

*Pondering the Word...*

# THE ANAWIM WAY

*Daily Liturgical Meditations*

*Advent and Christmas*

*November 27, 2022 to January 8, 2023*  
*Cycle A - Year 1*

**Scripture Texts:** Excerpts from the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition* © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970  
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## ***What is the Anawim Spirituality?***

**Our spirituality has three essential characteristics:**

### ***Liturgical***

The Liturgy is the source of our formation. Daily, we draw inspiration from the readings and prayers of the Liturgy, which we understand to be the ponderings of Mary's heart. For this reason, we honor Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Liturgical Life.

### ***Eucharistic***

Jesus in the Eucharist is the center of our spirituality. By faithful participation in Holy Mass and frequent Eucharistic Adoration, we are empowered by the Presence of Jesus to go forth to serve the people of God in all the circumstances of life.

### ***Marian***

We entrust ourselves to Mary, the mother and model of every Christian. She continually forms us in her spirit of humility, compassion and reconciling love, transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. She shares with us her spiritual motherhood as we are called to bring forth the life of Jesus in others.

***If you would like to explore the Anawim Community further, we invite you to contact us.***



## SEASONAL INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT

*Note: November 27, 2022, is the beginning of Advent and the beginning of a new liturgical year. The Church has set up a three-year cycle (A, B, C) for Sunday readings and a two-year cycle (1 and 2) for the daily readings. This year will be Cycle A/1.*

Each Advent we are given the opportunity to begin anew and to enter a deeper place of interior awareness. We not only continue to await the second coming of the Lord, but we look forward to celebrating again the birth of the Babe in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago! Even more important, we are preparing ourselves to receive him more deeply into our hearts every day. Christ came and redeemed us totally. To receive this gracious gift, we have to open our hearts to the light of Christ. To do this, we must prepare the way through prayer. Three voices lead us on the way through Advent: Mary, John the Baptist, and the prophet Isaiah.

On December 8, we joyfully celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This feast not only tells us that Mary was free from sin from the moment of her conception, but it gives us hope for our own “new birth” and our victory over the powers of darkness. She is our model, our guide, the one who awaits and receives and brings forth Christ for the world. She is the Virgin of Nazareth who brings us to Christ and Christ to us. She not only receives the word but is obedient to the word, and responds: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say” (Lk 1:38). In her, we too can say, “fiat . . . thy will be done.”

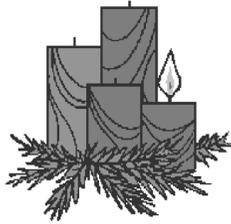
John is the great herald who proclaims that the coming of the Messiah is near. He cries out for repentance of our sins to “make ready the way of the Lord” (Mk 1:3). He teaches us that the way to “make ready” is through humility, acknowledging God as God and ourselves as his creatures. When John was thought to be the Christ, he declared that he was not what they thought and said: “One more powerful than I is to come after me. I am not fit to stoop and untie his sandal straps. I have baptized you in water; he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:7-8). Jesus came and through his suffering, death and resurrection, made restitution for the sin of mankind and offered us forgiveness of sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit.

The prophet Isaiah, whose words we read through much of Advent, is the hopeful prophet who describes the Messianic kingdom. His prophecy around the year 740 B.C. tells of the coming of the Messiah who is to be a descendant of David. This Messiah will bring light into our darkness and peace and justice into the world. He will make our barren hearts fruitful and reconcile us with the Father. Isaiah's words help us to walk through Advent with hope and expectation.

We need interior eyes. We can only see deeply if we are in prayer and are willing to be led. Mary invites us into her heart where everything is possible with God. Let us pray during this Advent Season for the grace to allow the Light of Christ to enter into our hearts and bring us ever more deeply into the new creation.

Fr. Francis J. Marino, S.M.  
Founder, Anawim Community

## *First Week of Advent*



***“... you also must be prepared,  
for at an hour you do not expect,  
the Son of Man will come.”***

Matthew 24:44

### *Theme for the Week*

Advent is a season of interior preparation and active vigilance. It is indeed a time for deeper conversion as we renew our commitment to prepare well for the Lord’s coming. In a spirit of perseverance and joyful anticipation, full of hope, let us welcome him more deeply into our hearts every day.

**AWAITING AND WELCOMING THE COMING OF JESUS,  
THE MESSENGER OF PEACE**  
*A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis*

Today, the First Sunday of the Time of Advent, a new liturgical year begins. In these four weeks of Advent, the liturgy leads us to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus, while it reminds us that he comes into our lives every day, and will return gloriously at the end of time. This certainty enables us to look trustfully to the future, as we are invited to do by the prophet Isaiah, who with his inspired voice accompanies the entire Advent journey.

