



Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

Advent and Christmas

*November 30, 2025 to January 10, 2026
Cycle A - Year 2*

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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The Roman Catholic Bishop of Parañaque

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ENDORSEMENT

A good homily should have, at least, these two important qualities: it should be faithful to the Gospel proclaimed, and it should speak to people in the context of their respective life-situations.

In all my years of preaching to the people of all ages and social backgrounds. I have found **“Pondering the Word”** published by the Anawim Community, a great help. Not only does it present the Word of God in its simplicity and richness, it likewise offers points for prayer, meditation and sharing which speak to the hearts of modern men and women as they move about in our fast-paced world.

I wish to recommend the Anawim Community for this truly blessed endeavor, and may the Spirit of God continue to touch the readers of their publication and allow them to encounter the Living Word in their busy world.

+ *Jesse E. Mercado*
+ **JESSE E. MERCADO, DD**
Bishop of Parañaque

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 30, 2025, 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/2.

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.”

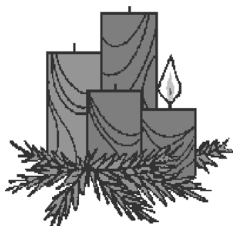
John is the great herald who proclaims that the coming of the Messiah is near. He cries out for repentance of our sins to “make ready the way of the Lord” (Mk 1:3). He teaches us that the way to “make ready” is through humility, acknowledging God as God and ourselves as his creatures. When John was thought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



***“Therefore, stay awake!
For you do not know
on which day your Lord will come.”***

Matthew 24:42

Theme for the Week

Advent is a season of interior preparation and active vigilance, a time for us to remain spiritually awake, preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord with joyful anticipation. Let us remain awake daily in the presence of Jesus and be prepared at all times for the day when all peoples will be gathered into the Kingdom of Christ the King.

***The Lord is Coming and is Present in Everyday Life:
Advent's Call to Vigilance***
A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

In the Gospel of today's Liturgy we hear a beautiful promise that introduces us to the Season of Advent: "Your Lord is coming" (cf. *Mt* 24:42). This is the foundation of our hope. It is what supports us even in the most difficult and painful moments of our life: God is coming, God is near and is coming. Let us never forget this! The Lord always comes, the Lord visits us, the Lord draws near, and will return at the end of time to welcome us in his embrace. Before this word, we ask ourselves: How will the Lord come? And how will we recognize him and welcome him? Let us dwell briefly on these two questions.

The first question: *how will the Lord come?* Very often we hear it said that the Lord is present on our journey, that he accompanies us and speaks to us. But perhaps, distracted as we are by many things, this truth remains merely theoretical for us. Yes, we know that the Lord is coming but we do not live according to this truth, or we imagine that the Lord will come in a spectacular way, perhaps through some miraculous sign. And instead, Jesus says that it will take place as in "the days of Noah" (cf. v. 37). And what did they do in the days of Noah? Just the normal, everyday things of life, as always: "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (v. 38). Let us bear this in mind: God is hidden in our life; he is always there — he is concealed in the most common and most ordinary situations in our life. He does not come in extraordinary events, but in everyday things. He manifests himself in everyday things. He is there, in our daily work, in a chance encounter, in the face of someone in need, even when we face days that seem grey and monotonous. It is right there that we find the Lord, who calls to us, speaks to us, and inspires our actions.

However, there is a second question: *how can we recognize and welcome the Lord?* We must be awake, alert, vigilant. Jesus warns us: there is the danger we may not notice his coming and may be unprepared for his visit. I have recalled on other occasions what Saint Augustine said: "I fear the Lord who passes by" (*Sermons*, 88, 14.13), that is, I fear that he will pass by and I will not recognize him! Indeed, Jesus says that those people in the time of Noah ate and drank "and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away" (*Mt* 24:39).

Let us pay attention to this: they did not realize anything! They were absorbed in their own things and did not realize that the flood was about to come. Indeed, Jesus says that, when he will come, “two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left” (v. 40). In what sense? What is the difference? Simply that one was vigilant, he was waiting, capable of discerning God’s presence in daily life, whereas the other was distracted, lived day to day, and did not notice anything.

