as a reminder to each family member to keep their own light of grace burning as a preparation for Christ's coming.

St. Lucy Cakes The feast of St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, is on 13 Dec. This marks the opening of the Christmas season in Sweden. Her life story can be found in most saints books, or on line, as can the recipe for the traditional cakes. The symbolism is rich and her life story worthwhile reading.

The Nativity Scene This is the event in which the entire family shares setting up the Christmas manger. Mary and Joseph should be far off traveling and their approach to Bethlehem can be adjusted daily. Older children can make life-size Nativity models, carve them, cut them out from cardboard, or set up pre-made figurines. The creative ideas are without limit. Make sure to place the Nativity scene where many can admire the children's efforts to give God glory.

Christmas Baking There are many recipe books available to find great traditional Christmas baking ideas, or unpack traditional family recipes. The baking usually starts around December 20th. As Christmas approaches, the house will smell of baking and fresh wreaths. The glory of Christmas is at hand! Move the manger to a focal point, add lights to the Nativity to be lighted on Christmas Eve, and anticipate together.

Blessing of the Tree More and more frequently families are blessing their Christmas trees. It is good to remind children that the tree relates to many aspects of our faith. For example, we are reminded that our first parents were not allowed to eat from one tree, and that Christ paid the great price for our redemption by hanging on a tree (Acts 5:29-32)

There are many different stories which attempt to explain why we use a tree at Christmas. For instance, St. Boniface in the eighth century gave the balsam fir tree to the Druids in place of the oak tree, the symbol of their idol. He said, The fir tree is the wood of peace, the sign of an endless life with its evergreen branches. It points to heaven. It will never shelter deeds of blood, but rather be filled with loving gifts and rites of kindness.

Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces His glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for His coming.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

ADORATION

Development of Eucharistic Adoration and the Development of Doctrine

We now move from considering development of Eucharistic adoration to progress in Eucharistic doctrine. The two forms of development are related, but they are not the same.

We may say that, historically, the growth in devotion led to development of doctrine. But saying this is not yet proving it. And our purpose from here on will be to show how the blessings experienced by the faithful from their worship of the Blessed Sacrament led, under the Church's guidance, to a phenomenal growth in understanding the Real Presence as a marvelous source of grace to those who believe.

Basic Premises of Doctrinal Development. The Second Vatican Council will go down in history as the Council of dogmatic progress. It was exactly four hundred years since the close of the Council of Trent (1563), when the Second Vatican Council opened (1962).

During these four centuries, one after another of the cardinal mysteries of the Christian faith had grown immensely. The essential deposit of faith has remained the same, of course. But the meaning of this faith had developed to a degree that has scandalized many, been misunderstood by others and, we may say, is recognized by relatively few.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Vatican II should have laid down the basic principles for dogmatic development. After declaring that divine revelation, found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, has been entrusted for safekeeping by the Church, the Council goes on to say that there is more to the Church's role than just preserving revealed truth. Her mission is also to

provide for growth in assimilating this truth. The revealed deposit "that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit."

There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who received, along with their rights of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth. Thus, as the centuries go by, the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, II, 8).

Among the ways that the Church has grown in her understanding of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we shall concentrate on only one, namely "experience."

Experienced Benefits of Eucharistic Adoration. The Council of Trent declared that Christ should be worshipped now in the Eucharist no less than He had been in first century Palestine. Why? Because in the Blessed Sacrament "it is the same God Whom the apostles adored in Galilee" (*Decree on the Holy Eucharist*, chapter 5). The adorableness of the Eucharistic Christ, therefore, is an article of the Catholic faith.

What has become increasingly clear, however, is that Christ in the Eucharist is not only adorable but entreatable. He is not only to be adored, like Thomas did, by addressing Him as, "My Lord and my God." He is also to be asked for what we need, like the blind man who begged, "Lord, that I may see," or approached like the woman who said to herself, "If I can even touch His clothes, I shall be well again." By now countless believers have begged the Savior in the Eucharist for what they needed, and have come close to Him in the tabernacle or on the altar. Their resulting experience has profoundly deepened the Church's realization of how literally Christ spoke when He promised to be with us until the end of time.

The experience has been mainly spiritual: In giving light to the mind and strength to the will, in providing graces for oneself and others, in enabling weak human nature to suffer superhuman trials, in giving ordinary people supernatural power to accomplish extraordinary deeds.