In today's First Reading, Isaiah prophesies that "it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it" (Is 2:2). The temple of the Lord in Jerusalem is presented as the point of convergence and meeting of all peoples. After the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus revealed himself as the true temple. Therefore, the marvelous vision of Isaiah is a divine promise and impels us to assume an attitude of pilgrimage, of a journey towards Christ, the meaning and end of all history. Those who hunger and thirst for justice can only find it by following the ways of the Lord, while evil and sin come from the fact that individuals and social groups prefer to follow paths dictated by selfish interests, which cause conflict and war. Advent is the time to welcome the coming of Jesus, who comes as a messenger of peace to show us the ways of God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus exhorts us to be ready for His coming: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Mt 24:42). Keeping watch does not mean to have one's eyes physically open, but to have one's heart free and facing the right direction, ready to give and to serve. This is keeping watch! The slumber from which we must awaken is constituted of indifference, of vanity, of the inability to establish genuine human relationships, of the inability to take charge of our brother and sister who is alone, abandoned, or ill. The expectation of Jesus who is coming must therefore translate into a commitment to vigilance. It is above all a question of wonder before God's action, at his surprises, and of according him primacy. Vigilance also means, in a concrete sense, being attentive to our neighbor in difficulty, allowing oneself to be

called upon by his needs, without waiting for him or her to ask us for help, but learning to foresee, to anticipate, as God always does with us.

May Mary, the vigilant Virgin and Mother of hope, guide us on this journey, helping us to turn our gaze towards the “mountain of the Lord,” the image of Jesus Christ, that attracts all men and all peoples.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message, December 1, 2019  
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## November 27, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent

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### ***First Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5***

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come,  
the mountain of the LORD's house  
shall be established as the highest mountain  
and raised above the hills.  
All nations shall stream toward it;  
many peoples shall come and say:  
"Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain,  
to the house of the God of Jacob,  
that he may instruct us in his ways,  
and we may walk in his paths."  
For from Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
and impose terms on many peoples.  
They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
one nation shall not raise the sword against another,  
nor shall they train for war again.  
O house of Jacob, come,  
let us walk in the light of the LORD!

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### ***Responsorial Psalm: 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9***

***Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.***

I rejoiced because they said to me,  
"We will go up to the house of the LORD."  
And now we have set foot  
within your gates, O Jerusalem.  
***R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.***  
Jerusalem, built as a city  
with compact unity.  
To it the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the LORD.

***R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.***

According to the decree for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.  
In it are set up judgment seats,  
seats for the house of David.

**R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!  
May those who love you prosper!  
May peace be within your walls,  
prosperity in your buildings.

**R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

Because of my brothers and friends  
I will say, "Peace be within you!"  
Because of the house of the LORD, our God,  
I will pray for your good.

**R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

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**Second Reading: Romans 13:11-14**

Brothers and sisters: You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

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**Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 85:8**

**Alleluia, alleluia.** Show us, Lord, your love; and grant us your salvation.  
**Alleluia, alleluia.**

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**Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44**

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would

have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

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***Meditation:***

It may surprise some of us that the Scripture readings on this First Sunday of Advent do not refer at all to the birth of Jesus at Christmas – which is what most well-meaning Catholics look forward to in this season. These readings, especially the Gospel, have nothing sentimental to them, but rather are quite sobering. They reveal to us the deeper meaning of Advent.

Yes, “Advent” means “coming” – the coming of Christ – but not only on the day of his birth. Christ Jesus came once in the flesh, born as a baby who in time shed his Blood on the Cross, died and rose from the dead. He comes to us now, especially in the Holy Eucharist. He will come again at the end of time to judge and reward us. His first coming in the flesh and his constant coming to us in the present – in the Sacraments, through suffering, and in the needy – serve to prepare us for the important future coming – the “Second Coming” – when he will judge the living and the dead. One important dimension of the mission of the Church founded by Jesus is to prepare us for his Second Coming, so that we will be ready for Judgment Day and prepared to receive our eternal reward. This preparation is at the heart of the liturgical season of Advent.

Therefore, today’s readings focus on the Second Coming – pointing us to what matters most and inviting us, as a result, to think about and prepare seriously for the great meeting with our just Judge and Savior. Whether we would like to think about it or not, there will surely be a “particular judgment” when each one of us dies (cf. CCC 1022) and a “Last Judgment” when Christ returns in glory (cf. CCC 1040). We can interpret today’s Gospel as referring to both of these future moments. No one knows exactly when he or she will die, and no one knows exactly when the Second Coming will take place. While we are occupied with the ordinary affairs of daily life, the Lord will come suddenly for judgment and separate the just from the wicked. This separation is the meaning of the expression, “one will be taken, and one will be left,” which is repeated in today’s Gospel. It has nothing to do with the “rapture” of individuals that some Evangelical Christians go

on about. The separation of one working man from another, or of one working woman from another, is simply a way of describing the great separation that will take place at the Last Judgment, at the Second Coming of the Lord.

The Lord is teaching us that we should no longer live our ordinary life as if there are no “last things” – Death, Judgment, Heaven or Hell – but should rather live in the light of his Second Coming and the reality of our future and everlasting life. For this reason, St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians urges: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

Looking forward to and preparing for the Second Coming – or the “Second Advent” – is an expression of the virtue of hope which brings joy. Inspired by God, the prophet Isaiah announces in today’s first reading the divine promise on which our hope is based: that God himself will gather into the heavenly Jerusalem countless people from every nation who, during their earthly pilgrimage, have followed his ways. This is what we look forward to – being with God in Heaven, in the company of his saints. Our Advent joy flows from this hope. As the Psalmist says: “I rejoiced because they said to me, ‘We will go up to the house of the LORD.’”

