

Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

Advent and Christmas

December 1, 2024, to January 11, 2025
Cycle C - Year 1

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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: December 1, 2024, 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 C/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 must 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, [December 9 this year] 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.”

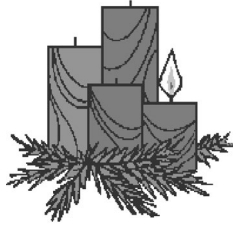
John is the great herald who proclaims that the coming of the Messiah is near. He cries out for repentance of our sins to “make ready the way of the Lord” (Mk 1:3). He teaches us that the way to “make ready” is through humility, acknowledging God as God and ourselves as his creatures. When John was thought 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



***May the Lord... strengthen your hearts,
to be blameless in holiness
before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus
with all his holy ones.***

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Theme for the Week

Jesus has come to dwell among his people, and we look forward to his coming again. Full of joyful hope, let us prepare to receive him more deeply into our hearts every day.

***Vigilance and Prayer:
Standing Firm in Hope Amidst Tribulations***
A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

The Gospel of today's Liturgy, the First Sunday of Advent, speaks to us about the Lord's coming at the end of time. Jesus announces bleak and distressing events, but precisely at this point he invites us not to be afraid. Why? Because everything will be okay? No, but because He will come. Jesus will return as he promised. This is what he says: "Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand" (Lk 21:28). It is nice to hear this encouraging word: stand up straight and raise our heads because right during those moments when everything seems to be coming to an end, the Lord comes to save us. We await him with joy, even in the midst of tribulations, during life's crises and the dramatic events of history. We await him.

But how do we raise our heads and not become absorbed with difficulties, suffering, and defeat? Jesus points the way with a strong reminder: "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy.... Be vigilant at all times and pray" (Lk 21:34, 36).

"Be vigilant": *vigilance*. Let us focus on this important aspect of the Christian life. From the words of Christ, we see that vigilance is tied to alertness: be alert, do not get distracted, that is, stay awake! Vigilance means this: not to allow our hearts to become lazy or our spiritual life to soften into mediocrity. Be careful because we can become "sleepy Christians" – and we know there are many Christians who are asleep, who are anesthetized by spiritual worldliness – Christians without spiritual fervor, without intensity in prayer, without enthusiasm for mission, without passion for the Gospel; Christians who always look inwards, incapable of looking to the horizon. And this leads to "dozing off": to move things along by inertia, to fall into apathy, indifferent to everything except what is comfortable for us. This is a sad life going forward this way since there is no happiness.

We need to be vigilant so that our daily life does not become routine, and, as Jesus says, so we are not burdened by life's anxieties (cf. v. 34). So today is a good moment to ask ourselves: what weighs on my heart? What weighs on my spirit? What makes me go to sit in the

lazy chair? It is sad to see Christians “in the armchair”! What are the mediocrities that paralyze me, the vices that crush me to the ground and prevent me from raising my head? And regarding the burdens that weigh on the shoulders of our brothers and sisters, am I aware of them or indifferent to them? These are good questions to ask ourselves, because they help *guard our hearts against apathy*.

What then is *apathy*? It is a great enemy of the spiritual life and also of Christian life. Apathy is a type of laziness that makes us slide into sadness, it takes away zest for life and the will to do things. It is a negative spirit that traps the soul in apathy, robbing it of its joy. It starts with sadness sliding downwards so that there is no joy. The Book of Proverbs says: “With all vigilance guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life” (*Prov 4:23*). Guard your heart: that means to be vigilant! Stay awake and guard your heart.