Brothers and sisters, in this Season of Advent, let us be shaken out of our torpor and let us awaken from our slumber! Let us try to ask ourselves: am I aware of what I am living, am I alert, am I awake? Do I try to recognize God’s presence in daily situations, or am I distracted and a little overwhelmed by things? If we are unaware of his coming today, we will also be unprepared when he arrives at the end of time. Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us remain vigilant! Waiting for the Lord to come, waiting for the Lord to draw near to us, because he is there, but waiting alert. And may the Holy Virgin, Woman of waiting, who knew how to perceive the passing of God in the humble and hidden life of Nazareth and welcomed him in her womb, help us in this journey of being attentive to wait for the Lord who is among us and passes by.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message, November 27, 2022

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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!



Responsorial Psalm: 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.



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.

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 85:8

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



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."



Meditation:

A blessed new Liturgical Year to all! Today we begin a new Year with the Season of Advent. New beginnings, especially in our journey of faith, offer something exciting and hopeful, a chance to renew and to start over.

We enter into Year A, so our Sunday Gospels will be taken from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Our excitement at beginning the new Year, however, is tempered by the Church's choice of turning not to the beginning of the Gospel, but to a chapter near the end, chapter 24 out of 28. In fact, the theme of today's Gospel is the end times. It seems that the Church is asking us to *begin* with the *end*. How do we do that?

The Word of God guides us by referring to the story of Noah, which comes from the beginning of the Bible (cf. Gen 6-9) but was an end of sorts as well. According to the ancient story, "When the Lord saw how great the wickedness of human beings was on earth, and how every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil... the Lord said: 'I will wipe out from the earth the human beings I have created'" (Gen 6:5, 7). The Lord, Creator of all, deciding to wipe out humanity! What a frightening way to begin a new year!

Jesus' point in recalling this incident, however, is not destruction but salvation. He is aware of the danger that we might live without concern for our spiritual survival, just as the people did in Noah's time. They paid no attention to the loving warning of the Lord. Alas, they carried on with their worldly ways, "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage... until the flood came and carried them all away." Only Noah listened and responded to the Lord.

St. Paul also is aware that we all face the danger of failing to heed God's message. Therefore in today's second reading he exhorts us to "awake from sleep," to "throw off the works of darkness" – such as orgies and drunkenness, promiscuity and lust, rivalry and jealousy – and instead to "put on the armor of light." This new Season is a new opportunity for us to "conduct ourselves properly as in the day."

The Gospel makes it clear that different choices lead to different consequences: "one will be taken, and one will be left." By alerting us to look to our end, the Church gives us an opportunity to make a new beginning, a new and better choice. An essential part of the choice that we are to make, as Jesus tells us, is always to *be prepared*.

This is what Advent is all about. Its Latin origin *adventus* means “coming”; it is a season of anticipation. While the festive Christmas Season looms on the horizon, with get-togethers and parties galore, we must remember that now is the time to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.” The liturgical color of the Advent Season is violet, the same color as Lent, which reminds us that part of preparation is self-discipline and reparation.

Another choice that the Gospel tells us to make is to “enter the ark” like Noah did. What does this mean? The “ark” is symbolic of the Church, our refuge and our salvation (cf. CCC 845). The Church is also prefigured by the “house of the Lord,” mentioned today in both the first reading and the Psalm. Isaiah prophesies that 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.” And the Psalmist joyfully declares: “We will go up to the house of the LORD... Let us go rejoicing to the house of the LORD.”

As we start the new Liturgical Year, then, we are being invited to enter the ark, to climb the mountain, to go up to the house of the Lord. These are all ways of describing our preparation for the coming of our Savior. To make progress on the journey requires that we stay spiritually awake. It is time for us to open ourselves increasingly to the Lord and decreasingly to the world. At times this is difficult, like climbing a mountain, but it is the Lord’s mountain, so we begin with rejoicing as we wait for the Lord to show us his love and grant us his salvation (cf. Gospel Acclamation).

In what areas of my life do I need to “awake from sleep” so that I can better prepare for Christ’s coming? Am I living more for worldly advantages or for the fulfillment of heavenly promises? How can I “enter the ark” this Advent – entering more deeply into the life of the Church?