To enter into joy we must resist and reject the enemies of our hope. In view of the Second Coming, St. Paul, in today’s second reading, invites us to repentance and vigilance, and beautifully says, “Throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; . . . Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.” His mention of “armor” alerts us that we are in a serious spiritual battle, and therefore we need to redouble our efforts to be conformed with Christ, so that the fruit of our season of Advent will be a share in his victory. The reality of the Last Judgment with its call to repentance and vigilance, and the image of putting on the “armor of light” answer the question of whether there is a penitential aspect to Advent. Paul makes it clear that we cannot prepare for the victory of light unless we are actively striving to throw off all the works of darkness.

Regarding the Last Judgment, the *Catechism* states: “The message of the Last Judgment calls men to conversion while God is still giving them ‘the acceptable time, . . . the day of salvation.’ It inspires a holy

fear of God and commits them to the justice of the Kingdom of God. It proclaims the ‘blessed hope’ of the Lord’s return, when he will come ‘to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all who have believed’” (CCC 1041). The joy of this “blessed hope” fills our hearts as we begin the season of Advent.

*What are the anxieties of my daily life that hinder me from striving for the things of eternal life? With God’s grace, how will I “throw off the works of darkness” and “put on the armor of light” this Advent? How does the hope of God’s divine promise of eternal life inspire me to lead a life of holiness?*

***Mary, be my companion this Advent as I enter into the spirit and grace of the Season.***

## **Notes**



**First Reading: Isaiah 4:2-6**

On that day,

The branch of the LORD will be luster and glory,  
and the fruit of the earth will be honor and splendor  
for the survivors of Israel.

He who remains in Zion

and he who is left in Jerusalem

Will be called holy:

every one marked down for life in Jerusalem.

When the LORD washes away

the filth of the daughters of Zion,

And purges Jerusalem's blood from her midst

with a blast of searing judgment,

Then will the LORD create,

over the whole site of Mount Zion

and over her place of assembly,

A smoking cloud by day

and a light of flaming fire by night.

For over all, the LORD's glory will be shelter and protection:

shade from the parching heat of day,

refuge and cover from storm and rain.

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**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9**

**Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

I rejoiced because they said to me,

“We will go up to the house of the LORD.”

And now we have set foot

within your gates, O Jerusalem.

**R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

Jerusalem, built as a city

with compact unity.

To it the tribes go up,

the tribes of the LORD.

**R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

According to the decree for Israel,

to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

In it are set up judgment seats,

seats for the house of David.

**R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.**

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

May those who love you prosper!

May peace be within your walls,  
prosperity in your buildings.

***R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.***

Because of my relatives and friends

I will say, "Peace be within you!"

Because of the house of the LORD, our God,

I will pray for your good.

***R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.***

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***Gospel Acclamation: see Psalm 80:4***

***Alleluia, alleluia.*** Come and save us, Lord our God; let your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***

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***Gospel: Matthew 8:5-11***

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully." He said to him, "I will come and cure him." The centurion said in reply, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven."

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***Meditation:***

Our Advent journey has begun. We have heard the call to wake up and to prepare for the Lord's coming in glory. In this season, we make special use of the prophecies of the Old Testament which prepared the people of God for the coming of the Messiah. We who know that this preparation pointed to the coming of Jesus can read the prophecies in the light of faith, and so use them to prepare ourselves for his coming to us today.

The meaning of today's selection from Isaiah is not immediately clear to modern readers. The original audience would have understood some symbols that are unfamiliar to us. For example, "the branch of the

LORD” and “the fruit of the earth” are Old Testament symbols for the Messiah, who would come forth as the “fruit” of the family tree of David (cf. Jer 23:5). “That day” refers to the day of his coming. All those who “remain in Zion” or are “left in Jerusalem” are the survivors of the great purification that will take place. They are the remnant people who “will be called holy.” Isaiah is telling us of a glorious future, when God will protect and guide his holy people, just as he watched over the Israelites in their flight from Egypt, with a “smoking cloud by day” and a “light of flaming fire by night.” This prophecy was given to strengthen the hope of a people facing severe trials.

The word of God strengthens our hope as well. We look forward to a time when our present trials will be over and we can find lasting peace. But “that day” also refers to today. God has already revealed himself as our refuge. Even in the midst of a society full of confusion, even with all our own weaknesses and temptations, the glory of the Lord is already our “shelter and protection.” We do not have to go to Jerusalem to find peace; we have to go to Jesus. This is the clear message of today’s Gospel.

The words of Isaiah may seem difficult, even obscure, but the story of the centurion in Capernaum is very practical and shows us clearly how to approach Jesus with humility and faith. The centurion is a marvelous Advent model for us. It is amazing, even to Jesus himself, that this pagan soldier was so well prepared for the Lord’s coming! We would expect a Roman centurion to turn to the gods of Rome for help, not lower himself like a beggar at the feet of a Jewish rabbi. We would expect a man in a position of such power to make demands, not humble requests. However, this centurion declares himself unworthy to have Jesus visit his house. For his part, the Lord declares that the centurion is actually more worthy, for he has more faith than the people of Israel. This humble soldier knows from personal experience that when a person in authority gives an order, it is effective. He applies what he knows about authority to his faith in Jesus, concluding with certainty that Jesus can exercise his authority over sickness simply by giving an order.

How can we be more like the centurion? By imitating both his *faith* and his *humility*. Faith moves us to approach Jesus with confidence in his goodness and power. Humility moves us to acknowledge that we do

not deserve what we seek. These two virtues must go together, or they get distorted. Faith without humility puts us at risk of becoming presumptuous and arrogant; humility without faith can lead to fear and discouragement.