And let us add an essential ingredient: the secret to being vigilant is *prayer*. In fact, Jesus says: “Be vigilant at all times and pray” (*Lk 21:36*). Prayer is what keeps the lamp of the heart lit. This is especially true when we feel that our enthusiasm has cooled down. Prayer re-lights it, because it brings us back to God, to the center of things. Prayer reawakens the soul from sleep and focuses it on what matters, on the purpose of existence. Even during our busiest days, we must not neglect prayer. The prayer of the heart can be helpful for us, repeating often brief invocations. For example, during Advent, we could make a habit of saying, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Only these words, but repeating them: “Come, Lord Jesus.” This time of preparation leading to Christmas is beautiful: we think of the Nativity scene and Christmas, so let us say from the heart: “Come, Lord Jesus.” Let us repeat this prayer all throughout the day: the soul will remain vigilant! “Come, Lord Jesus,” is a prayer we can all say together three times. “Come, Lord Jesus!” “Come, Lord Jesus!” “Come, Lord Jesus!”

And now we pray to the Madonna: may she who awaited the Lord with a vigilant heart accompany us during our Advent journey.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message, November 28, 2021
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December 1, 1st Sunday of Advent



First Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will fulfill the promise

I made to the house of Israel and Judah.

In those days, in that time,

I will raise up for David a just shoot;
he shall do what is right and just in the land.

In those days Judah shall be safe
and Jerusalem shall dwell secure;
this is what they shall call her:

“The LORD our justice.”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,

guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior,
and for you I wait all the day.

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.

He guides the humble to justice,
and teaches the humble his way.

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

All the paths of the LORD are kindness and constancy
toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

The friendship of the LORD is with those who fear him,
and his covenant, for their instruction.

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.



Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.

Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God—and as you are conducting yourselves—you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 85:8

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



Gospel: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”



Meditation:

The whole aim of our existence here on earth is union with Jesus Christ who is the very Source of life and who gives us eternal life. Prompted by love, he has taken the initiative to come to us that we may have life and have it to the full (cf. Jn 10:10). Today, we begin *Advent*, the holy and solemn Liturgical Season of looking forward in a special way to the One who has come and who will come again. We dedicate ourselves to a renewed preparation to meet him worthily when he comes. It is for this reason that we pray in today’s Collect (opening prayer): “Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, / the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ / with righteous deeds at his coming, / so that, gathered at his right hand, / they [we] may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.”

Today’s readings refer to the coming of our Lord Jesus and to the importance of being ready to welcome him. In the reading from the Book of the prophet Jeremiah, God announces his plan to raise up a “just shoot” (or a “righteous branch”) from the line of King David who will provide security to the house of Judah. In the days of this promised leader, “Jerusalem shall dwell secure.” This is part of the prophecy of the New Covenant that has already been fulfilled by the historical first

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the “just shoot” who brings salvation and security not only to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem but to the whole world. Through his sacrificial death on the Cross, he accomplished our salvation and made the blessings and graces of Heaven available to us.

The same “just shoot” becomes present at every Eucharistic Sacrifice through the ministry of the priest. Christ really comes to us in the Eucharist. This was the strong conviction of St. Francis of Assisi that moved him to write with poetic wonder in his *Letter to All the Friars*: ‘O humble sublimity! O sublime humility! That the Lord of the Universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles himself that for our salvation he hides himself under the form of bread...’ The Eucharistic Jesus is the same Jesus, the “just shoot” born of the Virgin, who suffered, died on the Cross, and rose from the dead. At every Holy Mass he makes his very self and his gift of salvation present to us.

During the Season of Advent, we prepare to celebrate his coming in the flesh through the womb of Virgin Mary. This holy Season also reminds us of our eventual meeting when he comes in glory to judge all people according to their deeds. Today’s Gospel uses some graphic descriptions of the upheaval that will accompany the coming in glory of Christ, the “Son of Man,” who will bring eternal salvation to all who have remained faithful to him. What should be of special interest to us and well worth pondering is not merely the frightening phenomena, but the certainty of his coming, our departure from this world, and the need for us to be well prepared to meet him. It is to this last point that today’s Gospel draws our attention. Jesus tells us: “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.... Be vigilant at all times and pray....”