Mary, awaken my heart to God’s call and guide me safely to your Son.



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.



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 Responsorial Psalm repeats that of yesterday: "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord." The Church is urging us to make a good start to the new Liturgical Year by combining an action, "go," with an attitude, "rejoicing." We have begun a journey that is full of joyful anticipation, but we do not arrive unless we go.

Today's Gospel is full of action words, for the Roman centurion is a man of action and he knows that his commands have effect: "go," "come here," "do this." But there is something hidden behind all these action words: Jesus compliments the centurion for his great faith. The

highlight of today's Gospel is *faith*. The Church's choice of this Gospel passage invites us to ponder the centurion as an Advent model. He teaches us the importance of faith as we enter the new Liturgical Year.

The scenario that the centurion describes is truly bleak. In the face of his servant's paralysis and dreadful suffering, none of his military strength and training can help. He cannot simply command the servant to get well! He must appeal to a higher authority. But who has authority over sickness? Only God! The centurion's faith propels him to identify a real connection between the healing power of God and the earthly ministry of the Jewish rabbi who has just arrived in Capernaum. He seeks the aid of Jesus.

The centurion, since he is not a Jew, does not "go rejoicing to the house of the Lord," the temple in Jerusalem. Rather, he goes to Jesus. He is probably not familiar with the prophecies of Isaiah, yet his faith allows him to see in Jesus a new possibility. He senses that he is in the presence of what Isaiah describes as "the LORD's glory": "shelter and protection: / shade from the parching heat of day, / refuge and cover from storm and rain." And to this faith that cuts through the darkness of impossibility, Jesus reacts with amazement, and responds with healing, saving power.

By faith the centurion realizes that Jesus does not have to perform any exterior action in order to heal. The power of his word is enough to bring about a miraculous healing: "only say the word and my servant will be healed." "Word" in the original Greek of the Gospels is *logos*. In the Gospel of John, Jesus himself is identified as the *Logos* of God; he is the Word of the Eternal Father. The centurion cannot have all this in mind, but by faith, by a kind of spiritual intuition, he is able to open himself to the divine power of the Word. As we ponder the insight of the centurion, we realize what he sensed: that to call on Jesus is more than to ask him to do something or simply to say some powerful words; it is to appeal to a powerful Person. Jesus is the Divine Word made flesh, the mediator between God and man. To ask Jesus to "say the word" is more than believing in what Jesus can do; it is an act of faith in who he is, the Word Incarnate himself.

The level of faith expressed by the centurion is captured in today's Gospel Acclamation: "Come and save us, Lord our God; let your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." This verse from Psalm 80 implies

that God does not have to “do something” in order to save us. His very presence, the light of his face, is enough to save us from any difficulty or danger. God saves us by coming to us. This is what we celebrate in Advent, the coming of God. The very reason for his coming is to save us. To be in his presence, to receive his word, is already to be saved. This is what is revealed to us by the light of faith.

Like the centurion, we may be facing bleak circumstances in our life. We may feel helpless before the suffering of our loved ones. In such moments of darkness and impossibility, faith is our light. Faith allows us to see and anticipate the unfolding of God’s saving plan. As we begin this holy season of preparation and renewal, we are invited to exercise this kind of faith, the faith of the centurion. It is a faith that Jesus can come and break through whatever darkness we are in now. It is a faith in his very Person. In him and through him we come to the salvation we long for, “the banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Like the centurion, do I truly believe that Jesus’ word is powerful enough to heal and save – even without visible signs? In what areas of my life am I being called to deeper faith rather than control or action? How can I “go rejoicing” toward Jesus this Advent, even in the midst of difficulties or uncertainties?

Mary, lead me to trust in the power of your Son’s word.

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.



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:

In today's Gospel, we see Jesus rejoicing in the Holy Spirit and thanking his Father in prayer. This passage follows the return of the seventy-two disciples who have excitedly reported to Jesus the great things that they have done in his name, specifically, that the demons have been made subject to them (cf. Lk 10:17-20). At the beginning of this new Liturgical Year, surely we would think that subduing our own demons of sinfulness would be a very good start. Yet Jesus directs us to something deeper, something hidden from the eyes of the wise and the learned but revealed to the childlike. He is referring to himself and to his mission of revealing the love of the Father.