At every Mass, we have a practical application of this lesson. We approach the altar to receive the Eucharist because we have faith in the Real Presence of the Lord. We believe that in the tiny Host we encounter the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But before we dare to do such a thing, we acknowledge our utter unworthiness, echoing the words of the centurion, “*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*” These same two dispositions, taken together, prepare us well for the Lord’s coming – his coming to us in the Blessed Sacrament, and his coming in the many ways he is present in our daily lives.

*Knowing that God is my refuge, how do I call upon him in hope during the trials of life? What can I learn spiritually from the centurion? How does my lack of faith and humility distance me from the love of Jesus?*

***Mary, as I await the coming of your Son, give me peace that sustains me amid all the uncertainties of life.***

## Notes



***First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10***

On that day,  
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:  
a Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
A Spirit of counsel and of strength,  
a Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,  
and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.  
Not by appearance shall he judge,  
nor by hearsay shall he decide,  
But he shall judge the poor with justice,  
and decide aright for the land's afflicted.  
He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.  
Justice shall be the band around his waist,  
and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.  
  
Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;  
The calf and the young lion shall browse together,  
with a little child to guide them.  
The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,  
together their young shall rest;  
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.  
The baby shall play by the cobra's den,  
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.  
There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,  
as water covers the sea.  
  
On that day,  
The root of Jesse,  
set up as a signal for the nations,  
The Gentiles shall seek out,  
for his dwelling shall be glorious.

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**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17**

***Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.***

O God, with your judgment endow the king,  
and with your justice, the king's son;  
He shall govern your people with justice  
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

***R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.***

Justice shall flower in his days,  
and profound peace, till the moon be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

***R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.***

He shall rescue the poor when he cries out,  
and the afflicted when he has no one to help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;  
the lives of the poor he shall save.

***R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.***

May his name be blessed forever;  
as long as the sun his name shall remain.

In him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed;  
all the nations shall proclaim his happiness.

***R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.***

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**Gospel Acclamation: Ps 84:8**

***Alleluia, alleluia.*** Behold, our Lord shall come with power; he will enlighten the eyes of his servants. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***

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**Gospel: Luke 10:21-24**

Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him."

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."

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### ***Meditation:***

Today we read another prophecy from Isaiah that begins with the words, “On that day....” This refers not to a twenty-four-hour day but to a future time, the time when the Messiah will come. Yesterday’s prophecy referred to the Messiah as “the branch of the LORD”; today he is called “a shoot” sprouting from the “stump of Jesse.” Jesse was the father of King David. These prophecies show that the Messiah will arise from among the remnant people of David’s lineage. When he comes, he will be an extraordinarily gifted leader, because “the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him.” He will rule with firm authority, justice, and faithfulness. The Psalm makes the same point: “Justice will flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever!” The effects of the Messiah’s leadership will also be extraordinary: mortal enemies – symbolized by the various animals, predators and prey – will be reconciled and live in serene harmony.

The description of the messianic kingdom is indeed beautiful. This is the sort of kingdom that “many prophets and kings wished to see... but did not see it.” However, it often seems that we do not see it either. Jesus the Messiah has come, but the world is still torn apart by violence and division everywhere. Even in the Church we keep hearing of grave scandals. Some of our own shepherds have acted like wolves and cobras, with innocent lambs as their victims. In light of the continued evidence of disorder in the world, what are we to make of this prophecy – and of our faith that all prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ? How can we believe such things?

Jesus provides the answer, but if we are too “wise and learned,” too full of ourselves and our worldly wisdom, his answer will remain hidden from us. He tells us that the Father grants wisdom about heavenly realities “to the childlike.” We must become spiritually childlike if we want to understand how the Kingdom of God is already present in our fallen world. The hidden mystery which is marvelously revealed at Christmas is that the great and powerful Messiah who “shall slay the wicked” with “the breath of his lips” comes in humility and weakness; God humbles himself to become man. But only the “childlike” are able to recognize and accept him. “No one, whether shepherd or wise man, can approach God here below except by kneeling before the manger at Bethlehem and adoring him hidden in the weakness of a new-born child” (CCC 563).

Advent calls us to a deep change of attitude, from expecting a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy according to our standards to accepting the surprising way in which God comes to us in Jesus Christ. When we do this, in the spirit of the “childlike,” we begin to share in the joy that Jesus experienced when he “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.” With him we too can praise the Father for his wonderful works, rather than complain about what he has not done for us. We begin to realize how blessed we are to have received the gift of faith – to be able to see and hear what so many people are still longing to see and hear.

To rejoice in the Holy Spirit, we need to open our hearts to the work of the Spirit. His Gifts – Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord – are all given to us when we are baptized. When we become members of the Body of Christ, we receive power to live by the Spirit of Christ. It is the Spirit who awakens our faith and fills us with Advent hope. The problems and injustices we suffer from do not discourage us. We look with confidence toward the future when God will reign in glory, and “the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea.”