To be ready for the coming (the “advent”) of our Savior, whether in the celebration of his Nativity, or his coming in the Eucharist, or at the end of our earthly lives, or at the end of the world – the time of which we do not know – we need a heart dedicated to a life of holiness. This comes from the constant effort to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love one another. It is essentially about living according to the commandments of God, as faithfully taught by the

Catholic Church. This life of love is what St. Paul prays will grow in us: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all... so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus....”

For us to truly love God and neighbor in ways that are pleasing to God, prayer is absolutely necessary. Prayer, which is communion with God, purifies our thoughts and makes us grow in the interior life – a necessary condition for the practice of fruitful love and the righteous deeds with which we strive to meet our Lord at his coming. Prayer indeed forms the heart and inspires right actions. Hence, it is the best way of being vigilant in preparing for the coming of our Savior.

How must I prepare for the coming of my Savior? What are some of my anxieties that burden me and distract me from His presence? How can I improve my prayer life during this Season of Advent to become more vigilant for his coming?

Mary, accompany me during my Advent journey.

Notes

December 2, Monday, 1st Week of Advent



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!



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.

Gospel Acclamation: 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.**



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."



Meditation:

Today's readings take us from the Lord's panoramic and poetic promise of peace, as revealed through the prophet Isaiah, to an example of how that peace enters the life of one man who prays. We would expect a contrast between Isaiah's vision of restoration and a Roman centurion's world of military might. But instead we have the privilege of pondering the centurion's words of great humility and great

faith as he stands face-to-face with Jesus in Capernaum – the same words we say as we stand face-to-face with Jesus in the Eucharist at every Mass.

The centurion is a military commander, “a man subject to authority,” he says, “with soldiers subject to me.” He approaches Jesus and appeals to him for the healing of his suffering, paralyzed servant. How shocking this must have been to the onlookers: a leader of the pagan enemy’s army asking a Jewish teacher for help! And Jesus’ offer to go to the home of a Gentile – and a Roman centurion at that – would have been unthinkable. They were breaking all the rules! But nothing about this situation follows the rules; a miraculous event is about to take place. The centurion expresses that he understands well what he is asking, and that he fully believes that Jesus can heal his servant. He understands that Jesus can heal in a supernatural way, not only through his physical touch but even by his command from afar. He realizes that just as he himself has military authority, Jesus has spiritual authority, and he submits to the Lord’s authority with sincere humility and hope.

His faith-filled words, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed,” are the words that the Church in her wisdom gives us to speak aloud just before we receive the Eucharist. With this statement we come before the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus in a state of humility and ardent faith. While acknowledging that we are not worthy of Jesus’ entrance under “the roof” of our souls, we trust and believe, as the centurion did, that he can and will heal us from the inside out, through our receiving of the Eucharist.

The centurion not only shows us a humble disposition and teaches us sacred words, he also offers us encouragement to trust in Christ no matter who we are. After all, he made his living as a soldier, with the weapons of war: it does not matter where we live or work. He was a pagan: it does not matter if we have a spiritual background or religious experience. Despite all he was and all he was not, he recognized and was drawn to the light of Christ. He went directly to that light, humbled himself, pleaded for what he needed, and trusted that Jesus not only could but would help him. He shows us how we are to approach Jesus. And Jesus assures us that he is ready to respond to anyone who comes to him in humility and faith. He promises that “many will come from the east and the west” and be welcomed in the Kingdom of God.

Whatever the centurion did for the cause of war, it pales in comparison to his work for the cause of peace. He is an instrument of the Lord's peace for all who hear his story. The prophet Isaiah gives us a beautiful vision of the kind of peace that comes from the Lord. God and his word are represented as a mighty mountain. As people from all nations stream toward it, as they climb his mountain and acknowledge his sovereignty, they bring all their disputes to him instead of opposing each other. It is an image of world peace: all nations approaching the Lord, being instructed by his word and walking in his paths. God will be the judge of all, and all disputes will be settled by his word of justice, love, and truth.