Sts. John Fisher (1469-1535) and Thomas More (1478-1535) were strengthened in life and prepared themselves for martyrdom by fervent adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In one of More's prayers, published after his death, we read, "O sweet Saviour Christ, by the divers torments of Thy most bitter Passion, take from me, good Lord, this lukewarm fashion or rather key-cold meditation, and this dullness in praying to Thee. And give me Thy grace to long for Thy Holy Sacraments, and especially to rejoice in the Presence of Thy blessed Body, sweet Saviour Christ, in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and duly to thank Thee for Thy gracious visitation therewith."

St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) after preaching and baptizing all day would often spend the night in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi (1566-1607) was a Carmelite nun from the age of seventeen. She recommended to busy people in the world to take time out each day for praying before the

Holy Eucharist. "A friend," she wrote, "will visit a friend in the morning to wish him a good day, in the evening, a good night, taking also an opportunity to converse with him during the day. In like manner, make visits to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, if your duties permit it. It is especially at the foot of the altar that one prays well. In all your visits to our Savior, frequently offer His precious Blood to the Eternal Father. You will find these visits very conducive to increase in you divine love."

St. Margaret Mary (1647-1680), a Visitation nun, found before the Blessed Sacrament the strength she needed to endure what witnesses at her beatification process declared were "contempt, contradictions, rebukes, insults, reproaches, without complaining, and praying for those by whom she was ill-treated."

St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787), patron saint of confessors, wrote a whole book on visits to the Blessed Sacrament. He advised, "withdraw yourself from people and spend at least a quarter of an hour, or a half-hour, in some church in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Taste and see how sweet is the Lord, and you will learn from your own experience how many graces this will bring you."

St. John Vianney, the Cure of Ars (1786-1859), told his people, "Our Lord is hidden there in the tabernacle, waiting for us to come and visit Him, and make our requests to Him...In heaven, where we shall be glorious and triumphant, we shall see Him in all His glory. If He had presented Himself, before us in that glory now, we should not have dared to approach Him; but He hides Himself like a person in prison, who might say to us, 'You do not see Me, but that is no matter; ask of Me all you wish and I will grant it.'" The Cure of Ars spent most of his long hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. During his homilies, he would often turn towards the tabernacle, saying with emotion, "He is there!"

So the litany of witnesses to the power of the Real Presence went on. By the time of the first international Eucharistic Congress in 1881, the evidence was more than sufficient for the Church's magisterium to speak extensively on the subject.

SAINT OF ADVENT SEASON: ISAIAH THE PROPHET

Icon at the entrance to the church proper.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived in Jerusalem from about 780 until 690 BC. His ministry extended over the reign of four kings of Judah, a period of at least 64 years. He is the author of the Book of Isaiah, one of most lengthy yet most read in the Old Testament. Some scholars argue that Isaiah was not written by one individual but at least three: Proto-Isaiah lived in eighth century BC Jerusalem and wrote Chapters 1-39. Deutero-Isaiah lived in sixth century BC Babylon during the Exile and wrote chapters 40-55. Trito-Isaiah is thought to be a group of disciples of Deutero-Isaiah, who wrote Chapters 56-66 during the post-Exile period. Whether one person or many, Isaiah's writings have been important to Jews and Christians alike down to the present time. Some of the best known passages foretell the coming of the Messiah. See for example, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, 11:1-9, 40:3-5, and 53:3-12.

The icon of Isaiah does not follow a well-known prototype since images of Old Testament prophets are quite rare in Orthodox iconography. The style is classic Byzantine however, presenting Isaiah to us full length, robed in classic fashion, and with his head surrounded by a gold halo. He is dressed in two garments, a tunic or *chiton* of red and a cloak or *himation* of

blue. The colors are the same as in many icons of Christ wherein red signifies Jesus' humanity and sacrifice and blue signifies divinity and kingship. Isaiah is privileged to wear the same because of his many prophecies of the Messiah.

His hair and beard are somewhat unkempt since prophets are often thought of as wild and unruly people who speak out against established society. Isaiah's left hand is raised in the gesture of an orator proclaiming God's word. His right hand holds a scroll, symbolic of the Biblical book that bears his name. The halo surrounding his head is an iconographic symbol of sanctity. While we do not normally refer to Old Testament prophets as saints, we do believe that their words were Divinely inspired. Therefore God worked through them to communicate His message to humankind. The gold of the halo is symbolic of Divine light shining through to us via the work of this man.

The letters on the background spell "Isaiah the Prophet" in Greek. The words on the scroll are an informal translation of Isaiah 50:4, a verse whose message in Hebrew is quite difficult to express in English. The words are similar to the first lines in the Rule of St. Benedict: "Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart." A sentiment appropriate to the season of Advent.