*How does being childlike enable me to understand that the Kingdom of God is already here? What are the struggles I have in accepting the way God comes to me? How do I give praise to God for all the blessings he has given me?*

***Mary, the most humble one, teach me to be more childlike.***

## Notes



**First Reading: Romans 10:9-18**

Brothers and sisters: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The Scripture says, *No one who believes in him will be put to shame.* There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. *For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!* But not everyone has heeded the good news; for Isaiah says, *Lord, who has believed what was heard from us?* Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I ask, did they not hear? Certainly they did; for

*Their voice has gone forth to all the earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world.*

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**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11**

***The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.  
or Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul;

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,  
giving wisdom to the simple.

***R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.  
or Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***

The precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;

The command of the LORD is clear,  
enlightening the eye.

***R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.  
or Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***

The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever;

The ordinances of the LORD are true,  
all of them just.

***R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.  
or Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***

They are more precious than gold,  
than a heap of purest gold;  
Sweeter also than syrup  
or honey from the comb.

***R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.  
or Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***

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***Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 4:19***

***Alleluia, alleluia.*** Come after me, says the Lord, and I will make you fishers of men. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***

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***Gospel: Matthew 4:18-22***

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.” At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

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***Meditation:***

On Monday, we were presented with a humble Roman centurion as an example of the spirit of Advent faith. Yesterday we were taught that the things of God are revealed to the childlike. Today’s Advent witness is a humble fisherman from Galilee, St. Andrew the Apostle.

The Scriptures give us two versions of the call of Andrew. The Gospel from St. Matthew, chosen for today’s Feast, is the story of Andrew’s swift conversion. When Jesus saw the two brothers Peter and Andrew and said to them, “Come after me,” they immediately abandoned their nets and followed him. The other version comes from the Gospel of St. John (cf. 1:35-42), who tells us more of the story of Andrew’s spiritual journey. Andrew was originally a disciple of John the Baptist. When Jesus passed by, John pointed him out, “Behold the Lamb of God.” Andrew decided to follow Jesus, putting his trust in the guidance of John. Jesus’ first word to Andrew was a question: “What are you looking for?” It seems that Andrew did not really know how to answer. His search was rooted more in his heart than in his conscious

mind. Still, it was not long before Andrew realized that Jesus was actually the Messiah. He ran to his brother Simon Peter and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” (v. 41).

The traditional way of combining these two accounts is to propose that Andrew experienced the call to follow Jesus in a two-stage process. He was following John the Baptist when he met the Lord and came to believe in him, but he continued to work as a fisherman. The second stage began when Jesus came by again and made a definitive call: “Come after me.” Andrew dropped everything, followed him, and became an Apostle. His whole life changed as he participated intimately in the most life-changing event in history.

Both versions of Andrew’s conversion express ways that we can experience the call of God. Each of us is called by Jesus to follow him. Our awareness of how his voice speaks to our hearts, and what he wants us to do, may come gradually or suddenly. The gradual experience is represented by Andrew’s progressive search for the will of God. Deeply moved by the ministry of John the Baptist, he became one of his disciples. Perhaps John’s strong message of repentance as the way to prepare for the coming of the Lord gave Andrew the courage to repent of his sins and be baptized, symbolizing the beginning of a new life. Still, the Baptist was always clear in announcing that he was not the Messiah. He was truly an Advent guide, preparing Andrew for the coming of Someone much greater. When John pointed to Jesus as the “Lamb of God,” Andrew must have sensed the call to take another step of faith, prompted by the Holy Spirit.

This is very often how our journey of faith progresses. God gives us a variety of signs and hints indicating how he is inviting us to follow him. We may hear him interiorly while we are talking with a friend, or reading an article, or going about our usual daily activities (like fishing). Often the will of God is not obvious to us, but he reveals enough to give us a sense that we should change our direction or move a little further forward in our faith journey. Andrew is an excellent example of sensitive obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, for he was listening and striving to follow God even before he received his formal call from Jesus.

It can also happen that God breaks in on us suddenly and directly, just as in Matthew’s description of the call of Peter and Andrew. Sometimes God makes his will known clearly, in such a way that we immediately know without doubt what we need to do, or say, or change. Like a flash of inspiration, we know that we must do something different. When Jesus gives us a clear indication of what we should do, we must respond like Andrew and drop everything to do it.

As we reflect on the witness of Andrew, we realize and must humbly admit that we do not always listen to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is due to dullness or laziness; at other times it can be due to fear or doubt. God, however, does not give up in calling us. He keeps drawing us by breaking through our obstacles and speaking to our heart. Advent gives us a precious time to reflect on the way the Lord is leading us. He is offering us the grace to abandon the “nets” of sin that threaten to entangle us and to follow him in the way of freedom.

*In what way did I experience the call of God? How does laziness, fear or doubt prevent me from listening to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit? How does my lifestyle draw others to Jesus?*

***Mary, Queen of Apostles, may I follow Jesus and become “fishers of men.”***

***St. Andrew, pray for us.***

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**Andrew** the Apostle, like his brother Peter, was a fisherman from Bethsaida in Galilee. His name comes from the Greek word for “manly” or “brave.” Because he was the first of the Apostles to be called by Jesus, the Eastern Orthodox churches honor him as the “Protokletos” or “Procolete,” meaning “first-called.” Andrew is also considered the first Patriarch of Constantinople. The family tie between Peter and Andrew is at the root of the “sister church” relationship between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople. Ancient tradition holds that Andrew dedicated his apostolic efforts to evangelizing the Greek world, and that he was martyred in Patras in Greece by being crucified on a diagonal or x-shaped cross – which is thus known as “St. Andrew’s Cross.”