In perhaps one of the most poetic images of peace in Scripture, Isaiah tells us that on God's holy mountain, "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." This is the peace that every human heart longs for. We find peace, as did the centurion, when we approach Jesus. As we humble ourselves before him, acknowledging our unworthiness, presenting to him our needs, we find ourselves no longer fixated on war, but walking "in the light of the LORD."

How does the example of the centurion inspire me to grow in faith and humility? Have I experienced peace when I have humbly approached the Lord in my unworthiness? What hinders me from welcoming Jesus into all the situations of my life?

Mary, help me to put all my trust in the Lord and not in the things of this world.

Notes

December 3, Tuesday, 1st Week of Advent
Saint Francis Xavier, Priest



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.



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.

Gospel Acclamation:

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



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."



Meditation:

Isaiah's prophecy in the first reading paints a beautiful picture of what life will be like when the Messiah comes. There will be justice for all, and peace, and "no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain." One of the famous verses from this passage tells of the wild animals living peacefully together, and even predicts that a "baby shall play by the cobra's den, / and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair." A phrase that is especially striking to us as Christians mentions the animals having "a little child to guide them." This time of year, there are many images of Jesus as a little Child. Even non-Christians know that Christmas is about a baby being born. During Advent we are preparing to celebrate that event.

But we are actually preparing for two events. One is the celebration of the birth of the baby Jesus at Christmas, the little Child who will guide us. The other event that the Church prepares for in Advent is the time when Jesus will come again at the end of the world. The first reading also gives a vision of that time of the final judgment: "But he shall judge the poor with justice, / and decide aright for the land's afflicted." These words tell us that the arrival of the Messiah will bring not only harmony to the wild animals, but also divine justice to the world. While the first may give us comfort, the other reminds us to stay on the straight path and to keep our hearts pure, for, "Not by appearance shall he judge, / nor by hearsay shall he decide."

Sometimes the pure of heart are called "childlike." Jesus uses this expression in today's Gospel where he joyfully praises the Father for the wonder of his "gracious will," saying, "although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike." So while we are aware of Jesus' coming as a child at Christmas time, he is telling us that it is valuable for *us* to be childlike *all* the time, because God the Father himself gives wisdom to his little children.

How can we be childlike and still take on the responsibilities of being adults in the modern world? Jesus is not against personal development and human progress. He does not discriminate against "the wise and the learned." Rather he is encouraging us who are adults to recognize and imitate the spiritual qualities that we find in children – qualities that reflect the Lord himself. Children live in the moment; they easily trust; they delight in the good, the true, and the beautiful.

One way to grow more childlike is to focus on Jesus' own humility and selfless love in coming among us as a little Child. We worship him not only in consideration of his ministry as an adult – his suffering, death and resurrection – but also in his holy Childhood. This is expressed in the various devotions to Jesus as a baby, such as the Santo Niño and the Infant of Prague. The honor we give to these images can be puzzling to many. It looks to them as if we are playing with a doll. They ask, "How can this be part of one's search for and worship of the Almighty God?" We answer that God intentionally came among us as a baby. He could have appeared on earth as an adult, as a King, displaying terrifying divine powers, but he came as a baby, thereby revealing a sacred quality to childlikeness.

In the Gospel Jesus also reminds his followers of how fortunate they are to be in the presence of the Messiah. Many generations of Jews prayed and endured through an "Advent" season that lasted centuries, as they looked forward to the arrival of the Savior. Jesus says, "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." Even Isaiah, who was given the prophetic gift to describe the time of the Lord, was not alive to see the prophecy fulfilled. We are also *blessed* today, for we are able to see and hear Jesus, though not in the same way as the disciples. He left us his word, his Spirit, and his sacred Body and Blood; we can see and hear and touch Jesus – and receive him in Holy Communion – if we are childlike.