Why is Isaiah seen a one of three principal Advent figures?

The Advent prophet. Isaiah is the prophet of Advent, and excerpts from his book are the most-used texts for the first readings of the Masses leading up to Christmas.

Advent Sundays. In the three-year Lectionary cycle, there is a total of 12 Advent Sundays, and readings from the prophet Isaiah are proclaimed the most often, seven times, all four Sundays in Year A and the first three Sundays of Year B. In Year C, the first readings are taken from four different Old Testament prophets: Jeremiah, Baruch, Zephaniah and Micah. Isaiah's voice rings out over all the others as the prophet of Advent.

Advent weekdays. Isaiah is also the most-quoted prophet on Advent weekdays. Of the 17 daily Masses over the first three weeks, passages from Isaiah are proclaimed 14 times: six times the first week, five the second, and three the third. In the eight-day octave immediately prior to Christmas, Dec. 17-24, Isaiah is quoted only once, on Dec. 20, while the other first readings are chosen from a variety of sources.

The Liturgy of the Hours. The selection of readings in the Breviary makes an emphatic statement regarding Isaiah's importance. Every Scripture text for the Office of Readings for every day of Advent is taken from Isaiah. Moreover, many of the readings for morning prayer, daytime prayer, midday prayer and midafternoon prayer, as well as a number of the responsories, are taken from Isaiah.

The manger scene. The ox and donkey that are present near the manger in many Nativity sets are included because of a verse in Isaiah: "The ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master's manger" (Isaiah 1:3a).

Isaiah's Advent message. Isaiah is the prophet who guides our journey through Advent as we prepare for Christmas. Advent is a season of joyful anticipation, and Isaiah invites us to look forward to the coming of the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord. Advent is a liturgical season with a strong penitential tone, and Isaiah urges us to straighten out our crooked ways, tear down our mountains of misdeeds, and fill in the valleys of our bad habits. It is a time to turn away from sin and receive forgiveness. Advent is also about the arrival of the reign of God,

a kingdom of justice and peace, and Isaiah urges us to obey the Lord's instruction, walk in the ways of peace, follow the promptings of the Spirit, and be just in thought, word and deed. Advent is a time to be filled with hope, rejoice in glad tidings and welcome the Messiah.

Messianic expectation. The prophet Isaiah eagerly looked forward to the day when the Messiah would come. He, along with all of Israel, was keenly aware of the promise that God made to Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:18); a promise also made to King David: "I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me" (2 Samuel 7:12b,14).

The Immanuel prophecies. The three Immanuel prophecies are unique to the prophet Isaiah and are found in his Messianic Oracle, chapters 6 to 12. These cherished texts stand at the forefront of the Advent season because they anticipate the coming of Immanuel, God with us, and the arrival of the ideal king, the one who would decisively change the course of history, rule with justice and bring peace. The first prophecy describes the birth of Immanuel: "The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). The second prophecy describes his dominion: "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful" (Isaiah 9:5-6a). The third prophecy describes the justice of his rule: "A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. He shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. Justice shall be the band around his waist" (Isaiah 11:1,2a,4a,5a).

ADVENT REFLECTIONS

MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER – 5 DECEMBER

Monday 30 November Feast of St. Andrew, Apostle

Andrew brought his brother Simon to meet Jesus. Within the one family, living by the sea of Galilee, one member had a Greek name, the other a Hebrew. This we may read as a marker of the diversity among the followers of Jesus, and the capacity of the Gospel to gather together the scattered children of God. On this feast-day the fraternal link between Andrew and Simon Peter – and between the sees of Rome and Constantinople – is nowadays expressed in the Pope sending a representative to the solemn liturgy of the day celebrate by the Patriarch.

Rom. 10:9-18: What Jesus said and did was witnessed by disciples, who in turn passed it on to others, both Jews and outsiders. 'Apostles' are people 'sent' with this news. If the listener accepts and welcomes this message from the heart, it leads to personal salvation, when one 'calls on the name of the Lord.' Paul adds the assurance that preachers really are sent by Christ, and indeed that theirs is a blessed work, deserving of Isaiah's lyrical phrase 'how beautiful the

feet of those who bring good news' (Is. 52:7) This offers a nice occasion to reflect on apostolic vocations as they are evidenced even today.