After speaking to the Father, Jesus says to his disciples: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.” In this context, what did the disciples actually see? They saw Jesus in prayer addressing God as his Father in the Holy Spirit. Jesus was revealing to them the intimate relationship, the joyful unity he has with his Father. He was sharing his own childlikeness before the Father. The Son knowing the Father and vice versa is a reference to the rich biblical concept of “knowing,” meaning deep intimacy and personal experience.

Jesus goes on to say that “many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it.” The Chosen People longed for intimacy with the Father, but sin kept preventing them from getting close. Even the law and the prophets were not enough. Indeed, some of their teachers became “wise and learned” in the law, but without conversion of heart, so they remained spiritually blind. Still, the prophecies that speak of a future time of peace were planted deep in the people's hearts, and these prophecies increased their longing for what they did not see, a kingdom ruled by a just and peaceful king.

The first reading is an excellent example of the sort of prophetic message that stirred the hearts of the Chosen People with expectation. It is Isaiah's famous foretelling of the arrival of a Messianic king. This king will “sprout from the stump of Jesse”; that is, he will be from the

line of David, the greatest king that the Israelites ever had. “The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him.” He will be filled with divine wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear of the Lord, and his rule will be marked by justice and peace. Isaiah promises that in his day, “the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, / as water covers the sea.” Today’s Responsorial Psalm is also filled with the anticipation of the reign of the Messiah-King: “Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.”

What do the disciples see? They see the Messiah present before them, Jesus Christ. By sharing with them his relationship with the Father in the Spirit, he “will enlighten the eyes of his servants” (cf. Gospel Acclamation). The Kingdom of justice and peace is to be found where Jesus, the Messiah, is reigning.

How do these readings help us in our Advent preparation? Firstly, we learn to pray in the childlike, joyful, intimate way that Jesus shows us. The Israelites of old looked for a *king*, and they expected to subject themselves to him. But Jesus instead reveals that God is a *Father* who is most gracious. Jesus shows us the way to the Father, for he himself is the Way. Secondly, we learn that our prayer is to be “in the Holy Spirit.” When we open our hearts to him, the Spirit guides us with his gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Thirdly, we discover that our deep longing to see the face of God is answered by our relationship with Jesus Christ. Our childlike prayer to the Father in the Spirit is rightly filled with ardent desire to see and hear Jesus. Thus we sing throughout Advent a song of longing: “*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!*” We look forward to his coming, knowing that to see and hear him is to be truly blessed.

In what ways is Jesus revealing the Father’s love to me in this Season of Advent? How can I develop a deeper and more personal relationship with the Father? How can I better allow the Holy Spirit to guide my heart with wisdom, understanding, and peace?

Mary, help me to see with childlike faith the love of the Father revealed in Jesus your Son.

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



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:

As we continue our Advent journey into the new Liturgical Year, the Church gives us the Gospel account of the miraculous multiplication of loaves. Great crowds follow Jesus up the mountain and gather around him. He sits down and welcomes all who come. Very many sick people approach him, hoping for a cure. It may strike us as strange to read that the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute – people whose movements are hampered by sickness – are going up the mountain. This detail reveals that a deep longing is at work in their hearts, and in the hearts of those who are assisting them. Going up the mountain represents the whole journey of faith, as well as the struggle of persevering in the face of illness. It is a struggle, but it is a hope-filled one, for Jesus is there, awaiting them; and he cures them.

St. Matthew's description of Jesus' ministry on the mountain is reminiscent of St. Luke's account of Jesus' visit to the synagogue in Nazareth, where he stood up to read from the scroll of Isaiah about the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind being able to see (cf. Lk 4:16ff). The people of Nazareth reacted negatively to their native son's declaration, but here on the mountain, the crowds are amazed, and they "glorified the God of Israel." In Jesus they can clearly see signs of God's power at work.