What prevents me from being more childlike? What must I do to develop the spiritual qualities of a child, such as simplicity and trust? How am I preparing spiritually this Advent for the celebration of Christmas?

***Mary, guide me to grow daily in humility and selfless love.
St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.***

Francis Xavier was born in the Basque region of Spain in 1506. While studying liberal arts in Paris, he met St. Ignatius of 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. In 1622, he was canonized together with St. Ignatius of Loyola. St. Francis Xavier is the patron of all foreign missionaries.

December 4, Wednesday, 1st Week of Advent
Saint John Damascene, Priest and Doctor of the Church



First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a

On this mountain the LORD of hosts
will provide for all peoples
A feast of rich food and choice wines,
juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.
On this mountain he will destroy
the veil that veils all peoples,
The web that is woven over all nations;
he will destroy death forever.
The Lord GOD will wipe away
the tears from all faces;
The reproach of his people he will remove
from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken.

On that day it will be said:
“Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!
This is the LORD for whom we looked;
let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!”
For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Gospel Acclamation: Is 33:22

Alleluia, alleluia. Behold, the Lord comes to save his people; blessed are those prepared to meet him. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 15:29-37

At that time: Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, went up on the mountain, and sat down there. Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see, and they glorified the God of Israel.

Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way.” The disciples said to him, “Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?” Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” they replied, “and a few fish.” He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. 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.



Meditation:

In Advent, we ponder many of the prophecies that Isaiah makes about the “day” of the Messiah. When the Messiah comes, he will usher in a time of extraordinary joy, peace, harmony, and prosperity. Yesterday, Isaiah said it will be like seeing predators living peacefully with their prey, with lions eating hay and with babies playing with poisonous snakes. Today the prophet describes the day of the Messiah using the image of a banquet, “a feast of rich food and choice wines.” Not only that, in the day that is coming, the Lord will wipe away all tears, free all people, and even overcome the greatest obstacle to our lasting happiness, death itself. “He will destroy death forever!”

These prophecies are either too fantastic to take seriously, or they are merely exaggerated poetic images of a rosy future – or they really reveal to us God’s plan for his people. We who live by faith believe that Isaiah was inspired by the Holy Spirit. His words are truly the word of God, revealing what God has promised to do. When God makes a promise, he keeps it.

The fulfillment of all of God’s promises is Jesus Christ. He has come to provide a rich feast for all peoples and to destroy death forever. In today’s Gospel, we see him at work on a mountainside in Galilee, curing the lame and the mute, and giving sight to the blind. The crowds are understandably amazed at what they see. So many people who were hopelessly disabled, many of them crippled even from birth, are walking around perfectly healthy! The reaction of the crowds is to give praise to God, for it is obvious to them that only God can do such things. No wonder they begin to speculate whether Jesus might be the Messiah. This idea grows even stronger when he feeds the vast crowd with just seven loaves. The prophecies of Isaiah are being fulfilled right here on the mountainside. According to John’s Gospel, the people’s reaction goes even further; after a miraculous multiplication of loaves, they want to proclaim Jesus their king (cf. Jn 6:14-15).

As we ponder these readings, we reflect on how they apply to us today. The scandal of world hunger gives some people the idea that God has not yet come, or that perhaps he cannot or will not provide for us. They wonder whether a loving God exists at all. If he had pity on the hungry crowd, why has he delayed having pity on the hungry world? We who have met the Lord in faith know that he has come, he is here with us now, and he will come in glory. We do not have simple answers to every question and social problem, but we know that the Lord himself is the answer to the deepest needs and hungers of every person. We experience him today as the fulfillment of God’s eternal promises.