Mt. 4:18-22: St. Andrew is beloved throughout the Christian world as the good natured brother who worked with Simon Peter in the family fishing business and later introduced his brother to Jesus (Jn. 1:41) after they had both gone to hear the preaching of John the Baptist. Aside from a few mentions of him in the Gospel we have no firm data about his later ministry, but the fact that his name crops up several times in the apocryphal literature of the second and third centuries suggests that his personal was held in considerable respect in various local Churches. Perhaps the key to this devotion is in the Gospel statement that, like his brother, as soon as Andrew was called by Jesus he immediately left behind all his earlier concerns and spent the rest of his life following Him.

Is. 2:1-5: Mountain imagery is very appropriate for Jerusalem since it stand out physically in the Judean hills. Isaiah's vision of the nations streaming to it has been fulfilled century after century, though not that of 'hammering swords into ploughshares'. We could pray that the people of Jerusalem, and all of us, will walk 'in the light of the Lord' to bring this transformation about.

Mt. 8:5-11: Faith can be found in the most unlikely of places. No-one among the followers of Jesus would expect a Roman officer to believe in the power of Jesus to heal. But, whatever else, military people understand the power of the authoritative word. Through his previous experience, then, the officer comes to believe that Jesus can heal his servant. The same will be true for many 'from east and west' even to our own day.

The Eyes of Our Lord

As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Mt. 4:18-19)

Today, we honor one of the Apostles: Saint Andrew. Andrew and his brother Peter were fishermen who would soon take on a new form of fishing. They would soon become "fishers of men," as Jesus said. But prior to being sent on this mission by our Lord, they had to become His followers. And this happened as our Lord was first the fisher of these men.

Notice that in this Gospel, Jesus was simply walking by and "saw" these two brothers working hard at their occupation. First, Jesus "saw" them, and then He called them. This gaze of our Lord is worth pondering.

Imagine the profound truth that our Lord is continually gazing at you with divine love, looking for the moment that you turn your attention to Him. His gaze is perpetual and deep. His gaze is one that yearns for you to follow Him, to abandon all else so as to hear His gentle invitation not only to follow Him, but to then go forth and invite others on the journey of faith.

As we begin this Advent season, we must allow the call of Andrew and Peter to also become our own calling. We must allow ourselves to notice Jesus as He looks at us, sees who we are, is aware of everything about us, and then speaks a word of invitation. He says to you, "Come after me..." This is an invitation that must permeate every aspect of your life. To "come after" Jesus is to leave all else behind and to make the act of following our Lord the single purpose of your life.

Sadly, many people pay little attention to this calling in their lives. Few people hear Him speak and fewer respond, and even fewer respond with complete abandonment of their lives. The beginning of Advent is an opportunity to evaluate your responsiveness to the call of our Lord once again.

Reflect, today, upon Jesus speaking these words to you. First, ponder the question of whether you have said “Yes” to Him with all the powers of your soul. Second, reflect upon those whom our Lord wants you to invite on the journey. To whom is Jesus sending you to invite? Who, in your life, is open to His call? Who does Jesus want to draw to Himself through you? Imitate these Apostles as they said “Yes” to our Lord, even though they did not immediately understand all that this would entail. Say “Yes” today and be ready and willing to do whatever comes next on this glorious journey of faith.

My dear Lord, I do say “Yes” to You this day. I hear You calling me, and I choose to respond with the utmost generosity and abandonment to Your holy and perfect will. Give me the courage and wisdom I need to hold nothing back from You and Your divine calling in my life. Jesus, I trust in You.

Tuesday 1 December

Is. 11:1-10: The king in Israel was meant to embody what we have come to call ‘the gifts of the Spirit’. Historically, however, most of the kings failed in their calling to bring about harmony and peace. The expectation of such harmony, even in nature, was therefore projected into the future: the coming Messianic age, it was believed, would be a time of reconciliation and justice, not only among humans but in the animal kingdom as well. Knowledge of God should lead to care for creation.

Lk. 10:21-24: A rare insight into the joy of Jesus! What makes Him joyful is the realization that those who accepted Him as the Messiah who would bring about peace and reconciliation, were not the scholars of Israel, who knew the texts of the Scriptures inside out, but the ‘little ones’ – those who were despised by them as being ignorant of the Scriptures. His disciples are blessed to be among those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The Eyes of Faith

Turning to the disciples in private He said, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.” (Lk. 10:23-24)

What did the disciples see that made their eyes “blessed?” Clearly, they were blessed to see our Lord. Jesus was the One promised by the prophets and kings of old and now He was there, in flesh and bone, present for the disciples to see Him. Though we do not have the privilege to “see” our Lord in the same way that the disciples did some 2,000 years ago, we are privileged to see Him in countless other ways in our daily lives, if we only have “eyes that see” and ears to hear.