But Jesus goes beyond the great work of healing. He knows his people's hunger and, moved with pity, decides to provide food for them. The prophecy of Isaiah that we find in today's first reading is about to be fulfilled, as "the Lord of hosts / will provide for all peoples / a feast of rich food and choice wines.... For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain."

One insight that we can take from this for our Advent journey is that the Lord is moved with pity by our hunger. The discipline of fasting is an appropriate part of this season of preparation. When we fast, we decide not to fill ourselves with food so that our hunger for the Lord may grow. Fasting helps us focus on him as the one Food that satisfies us.

At this point, Jesus decides to involve his disciples. Whereas he was previously doing the healing himself, in his desire to feed the crowd, he works with his disciples. But they are not miracle workers as he is; they are subject to the limitation of what they happen to have at the moment, seven loaves and a few fish. Even if they share Jesus' concern for the crowd, there seems to be very little they can do for them. The little they have, however, is enough for Jesus. He feeds the whole crowd with the seven loaves, and there are seven baskets of surplus fragments.

The multiplication of the loaves is one of the few miracles that is recounted in all four Gospels – which highlights the great importance of this story to the early Christian communities. The Church has always seen this event as Eucharistic, pointing to the even greater miracle of multiplication that takes place at every Holy Mass. The miracle of Transubstantiation, when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, makes present for us the miracle of the Incarnation –

which is what Advent is preparing us to celebrate. The Incarnation is the mystery of God becoming man, and Transubstantiation is the mystery of the crucified and risen Christ giving himself to us as food. It is therefore proper for our Advent preparation to be Eucharistic in nature.

At every Mass, the Lord provides “a feast of rich food and choice wines, / juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.” But how many of us make an effort to share in this sumptuous and abundant banquet? If we know what the Lord is offering us, we will be more eager to come to him in the Mass than the sick were to climb up the mountain in Galilee! In addition to the reception of the Eucharist at Mass, we can also encounter the presence of the Lord in Eucharistic adoration. This is another concrete way to respond to God’s desire to feed our hunger. In the tabernacle and in the monstrance, Jesus eagerly waits for us to come visit him. He becomes flesh to heal us; he becomes bread to feed us. He wants us to partake of the banquet of love that he has prepared for us. Our joy is to be able to respond with the psalmist: “I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.”

Do I recognize my own spiritual hunger and bring it honestly before the Lord in prayer? In what ways can I offer the little I have to Jesus, trusting that he can multiply it for others? To satisfy my hunger for God, how can I intensify my prayer life during Advent?

Mary, teach me to hunger for your Son and to trust that he will fill me with his love and mercy.

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 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.

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



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:

Today’s Gospel alerts us that our Advent preparation must be more than simply words. Saying, “Lord, Lord,” is insufficient, and listening to the Lord’s words without acting on them is insufficient. We prepare well for Christmas when we listen to him and put his words into practice. Jesus says that those who choose to act on his words are like a wise man who builds his house on rock. Solid rock is the most secure foundation for a house. This image shows us the sound, practical judgment of someone who listens and does what he hears.

If we want more insight into exactly what it means to be wise and to build one’s house on rock, we can find good clues in today’s first reading. Those who put their trust in the Lord are described here as “a strong city,” “a nation that is just,” “one that keeps faith,” “a nation of firm purpose.” When we hear the word of the Lord and act on it, we can

be just, faithful, and strong because our life is built on a firm basis. We grow in courage and strength of character, speaking only the truth and giving the Lord who is the Truth what is due to him. With the Lord's help we can remain firm in our resolve to do whatever he tells us to do. And we can weather every trial – the rain of suffering, the flood of persecution, and the winds of temptation and deception.

On the other hand, Jesus says, those who choose not to act on his words are “like a fool who built his house on sand.” Why would anyone who hears the life-giving words of the Lord choose not to act on them? What might tempt us to give up the Lord's words? Today's Psalm mentions one of the bad alternatives to following the Lord: “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 build our life on sand whenever we put more trust in men (“princes”) than in the Lord. We are foolish when we choose creatures instead of the Creator, when we seek human approval more than divine mercy, earthly glory more than heavenly glory.