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**First Reading: Isaiah 26:1-6**

On that day they will sing this song in the land of Judah:

“A strong city have we;

he sets up walls and ramparts to protect us.

Open up the gates

to let in a nation that is just,

one that keeps faith.

A nation of firm purpose you keep in peace;

in peace, for its trust in you.”

Trust in the LORD forever!

For the LORD is an eternal Rock.

He humbles those in high places,

and the lofty city he brings down;

He tumbles it to the ground,

levels it with the dust.

It is trampled underfoot by the needy,

by the footsteps of the poor.

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**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a**

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.***

or *Alleluia.*

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,

for his mercy endures forever.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD

than to trust in man.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD

than to trust in princes.

***R. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.***

or *Alleluia.*

Open to me the gates of justice;

I will enter them and give thanks to the LORD.

This gate is the LORD's;

the just shall enter it.

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me

and have been my savior.

***R. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.***

or *Alleluia.*

O LORD, grant salvation!

O LORD, grant prosperity!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD;  
we bless you from the house of the LORD.

The LORD is God, and he has given us light.

**R. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**  
or *Alleluia*.

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**Gospel Acclamation: Isaiah 55:6**

*Alleluia, alleluia.* Seek the LORD while he may be found; call him while he is near. *Alleluia, alleluia.*

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**Gospel: Matthew 7:21, 24-27**

Jesus said to his disciples: “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.

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”

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**Meditation:**

How are we to prepare for the coming of the Lord? Today’s Advent Gospel gives us a clear answer: we are to listen to his words and act on them; we must put them into practice. To an unbeliever this sort of advice may sound like a vague pious theory. But the word of God reveals that the Lord is anything but vague. He is the one solid reality we can build our life on. When we put our trust in him, we are secure forever, for “the LORD is an eternal Rock.”

Jesus teaches us that putting our trust in him means more than simply crying out, “Lord, Lord.” Our holy words have effect only when they correspond to the truth in our hearts. St. Paul reminds us that saying “Jesus is Lord” must be accompanied by faith in the heart (cf. Rm 10:9). Because we have faith in our hearts, we do not treat the words of prayer as some kind of magic formula but as an expression of our trust in the Lord. We speak to him and we listen to him. What we hear from him – about mercy, humility, love, trust, sacrifice, truth – we strive to put into practice. That is the way a wise disciple of Christ lives.

If we are wise, we build our spiritual “house” on rock, that is, on Christ. If we are foolish, we build on something else, some earthly promise of security which is nothing more than sand. It does not *look* like sand; it looks like a very good investment or a great insurance policy or a secure job; it looks like a precious possession or an enjoyable activity or an unbeatable bargain. But it is no more than a pile of sand by comparison to the solid Rock of Truth and Divine Love. If we do not realize the difference at first, it will become obvious to us when we face a time of suffering. When a flood of affliction strikes us, the sand of the world and all that we build upon it can collapse and be completely ruined. All it takes is one accident, or an illness, or the death of a loved one, and the real foundation of our house is exposed. If we are wise, we do not collapse because our life is solidly set on Rock.

Not every storm in life is a major disaster. Sometimes the “wind and rain” comes in smaller doses. Actually, the Lord is quite gentle with us – though we may not realize it at the time. He is not out to destroy us but to show us the weakness of our trust in him. We can find ourselves getting swamped simply by the demands of a day’s work, or by an argument that shatters the peace in our household. The weeks before Christmas tend to become a storm of hectic activity. Our prayer life gradually weakens; our patience grows thin; we find ourselves unable to resist temptations. These are all warning signals. It is not enough for us simply to read a few words from the Bible. We need to repent of our sins and return to the Lord our Rock. “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.” We are better off building a humbler, simpler life on a solid foundation than an outwardly impressive life on a weak foundation.

Since the key to entering the Kingdom of God is doing the will of the Father, it is essential that we discover what God wants and commit ourselves entirely to doing it. When we take time aside to pray, today and every day, this is what we are doing. As we ponder the word of God, we listen to him in the depths of our hearts, accept what he says to us, and begin without delay to put his word into practice.

*How am I striving to practice mercy, humility, love, truth, trust and sacrifice? In my longing for Christ, how am I more watchful in prayer and active in works of charity? Why do I tend to trust in man and not take refuge in the Lord?*

***Mary, may the will of God be my only source of comfort.***



**First Reading: Isaiah 29:17-24**

Thus says the Lord GOD:

But a very little while,  
and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard,  
and the orchard be regarded as a forest!

On that day the deaf shall hear  
the words of a book;

And out of gloom and darkness,  
the eyes of the blind shall see.

The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD,  
and the poor rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

For the tyrant will be no more  
and the arrogant will have gone;

All who are alert to do evil will be cut off,  
those whose mere word condemns a man,

Who ensnare his defender at the gate,  
and leave the just man with an empty claim.

Therefore thus says the LORD,  
the God of the house of Jacob,  
who redeemed Abraham:

Now Jacob shall have nothing to be ashamed of,  
nor shall his face grow pale.

When his children see  
the work of my hands in his midst,

They shall keep my name holy;  
they shall reverence the Holy One of Jacob,  
and be in awe of the God of Israel.