God feeds us with his own divine life – most especially in the gift of the Eucharist – and has made us his ministers, to share with the world the new life we have received. Our situation is like that of the Apostles. We see the vast crowd of hungry people in the world, people living in poverty, suffering, ignorance, and weakness, and we have no way of caring for them. All we have is “seven loaves and a few fish.” Our resources are hopelessly inadequate. But if we submit ourselves, with

all we have and with all our limitations, to Jesus, he can do wonders. We ourselves are the humble loaves in the Lord's hands. He takes what we offer him, ourselves, blesses us, breaks us, and indicates to us how we are to give of ourselves to others. If we keep what we have for ourselves, we soon run out, without helping anyone, but if we entrust ourselves fully to the Lord, he provides in abundance. In Advent, our attitude toward the future is renewed as one of joyful hope, because we know the Lord will provide more than enough to fill the hearts of all who are hungering for his love.

Why do I question the ways of the Lord when I am aware of the hunger and the deep needs of people? When sorrows and doubts confront me, how do I find true peace in Jesus? How can I be one of God's humble instruments to feed the hearts of those who are hungering for the love of Jesus?

Mary, inspire me to give of myself to others and not count the cost.

St. John Damascene, pray for us.

John Damascene (John of Damascus) was born of an Arab Christian family in 676. Brought up under Muslim rule in Damascus, his Christian faith did not cause any grievance with the Muslims, who held him in high esteem. John received the best education from a Christian tutor and was ordained a priest. His dedicated life of prayer enabled him to put his literary and preaching talents at the service of God. Best known for his strong defense of the veneration of sacred images, statues, and icons, John is called the Doctor of Christian Arts. He is considered one of the last of the Fathers of the Eastern Church and the greatest of her poets. He died in 749 and was declared a Doctor of Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1890.

Notes

December 5, Thursday, 1st Week of Advent



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.



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*.

Gospel Acclamation: Isaiah 55:6

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



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.”



Meditation:

Advent is a time of prayer, a time for calling on the Lord. But there is more to our Advent preparation than simply saying, “Lord, Lord.” Jesus teaches us in today’s Gospel that wisdom involves not only *speaking* to God and not only *listening* to God but also *doing* the will of God. Who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven? “Only the one who does the will of my Father in Heaven.”

Jesus uses the image of two houses. The first can withstand the onslaught of the elements; the second cannot. The only difference between the two houses is the foundation: one is built on rock and the other on sand. This shows the difference between *listening and acting* and merely *listening*. Both the wise man and the fool *listen* to the word of God. The wise man goes a step further and *acts* upon what he has heard. When we act upon the word of God that we have heard in prayer or at Mass, then we are building our spiritual life upon a firm foundation.

There is another kind of foolishness: when we do not even listen to the word, much less act upon it. Jesus does not include this foolish option in the parable. Perhaps he would say that one who does not listen

at all is like a foolish man who does not even build a house. He is completely exposed to the rain and the floods. As we read in this week's *Seasonal Introduction to Advent* by Fr. Francis, "We need interior eyes. We can only see deeply if we are in prayer and are willing to be led." We can only be led if we take the time to listen to what God is telling us, and if we are willing to follow the direction he gives us.

Many other voices are competing for our attention: the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we choose to act upon what we hear from these sources, then we will be like the fool who built his house on sand. These three sources do not provide a firm foundation! When challenges and disappointments occur, which they most assuredly will, we will collapse, just as a house built on sand collapses before the force of winds, rain, and floods. This Scripture invites us to take a moment to reflect on what voices we are listening to, and how we are responding. Are we building on the firm foundation of the word of God? Apart from God we can do nothing.

The first reading also shows a comparison, not between two houses but two cities, a "strong city" and a "lofty city." "A strong city have we; / he sets up walls and rampart to protect us." This is comparable to the house built on solid rock. It is a city founded on the will of God, protected by the power of God. The other city, however, which has built itself up in defiance of God, must be humbled: "He humbles those in high places, / and the lofty city he brings down; / He tumbles it to the ground, / levels it with the dust." The destruction of the "lofty city" is the same as the final end of the house built on sand.