Earthly treasures do not last. They fade away and disappear, especially in times of distress – which is just when we often feel that we need them the most. As the first reading further expounds, worldly power and glory cannot endure forever before God: “the lofty city he brings down; / He tumbles it to the ground, / levels it with the dust.” So to seek our security in these passing things is truly foolish, like building a house on sand – or even like building a house on quicksand.

As we approach Christmas, our December calendar may fill up with celebrations and get-togethers that will involve a lot of eating, drinking, and merrymaking. We enjoy giving and receiving gifts from loved ones. Good as these are, they are not solid rock; they are not permanent. And they are not the reason for the Season. Advent directs our hearts not merely to things that we have here and now but to the One who is coming. It is a time to “give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, / for his mercy endures forever,” as the psalmist says.

Why should we prepare for the coming of the Lord? Because the Lord himself “is an eternal Rock.” All who are wise build their lives on him, living according to his words. No rain, floods, or strong winds can topple them because these trials cannot move the Rock of our salvation.

He is Emmanuel, God with us. May our Advent preparation put flesh on today's Gospel Acclamation: "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call him while he is near."

What parts of my life are built on sand — things that shift, fade, or fail me in difficult times? Am I acting on the Word of God, or merely hearing it without true response? How can I better build my Advent preparations on Christ, the Rock, rather than on worldly distractions?

Mary, guide me to ponder the daily word and allow the Lord to form my heart.

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



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:

One of the rituals associated with Advent is the lighting of the candles on the Advent wreath. As more candles get lit week by week, they signify that we are getting closer to the celebration of Christmas and the arrival of Jesus, the Light of the World. It is fitting, then, that today’s liturgical readings build on the themes of darkness and light, blindness and sight. Advent is something like early morning. As dawn breaks, before the sun has risen, nature starts to come alive, already sensing the coming of the light. Roosters crow, birds chirp, and people start to wake up. We welcome the coming of a new day; we welcome the light of the sun.

This is what our Advent preparation ought to be like. It is a time to start waking up from our spiritual slumber, to start singing songs of praise like the birds, and to start proclaiming like the roosters the coming

of Christ, whose light will appear on Christmas Day. For on Christmas we will see him, the Word made flesh, “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father,” as we say in the Nicene creed.

This “Light from Light” was prophetically foreseen during the time of Isaiah. The section of the Book of Isaiah from which today’s reading comes is believed to have been written when the Northern Kingdom had already fallen to the Assyrians, and Judah and Jerusalem would soon be plunged into war. What was once a proud nation under King David is now divided, conquered, and in turmoil. With this dark scenario as the historical backdrop of his writings, the prophet finds hope in God’s deliverance. He has a prophetic vision of a future when neither military nor political powers will dominate Israel. Rather the Lord himself will reign supreme in a kingdom of justice and might. Isaiah announces an era of liberation from limitations of deafness and blindness, a time of transformation from barrenness to abundance, a time of redemption.

Our current situation may be similarly bleak. Despite our Christmas decorations and all the promise a new year holds, we can still find ourselves stuck in the same old problematic and messy situations that we have suffered so often in the past. Thus today, as part of our Advent preparation, God is speaking to us through the words of Isaiah, calling us to listen more intently and ponder more deeply the promise of a coming era of the Lord’s triumph in our lives.

Zeroing in on this hope, we turn to the words of today’s Psalm, which speaks of the Lord himself as our light and our refuge. “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?” What or whom do we fear today? Our current and future suffering? Our messy lives? Our unsolvable problems? Our wicked enemies? It is precisely because we face present darkness that we find ourselves drawn to the light of the Lord. We seek to dwell in the house of the Lord, to gaze on his loveliness and contemplate his temple. Because we place our hope in the Lord, we can persevere and “wait for the LORD with courage.” This courage or fortitude is the virtue that “ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life” (CCC 1808).

The two blind men in today's Gospel are examples of hope and courage. Despite the darkness of their physical blindness, they persevere in prayer and in following Jesus. They sense that the prophecy of Isaiah is nearing its fulfillment, that a Messiah from the line of David has come, and that "out of gloom and darkness, / the eyes of the blind shall see." The two men believe that the word of God is addressed, not only to the whole nation, but personally to them as well. Though they are blind, they can see in faith that the Messiah has arrived in the person of Jesus. So they shout out to him, "Son of David, have pity on us!" When Jesus tests their faith, "Do you believe that I can do this?", they respond with a strong, "Yes, Lord!" Because of their deep faith that he is the Lord, they believe that he can heal them. Because their hearts are open to the light of faith, their eyes are also enlightened.