Since the time of Jesus’ appearance on Earth, in the flesh, so much has changed. The Apostles were eventually filled with the Holy Spirit and sent forth on a mission to change the world. The Church was established, the Sacraments were instituted, the teaching authority of Christ was exercised, and countless saints have given witness to the Truth with their lives. The past 2,000

years have been years in which Christ was continually made manifest to the world in countless ways.

Today, Christ is still present and continues to stand before us. If we have the eyes and ears of faith, we will not miss Him day in and day out. We will see and understand the countless ways that He speaks to us, leads us and guides us today. The first step toward this gift of sight and hearing is your desire. Do you desire the Truth? Do you desire to see Christ? Or are you satisfied with the many confusions of life that seek to distract you from what is most real and most life-changing?

Reflect, today, upon your desire. The prophets and kings of old “desired” to see the Messiah. We are privileged to have Him alive in our presence today, speaking to us and calling to us continually. Foster within yourself a desire for our Lord. Allow it to become a blazing flame which longs to consume all that is true and all that is good. Desire God. Desire His Truth. Desire His guiding hand in your life and allow Him to bless you beyond what you can fathom.

My divine Lord, I know You are alive today, speaking to me, calling me and revealing to me Your glorious presence. Help me to desire You and, within that desire, to turn to You with all my heart. I love You, my Lord. Help me to love You more. Jesus, I trust in You.

Wednesday 2 December

Is. 25:6-10: Feeding is the theme of today’s readings. In the First Reading the banquet prepared is rather fanciful for a poor people, with its promise of fine wines and sumptuous food. It has come to be seen as the Messianic banquet of the future and used as a sign that God will deliver the people in times of difficulty and restore them to a life of plenty in the company of all peoples.

Mt. 15:29-37: At one level the Gospel is more realistic: it portrays Jesus as answering very human needs, as He heals the sick and gives food to the hungry. But the language used has echoes of the Eucharist: ‘giving thanks’, ‘breaking bread.’ Participating in Jesus’ gift of Himself calls us to share what we have and are with the sick and hungry.

A Miracle of Superabundance!

Then He took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full. (Mt. 15:36-27)

This line concludes the second miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes as told by Matthew. In this miracle, seven loaves and a few fish were multiplied to feed 4,000 men, not counting the women and children. And once everyone ate and were satisfied, seven full baskets remained.

It’s hard to underestimate the effect that this miracle had on those who were actually there. Perhaps many did not even know where the food came from. They just saw the baskets being passed, they took their fill, and passed the rest on to others. Though there are many important lessons we can take from this miracle, let’s consider one of them.

Recall that the crowds had been with Jesus for three days without food. They were amazed at Him as He taught and continually healed the sick in their presence. They were so amazed, in fact, that they showed no sign of leaving Him, despite the obvious hunger they must have been experiencing. This is a wonderful image of what we must seek to have in our interior life.

What is it that “amazes” you in life? What is it that you can do hour after hour without losing your attention? For these first disciples, it was the discovery of the very Person of Jesus that had this effect upon them. How about you? Have you ever found that the discovery of Jesus in prayer, or in the reading of Scripture, or through the witness of another, was so compelling that you became engrossed in His presence? Have you ever become so engrossed in our Lord that you thought of little else?

In Heaven, our eternity will be spent in a perpetual adoration and “amazement” of the glory of God. And we will never tire of being with Him, in awe of Him. But too often on Earth, we lose sight of the miraculous action of God in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Too often, instead, we become engrossed in sin, the effects of sin, hurt, scandal, division, hatred and those things that lead to despair.

Reflect, today, upon these first disciples of Jesus. Ponder, especially, their wonder and awe as they stayed with Him for three days without food. This draw of our Lord must take hold of you and overwhelm you so much that Jesus is the one and only central focus of your life. And when He is, all else falls into place and our Lord provides for your many other needs.

My divine Lord, I love You and desire to love You more. Fill me with a wonder and awe for You. Help me to desire You above all things and in all things. May my love of You become so intense that I find myself trusting You always. Help me, dear Lord, to make You the center of my entire life. Jesus, I trust in You.

Thursday 3 December St. Francis Xavier, Priest

Born in 1506, Francis was one of the original founding group of the Jesuits along with St. Ignatius Loyola. He was one of the great missionaries, preaching in Goa, South East Asia and Japan (Learning Japanese) where he founded a Church. So well organized was it that it survived persecution long after he had left. He died on his way from Goa to China in 1552.