Those who err in spirit shall acquire understanding,  
and those who find fault shall receive instruction.

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**Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14**

***The Lord is my light and my salvation.***

The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life's refuge;  
of whom should I be afraid?

***R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.***

One thing I ask of the LORD;  
this I seek:

To dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,

That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD  
and contemplate his temple.

***R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.***

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD  
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD with courage;  
be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

***R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.***

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***Gospel Acclamation: cf. Is 45:8***

***Alleluia, alleluia.*** Behold, our Lord shall come with power; he will enlighten the eyes of his servants. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***

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***Gospel: Matthew 9:27-31***

As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying out, “Son of David, have pity on us!” When he entered the house, the blind men approached him and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” 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.

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***Meditation:***

The beautiful liturgies of Advent remind us often that God is faithful to his promises. What the Father promised through Isaiah and the other prophets, he has fulfilled by sending his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of every promise and of all our deepest longings. With hearts full of hope we are preparing for him to come to us and fill us with divine life. Today’s prophecy of Isaiah is full of hope for the future. The divine promise is that when the Messiah comes, there will be widespread healing and marvelous restoration. The wicked and the powerful will be overthrown. The poor and lowly – the *anawim* – will rejoice in the Lord, and all the children of God will “be in awe of the God of Israel.”

We can apply the images of the deaf hearing and the blind seeing to ourselves. When we are fixed on having things our way, we grow deaf to what God says. Still, he does not stop speaking to us. The power of the divine word, the “words of a book,” can still reach us. Blindness in the spiritual sense afflicts us whenever we refuse to acknowledge the truth that we do not want to see; it is willful blindness. Yet God keeps shining on us, attracting us with an interior light that we find hard to resist. When St. Augustine reflected back on the great grace of his conversion, he addressed the Lord with gratitude and wonder at how he had been able to heal his spiritual deafness and blindness: “You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness” (*Confessions*, X, 27).

The two blind men in the Gospel have the physical affliction of blindness, but faith gives them clear inner vision, as well as the strength to persevere in seeking a healing. These men are presented to us as examples of Advent faith and hope. Because they believe firmly that Jesus can heal them, they cry out to him in prayer, follow him right to the house, and confess their faith in him. They can see by faith before they begin to see with their eyes.

Like these blind men, we suffer from limited vision. We want to see more clearly the work of God in our lives. We seek the joy of his presence. We also long for an end to the evil that permeates the world. How can all this come about? The first thing we must do is acknowledge that we cannot accomplish such changes on our own. As we come before the Lord, we need to admit our blindness. One of the basic foundations of prayer is humility. “Son of David, have pity on us!” With this cry from the heart, we enter into a conversation with God about the matters that concern us.

Jesus knows the gifts he wants to bestow on us, but before he gives, he often prepares us by testing the quality of our faith: “Do you believe that I can do this?” If we treat the Lord as simply one option among many, or if we harbor doubts about his goodness, he will often delay his blessings. He knows when we are not yet in the right disposition to receive what we need. When he sees a confident, “Yes, Lord!” in the depths of our hearts, as he saw in the passionate prayer of the blind men, then he reaches out to touch us and give us light. “Let it be done for you

according to your faith.” The great gift in this personal touch is not merely to get the favor we ask for but to know the loving presence of God in our lives. We discover anew that the Lord himself is indeed our true source of light. “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?”

The witness of the blind men challenges us to pray – humbly, urgently, passionately, confidently. They were seeking an impossible favor, knowing that it was not impossible for Jesus. The Lord can transform the small garden of our lives into an orchard, then into a forest; he is the one who transforms us and makes our lives fruitful – when we trust in him. We must resist the temptation that says our prayer will not make any difference. When we are in the presence of Jesus, in a relationship of love with him, he himself is the difference. No darkness can overcome us when we cry out to him in faith, because he is the light of our lives.

*In what ways do I resist the inner light that speaks the truth to my conscience? In my limited vision of faith, how can I persevere in seeking inner healing? How can my spiritual life blossom if I have the faith and humility of the two blind men?*

***Mary, open my heart and my eyes to the areas in my life that need Christ’s healing.***

## Notes

**December 3, Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent**  
**Saint Francis Xavier, Priest**

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***First Reading: Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26***

Thus says the Lord GOD,  
the Holy One of Israel:

O people of Zion, who dwell in Jerusalem,  
no more will you weep;  
He will be gracious to you when you cry out,  
as soon as he hears he will answer you.  
The Lord will give you the bread you need  
and the water for which you thirst.  
No longer will your Teacher hide himself,  
but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher,  
While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears:  
“This is the way; walk in it,”  
when you would turn to the right or to the left.

He will give rain for the seed  
that you sow in the ground,  
And the wheat that the soil produces  
will be rich and abundant.  
On that day your flock will be given pasture  
and the lamb will graze in spacious meadows;  
The oxen and the asses that till the ground  
will eat silage tossed to them  
with shovel and pitchfork.  
Upon every high mountain and lofty hill  
there will be streams of running water.  
On the day of the great slaughter,  
when the towers fall,  
The light of the moon will be like that of the sun  
and the light of the sun will be seven times greater  
like the light of seven days.  
On the day the LORD binds up the wounds of his people,  
he will heal the bruises left by his blows.