We are well into the First Week of Advent. This is a season of preparation for the celebration of Jesus' Birth and a time to prepare for his Second Coming. It is important to take the time now to heed the words of the Gospel and examine what we are listening to and acting upon. We look to Mary, Mother of the Word, as our model of one who *listened* and *acted*. We ask her intercession that we may be given the wisdom and grace to do the same.

Why do I sometimes listen to God without doing his will? How does prayer provide for and strengthen the foundation of my spiritual life? During Advent how much time and effort am I spending in prayer to develop my "interior eyes"?

Mary, grant me the wisdom and grace to listen to and act on the word of God.

December 6, Friday, 1st Week of Advent
Saint Nicholas, Bishop



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.



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.

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.***

 ***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.



Meditation:

In Advent, we read many passages from the great prophet Isaiah, who spoke often of the future coming of the Messiah. In today’s prophecy, he tells us that when the Messiah comes, “the deaf shall hear / the words of a book,” and “out of gloom and darkness, / the eyes of the blind shall see.” In today’s Gospel we read of Jesus curing two blind men – a clear sign that the Messiah has indeed come. There is much more to this miracle, then, than a compassionate deed on behalf of the two men. Jesus is revealing that a *new era* has begun. He shows not only his divine power to heal, but also his very identity as the Light of the World. All who put their faith in him are set free from the darkness of sin.

When we cannot see, either because we are in a dark place or because of our poor eyesight, our natural longing is for light. We want to see! When the darkness is an intellectual one, when we are ignorant,

we long for knowledge. The worst form of darkness is spiritual. When we are in the darkness of sin, our longing for light is all the more urgent. We are made to see God, yet we cannot see him – and we might, by our own misuse of our freedom, be refusing to see. We cannot create light for ourselves; someone must give it to us. We need a Savior!

The *Catechism* describes our needy condition as one of the very reasons why God became man, quoting from an instruction by St. Gregory of Nyssa: “Sick, our nature demanded to be healed; fallen, to be raised up; dead, to rise again. We had lost the possession of the good; it was necessary for it to be given back to us. Closed in the darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?” (CCC 457).

We are now preparing for the coming of the Savior. But why is he coming? He comes in part because we are in “so miserable and unhappy a state.” He comes to give light to those in darkness. The Lord is ready to heal us. Our responsibility is to be ready to accept his gift. He asks us the question of *faith*: “Do you believe that I can do this?” Our response need not be complicated. We can express faith with the simplicity of the blind men: “Yes, Lord!”

Faith is connected to healing. The blind men did not heal themselves; Jesus tells them that they will be healed because of their faith. When we say “yes” to the Lord, we open our hearts to the healing work he desires to do in us. Faith is itself a kind of seeing. The blind men, even before their healing, are able to “see” what many in Capernaum never recognized, that Jesus is the “Son of David” – that is, the Messiah himself. When we call on the Lord in faith, we are not only asking him for healing, we are acknowledging that our hearts have already been healed, for we know him as our Lord and Savior.

Faith is the treasure of the lowly and the poor. Isaiah prophesies that these lowly ones, the *anawim*, will rejoice at the coming of the Messiah. “The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD, / and the poor rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” This is the joy that fills our own hearts when we renew our trust in the goodness and power of the Lord. Even as we pass

through times of painful darkness, we do not lose hope. We have learned what all people of faith know deep in their hearts: “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?”

*Why am I sometimes blind to my own weaknesses and sins?
How has faith in Jesus Christ led me to freedom from the
darkness of sin? When have I experienced the joy that fills the
hearts of the lowly and the poor?*

Mary, reveal my areas of blindness so I may seek the healing touch of Christ.

St. Nicholas, pray for us.

Nicholas was born in Lycia, in modern day Turkey, around 270. Though he is one of the most popular saints in the Greek as well as the Latin Church, we know scarcely anything historically certain about him except that he was Bishop of Myra in the fourth century. He became known for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors. According to legend, he was cast into prison but was released during the reign of Constantine. Some believe he was also present at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Nicholas died in 343.