Is. 26:1-6: Those who think they are impregnable because of their good defenses will often find that they are on shifting ground. On the other hand, those who trust in the Lord as their Rock will be as strong as a city well protected.

Mt. 7:21, 24-27: Building on rock is the theme of the Gospel parable also. Those who do so are not those who mouth dependence on God but go their own way. Rather it is those who ‘do the will of the Father in heaven’. Conforming to the will of God does not mean a slavish acceptance of every disaster that befalls us, but a joyful participation in the mentality of Jesus who strove to bring about peace and reconciliation in the world.

Authentic Christians

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Mt. 7:21)

It’s frightening to think of those of whom Jesus is speaking. Imagine arriving before the throne of God upon your passing from this earthly life and you cry out to Him, “Lord, Lord!” And you expect Him to smile and welcome you, but instead you come face-to-face with the reality of your ongoing and obstinate disobedience to the will of God throughout your life. You suddenly realize that you acted as if you were a Christian, but it was only an act. And now, on the day of judgment, the truth is made manifest for you and for all to see. A truly frightening scenario.

To whom will this happen? Of course, only our Lord knows. He is the one and only Just Judge. He and He alone knows a person's heart, and judgment is left only to Him. But the fact that Jesus told us that "Not everyone" who expects to enter Heaven will enter should grab our attention.

Ideally, our lives are directed by a deep and pure love of God, and it is this love and this love alone that directs our lives. But when a pure love of God is not clearly present, then the next best thing may be a holy fear. The words spoken by Jesus should evoke this "holy fear" within each of us.

By "holy," we mean that there is a certain fear that can motivate us to change our lives in an authentic way. It's possible that we fool others, and maybe even fool ourselves, but we cannot fool God. God sees and knows all things, and He knows the answer to the one and only question that matters on the day of judgment: "Did I fulfill the will of the Father in Heaven?" A common practice, recommended over and over by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, is to consider all our current decisions and actions from the point of view of the day of judgment. What would I wish I had done in that moment? The answer to that question is of essential importance to the way we live our lives today.

Reflect, today, upon that important question in your own life. "Am I fulfilling the will of the Father in Heaven?" What will I wish I had done, here and now, as I stand before the judgment seat of Christ? Whatever comes to mind, spend time with that and strive to deepen your resolve to whatever God reveals to you. Do not hesitate. Do not wait. Prepare now so that the day of Judgment will also be a day of exceeding joy and glory!

My saving God, I pray for insight into my life. Help me to see my life and all of my actions in the light of Your will and Your Truth. My loving Father, I desire to live fully in accord with Your perfect will. Give me the grace I need to amend my life so that the day of judgment is a day of the greatest glory. Jesus, I trust in You.

Friday 4 December St. John Damascene, Priest & Doctor of the Church

Born in Damascus into a Christian family sometime around 676, John had two careers. First, he followed his father as a senior civil servant to the Muslim caliph of Damascus: after the Muslim conquest of Damascus, Christians retained their posts in government. He moved to the Mar Saba monastery near Jerusalem where he was ordained priest in 735. A polymath, his extensive writings were particularly effective in defending the true faith during the iconoclast crisis. He compiled a compendium of the teachings of the Greek Fathers, amounting to a summa theological. His hymns remain in use, especially in the Orthodox Church. He died at the Mar Aba monastery on 4 December 749.

Is. 29:17-24: The theme of reversal plays a part in today's readings. Those who are out to destroy others get their comeuppance, though even they can 'learn wisdom' and 'accept instruction'. But the real reversal is for the oppressed who will 'in a short time' be able to rejoice in God, and for the deaf and blind who 'after shadow and darkness' will see.

Mt. 9:27-31: Jesus continues the work of God by healing the blind. The two men involved make a nuisance of themselves, shouting out the calling after him. Sometimes we can expect those seeking help to behave meekly, but Jesus wasn't like that. His actions on behalf of the sick and the poor fulfil his understanding of the justice of God which he, like Isaiah before him saw as weighted in favor of the poor and the weak.

The True Messiah

And their eyes were opened. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread word of Him through all that land. (Mt. 9:30-31)

Who is Jesus? This question is much more easily answered today than it was at the time Jesus walked the Earth. Today we are blessed with countless saints who have gone before us who have prayerfully and intelligently taught much about the person of Jesus. We know Him to be God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Savior of the World, the promised Messiah, the Sacrificial Lamb and so much more.