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***Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6***  
***Blessed are all who wait for the Lord.***

Praise the LORD, for he is good;  
sing praise to our God, for he is gracious;  
it is fitting to praise him.

The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem;  
the dispersed of Israel he gathers.

***R. Blessed are all who wait for the Lord.***

He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.

He tells the number of the stars;  
he calls each by name.

***R. Blessed are all who wait for the Lord.***

Great is our LORD and mighty in power:  
to his wisdom there is no limit.

The LORD sustains the lowly;  
the wicked he casts to the ground.

***R. Blessed are all who wait for the Lord.***

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***Gospel Acclamation: Isaiah 33:22***

***Alleluia, alleluia.*** The LORD is our Judge, our Lawgiver, our King; he it is who will save us. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***

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***Gospel: Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8***

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.”

Then he summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness.

Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, “Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.”

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***Meditation:***

Today’s Advent Gospel gives us an insight into our situation in the world and shows us what the Lord sees when he looks upon us. So many people nowadays are “troubled and abandoned” – troubled by trying to keep up with the demands of an imbalanced and dysfunctional culture, troubled by the search for fulfillment in the empty promises of the world, troubled by the effort to remain hopeful in the face of so much bad news. In this era of proud independence from God,

many people make the foolhardy attempt to live as if there were no God. If we abandon our shepherd, no wonder we feel abandoned! The Gospel describes the result quite accurately: we end up in the fatigued condition of “sheep without a shepherd.”

However, we are *not* sheep without a shepherd! We have a very good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. When he looks at us, he sees our pathetic condition, and even though we are at fault, he does not hold our offenses against us. Rather, “his heart [is] moved with pity” for us. This is not a momentary emotional reaction. It is a revelation of God’s heart, of his eternal, unchanging, merciful love. This is the reason why Jesus has come, because the lost sheep are in desperate need and God’s deep desire is to gather them into his Kingdom. This desire is the secret behind the energetic public ministry of the Lord as he journeys from village to village, teaching, healing, and proclaiming everywhere “the Gospel of the Kingdom.”

This Gospel shows us that the great hope expressed long ago by Isaiah has now been fulfilled. Isaiah was looking forward to a future time that he could see only in faith. We know that the time has arrived, and we are living in it already, for the Messiah has come. Still, we too must look with eyes of faith in order to see what the Lord is doing in our lives. For example, Isaiah says that our Teacher will no longer hide himself, and that we will see him with our own eyes. This does not mean that we see the Lord physically in this life. In this sense, the Lord is still hidden from us. The “eyes” the prophet refers to are the eyes of faith, or what St. Paul calls “the eyes of our hearts” (Eph 1:18). Isaiah also says that we will hear the Lord’s voice sounding in our ears. This too is a spiritual, not physical, sense of hearing. We hear the Lord’s voice in our hearts – if we are listening.

What do we hear? The voice is that of a Shepherd, not a slavedriver. He speaks tenderly, usually very quietly, not with condemnation. The prophet Elijah heard the Lord’s voice as “a tiny, whispering sound” (1 Kg 19:12). Isaiah tells us what the voice says: “This is the way; walk in it.” How blessed we are to have such heavenly guidance! The Lord is not distant or indifferent. He does not abandon us to the noisy confusion of the world. If we are attentive to his voice, he shows us the path that leads to our happiness.

Sometimes we are tempted to “turn to the right or to the left” – that is, to depart from God’s will and follow our own way. We have expectations and desires that we think must be fulfilled in order for us

to be happy. When the Lord shows us that his way is not our way, we can be taken by surprise. In our pride, we may even react with indignation. If we want to follow the way of the Lord, however, we must humble ourselves and accept his guidance.

Jesus shows us that there is more to the divine plan than our being guided like sheep. He also wants us to participate in the service of shepherding others, to give them without cost the very gift that we have received without cost. He wants us and many others to be his laborers, to gather in the great harvest of souls. This is the great mission of the Church (cf. Mt 28:19). To be effective laborers, we need to let our hearts be transformed by the Lord's love for his sheep. He wants us to love them as he loves them.

This does not come naturally to us. When we look at the world, with all its disorders, we can easily grow impatient and judgmental – and self-righteous. *Why are they so selfish and stupid? Why don't they follow the law?* This is not how the Lord looks at us, and not how we are to look at others. The Lord teaches us and guides us in his own way, which is one of love and mercy. He whispers to us the words we should speak to others. He guides our hearts, so that our words and actions will truly proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

*How am I preparing myself to be able to hear the Lord speaking to me? When do I refuse to humble myself before God and to accept his guidance? In what ways am I shepherding others by giving to them what Jesus has given to me?*

***Mary, grant me the desire to serve my brothers and sisters joyfully as a laborer of your Son Jesus.***

***St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.***

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**Francis Xavier** was born in the Basque region of Spain in 1506. While studying liberal arts in Paris, he met St. Ignatius Loyola, who convinced him to use his talents to spread the Gospel. He became one of the founding Jesuits, and the order's first missionary. He worked for ten years in India, Indonesia, and Japan, baptizing more than forty thousand people. Wherever he went he would seek out and help the poor and forgotten. Francis is considered the greatest missionary since the time of the Apostles. He died in 1552 off the coast of China and was canonized with St. Ignatius Loyola in 1622. He is the patron of all foreign missionaries.

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