Notes

December 7, Saturday, 1st Week of Advent
Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church



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.



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.

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.***



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.”



Meditation:

In today’s first reading we have a beautiful prophecy from Isaiah: when the Messiah comes, there will be glorious prosperity and restoration for the people of Israel. The prophet uses many images to describe what this restoration will be like. One image in particular stands

out: in the days of the Messiah, “the Teacher” – that is, the Lord himself – will reveal himself and speak to each one personally, “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.”

To hear the Lord’s voice is to experience being led by the Lord interiorly, in the depth of our conscience. God usually addresses himself to us on this level, speaking to the ears of our hearts. It is from within that we hear him say: “This is the way,” or sometimes *That is not the way!* This subtle small voice which resonates within is a very large part of our Christian life – or it should be – which is why we listen to it and strive to develop an ever more accurate and sensitive conscience.

Sometimes we can be mistaken about what the Lord is saying to us. When we have important decisions to make in our lives, we need to discern whether what we are hearing interiorly is really from the Lord or from our own desires and thoughts. We need to seek wisdom from the Church and from trustworthy spiritual guides. From day to day, we should be listening within our own hearts for the voice of God. This is what we are doing right now, as we take time to ponder the word.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus says, “Ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” And at the end of Gospel, he says, “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.” The gift we have received is the gift of faith, the gift of knowing Jesus Christ and his victory in our lives. Not everyone has this gift, so we are called to share our faith with others in whatever way the Lord opens up for us. We ourselves are “laborers” for the Lord’s harvest of souls.

As the First Week of Advent closes, we need to reflect on how we have acted on the word which the Lord has spoken personally to us. Acting on the word is not only a matter of our own wholeness and salvation but that of others as well. As Jesus says in today’s Gospel, we are called to bring this saving message to others. Our vision must be expanded. So great is the mercy of the Lord that he promises to transform us completely, and to reveal to us the mysterious plan of his merciful heart. As he heals us of our weakness, Jesus gives us a heart like his own, a heart that can be “moved with pity” for those who are “troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.” When he awakens in us the power of merciful love for those who do not know him, he sends us to share with them the great gift that we have been given.

God is sharing with us his overwhelming desire to bring healing and restoration to his people. He did this through the earthly ministry of Jesus, whose coming in glory we await. But he also means to do this through the Body of Christ on earth. That is why he sends us out today to be his continuing presence of healing and restoration in the world. In this Season of Advent, let us pray not only for a fuller coming of Jesus to us, but also a fuller coming of Jesus into the world *through* us.

How sensitive am I to the voice of the Lord in the depths of my conscience? In what ways do I show my gratitude to God for the precious gift of faith? How am I called to share the saving message of Jesus with others?

Mary, as I await the coming of your Son, help me to discern his voice so that through me, he may continue to heal and restore the world.

St. Ambrose, pray for us.

Ambrose was born in Trier, France, around 340 to an ancient Roman family. After the death of his father, the family moved to Rome where he received his classical education. In about 374 the bishop of Milan, who supported the Arian heresy, died. During the election of a new bishop, Ambrose, as governor of Milan, was present to preserve order, since the Arian heretics were many and fierce. He begged the people to make their choice without fighting. Suddenly, while he was speaking, a voice called out, "Ambrose for bishop!" Soon everyone was shouting, "Ambrose for bishop!" Though only a catechumen, he was baptized and consecrated. As bishop, he was a tireless and dedicated shepherd, full of sympathy and charity, but uncompromising in matters of principle. Ambrose's power as an orator led to the conversion of St. Augustine, who said of him: "He was one of those who speak the truth, and speak it well, judiciously, pointedly, and with beauty and power of expression." He died in 397 and is revered by the Church as one of her greatest Doctors.

Notes