The Gospel above comes from the conclusion of the miracle in which Jesus healed two blind men. These men were overwhelmed with their cure, and their emotion overtook them. Jesus instructed them to "See that no one knows about this" miraculous healing. But their excitement could not be contained. It's not that they were intentionally disobedient to Jesus; rather, they did not know how else to express their sincere gratitude other than to tell others about what Jesus had done.

One reason Jesus told them not to tell others about Him is because Jesus knew they did not fully understand Who He was. He knew that their testimony about Him would fail to present Him in the way that was most truthful. He was the Lamb of God. The Savior. The Messiah. The Sacrificial Lamb. He was the One Who came into this world to redeem us by the shedding of His blood. Many of the people, however, wanted a nationalistic "messiah" or a miracle worker alone. They wanted one who would save them from political oppression and make them a great earthly nation. But this was not Jesus' mission.

Oftentimes we can also fall into the trap of misunderstanding Who Jesus is and Who He wants to be in our lives. We can want a "god" who will save us only from our daily struggles, injustices and temporal difficulties. We can want a "god" who acts in accord with our will and not vice versa. We want a "god" who will heal us and free us of every earthly burden. But Jesus taught clearly throughout His life that He would suffer and die. He taught us that we must take up our own crosses and follow Him. And He taught us that we are to die, embrace suffering, offer mercy, turn the other cheek, and find our glory in that which the world will never understand. Reflect, today, upon whether Jesus would caution you about speaking too loudly about your vision of Who He is. Do you struggle with presenting a "god" who is not actually God? Or have you come to know the very Person of Christ our Lord to such an extent that you are able to give witness to Him Who died. Do you boast only in the Cross? Do you proclaim Christ crucified and preach only the deepest wisdom of humility, mercy and sacrifice? Recommit yourself to a true proclamation of Christ, setting aside any and all confused images of our saving God.

My true and saving Lord, I commit myself to You and pray that I will come to know and love You as You are. Give me the eyes I need to see You and the mind and heart I need to know and love You. Remove from me any false vision of Who You are and replace within me a true knowledge of You, my Lord. As I come to know You, I offer myself to You so that You may use me to proclaim Your greatness to all. Jesus, I trust in You.

Saturday 5 December

Is. 30:19-21, 23-26: A time of distress and disaster gives way to a time of plenty when the people learn to follow the way of the Lord. God is imaged as a teacher, as a rain-giver and as a nurse 'who dresses the wound of his people'. The greening of the land after drought in an abundant harvest will be the result of God's concern for His people. This will extend event o the oxen and the donkeys who will eat the best of fodder specially prepared for them.

Mt. 9:35-10:1, 68: Jesus, too, speaks of harvest. His own harvest work of proclaiming the Good News and curing the sick needs to be carried on after Him. His saying about the need to pray for laborers for the harvest comes before the commissioning of the disciples to go out and continue the work. Like him, they were to proclaim freely the good News and to cure those who were in need.

On Mission From Christ

"The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for His harvest." (Mt. 9:37-38)

What does God want of you? What is your mission? Some fervent Christians may dream of becoming a popular evangelist. Some may dream of doing heroic acts of charity that are praised by all. And others may wish to live a very quiet and hidden life of faith, close to family and friends. But what does God want of YOU?

In the passage above, Jesus exhorts His disciples to pray for "laborers for his harvest." You can be certain that you are among the "laborers" of which our Lord speaks. It's easy to think that this mission is for others, such as priests, religious and full-time lay evangelists. It's easy for many to conclude that they do not have much to offer. But nothing could be further from the truth.

God wants to use you in exceptionally glorious ways. Yes, "exceptionally glorious!" Of course, that does not mean that you will be the next most popular YouTube evangelist or enter the spotlight like Saint Mother Teresa did. But the work God wants of you is just as real and just as important as any of the greatest saints of old or who are alive today.

Holiness of life is discovered in prayer but also in action. As you pray each and every day and grow closer to Christ, He will exhort you to "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons" (Mt. 10:8) as today's Gospel goes on to state. But He will call you to do this in the unique way within your own vocation. Your daily duty is not to be ignored. So who in your daily encounters are those who are the sick, dead, lepers and possessed? Most likely they are all around you, to one extent or another. Take, for example, those who are "lepers." These are those who are the "rejects" of society. Our world can be harsh and cruel, and some may find themselves feeling lost and alone. Who do you know who may fall into this category? Who needs a bit of encouragement, understanding and compassion? God has given you a daily duty that He has not given to another, and, for that reason, there are some who need your love. Look for them, reach out to them, share Christ with them, be there for them.

Reflect, today, upon this exceptionally glorious calling you have been given to be Christ to another. Embrace this duty of love. See yourself as one called to be a laborer for Christ and commit yourself to the full and glorious fulfillment of this mission, no matter how it is to be lived out in your life.

My dear Lord, I commit myself to Your divine mission. I choose You and Your holy will for my life. Send me, dear Lord, to those who are most in need of your love and mercy. Help me to

know how I can bring that love and mercy to those entrusted to me so that they will experience in their lives Your glorious and saving grace. Jesus, I trust in You.

PRAYERS

Lighting the Wreath for the first time

Leader: We gather around our wreath to begin the celebration of Advent. Let us ask our Father in heaven to fill our hearts with grace.

Silent pause for prayer.

Heavenly Father, we look forward to the celebration of Christmas and to the coming of the Lord in glory. Bless this Advent wreath and all of us. As we pray daily around it, fill us with your life and strengthen us for our daily tasks. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The First Week of Advent [One candle is lit.]

Leader: Heavenly Father, as we begin this Advent, give light to our eyes and peace to our hearts. May the Lord find us watching and waiting in joy when He comes. We pray in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

Advent Week 1 - Prayer for Hope

Father God, every word in scripture points to the gift of hope that we have because of Christ Jesus. The Christmas story wasn't the beginning of that message of hope because the old testament is full of glimpses of your plan to redeem your people and restore them into a relationship with you, but we are able to truly begin to see and understand just how great your love for us is when we read the story of Jesus' birth in scripture.

Help us to see that you are with us. Nothing is too difficult, too messy, or too dirty for you.

Jesus came to give us the gift of eternal life through the [salvation](#) that only you, our Heavenly Father, can give when we believe on your Son, repent of our sins, and confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

That first Christmas, you gave us the gift of hope wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. Thank you, Father, for your immeasurable gift. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

The first week of Advent is all about hope.

Think about hope as you hear Lamentations 3: 21-24:

"But this I call to mind,

and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,

God's mercies never come to an end;

they are new every morning;

great is your faithfulness.

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, manger.

"therefore I will hope in the Lord."

One purple candle is lit.

Gracious God, As the Advent season begins, we cry out to you. We come to you looking for hope. When everything else we rely on fails us, our only hope is in you. When we do not understand what has happened, we hope in you. We can hope for better days because we trust you. We know you and we know you are here with us no matter what we are facing. Some of us see only darkness this time of year. Some of us find life overwhelming. Some of us are filled with Advent joy. Wherever we find ourselves today, Loving God, remind us that our hope is in you. Be with us on this journey. Amen.

Praying Through the Prophet Isaiah

Praying through Isaiah 1:3

Heavenly Father, thank You for the book of Isaiah and the many truths within its pages. Thank You that You sent Jesus to save Your people from their sin and to save ME - and place me into Your heavenly family, by grace through faith in Christ Jesus my Savior. Keep me from wandering away from the truth of Your word, and give me an understanding heart and a love for You, that grows with every passing day - This I ask in Jesus name, AMEN.

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.”

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK OF SATURDAY 28 - SUNDAY 6 DECEMBER

Saturday 28 Nov

8:30 a.m. Mass
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Baptisms
1:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Confessions
5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass First Sunday of Advent

Sunday 29 Nov First Sunday of Advent

7:00 a.m. Mass
8:30 a.m. Mass
11:30 a.m. Mass
2:00 p.m. Mass at Brig

Monday 30 Nov Day Off

6:30 a.m. Mass
7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
11:00 a.m. Funeral Mass James Shilts

Tuesday 1 Dec

6:30 a.m. Mass
7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
10:00 Appointment

Wednesday 2 Dec

6:30 a.m. Mass
7:00 – 8:30 Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
11:00 a.m. Mass **Amazing Grays**

Thursday 3 Dec

6:30 a.m. Mass
7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
5:00 – 6:30 p.m. Confessions
6:30 p.m. Mass **(Confirmation Reception into the Church)**

Friday 4 Dec

6:30 a.m. Mass
7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions
8:30 a.m. Mass
9:30 a.m. Appointment
5:00 – 7:00 p.m. Adoration
7:00 p.m. Mass **Benediction**
7:30 p.m. Confessions **WWP**

Saturday 5 Dec

8:30 a.m. Mass
1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Confessions
5:00 p.m. Mass **Vigil Second Sunday of Advent**

Sunday 6 Dec Second Sunday of Advent

7:00 a.m. Mass
8:30 a.m. Mass
11:30 a.m. Mass
2:00 p.m. **Brig Mass**

THE ADVENT POLICE