This Advent Season is a time for us to imitate these two men. Let us persevere in hope and courage through the hardships that we face today, and let us open our hearts more and more, making space for the coming of the Light of Christ. With confidence we proclaim: "Behold, our Lord shall come with power; he will enlighten the eyes of his servants" (Gospel Acclamation).

When my faith and hope are weak, how do I cry out to the Lord to have pity on me? How does the hope and courage of the two blind men increase my weak faith? When have my heart and eyes been closed to the healing power of Jesus?

Mary, guide me through the darkness and lead me ever closer to your Son, the Light of the world.

Notes

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



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:

We saw on Wednesday that Jesus’ heart was moved with pity at the sight of a hungry crowd. As we come to the end of this first week of Advent, the Church once again directs our attention to the heart of our Lord, which is moved with pity for us. A good way to prepare for

our year-long liturgical journey is to reflect on the richness and the compassion of this divine heart. From Jesus' heart we receive abundant provisions for the journey that we have begun.

As today's Gospel narrates, Jesus was going around everywhere, "proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom." He was also revealing the presence of the Kingdom through the various cures he was performing. Yet there was even more to his ministry than clear teaching and healing. As we look into his heart, we see another aspect of the coming of the Kingdom: it is the Kingdom of God's Mercy. This mercy is what stirred in Jesus' heart at the sight of the many people who were "troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd."

When God introduced himself to Moses in the Book of Exodus, he revealed the same divine mercy: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering" (Ex 3:7). Upon seeing the bitter hardships of the Israelites, God sent Moses to liberate them from the Egyptians. Jesus does the same: seeing the afflictions of the crowd, he too expresses the divine desire to send aid. He exhorts his disciples to "ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

Let us ponder more deeply this divine pattern of being moved with pity that results in sending. Today's first reading reveals many aspects of God's being moved with pity for his people. We can apply these prophetic words to our own personal lives. The Lord is gracious to us when we cry out, and as soon as he hears us, he answers. He provides for us, giving us the bread we need and the water for which we thirst. The Lord himself is our Teacher; he gives us clear direction when we are lost. He binds up our wounds and heals our bruises. His vision for us is that we grow and flourish to our full potential. In all these ways, God reveals that our pitiful situation moves his heart. He is a Shepherd who is present to his sheep, caring for us, whatever we are going through.

The second part of the Gospel takes us from the narration of Jesus' heart being moved with pity to his summoning and commissioning of the Twelve. Here he acts on the prayer that he has just invited the disciples to offer. First he tells them to ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers, and then he sends them out. There is a connection,

then, between prayer and mission, between praying for vocations and discovering that we ourselves are part of God's response to our prayer. He sends those who pray; he sends us.

The relationship between prayer and mission is also revealed in today's Psalm. The Psalm begins with the prayer: "Praise the LORD, for he is good; / sing praise to our God, for he is gracious. . . ." Then it speaks of mission: the Lord's work of rebuilding Jerusalem and gathering "the dispersed of Israel." And how does the connection between our prayer to God and our being involved in his mission unfold? The refrain gives us the key: "Blessed are all who wait for the Lord." Waiting, an Advent theme we have been pondering throughout this week, is making space in our hearts for the Lord. Waiting in prayer, we tune in to the heart of Jesus that is moved with pity. As we are drawn to his heart, we too share in his deep concern for others. In prayer, we also discern how he sends us to show his mercy to others. Waiting for the Lord is the attitude of a faithful servant, always attentive to the concerns of his or her master, ready to do his every bidding.

How have I experienced the compassionate heart of Jesus in my own moments of being "troubled and abandoned"? When has my heart been moved with pity and compassion for those who do not yet know the mercy of God? How often do I pray to the Lord to send out laborers for his harvest?

***Mary, make me more sensitive to the needs of others.
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.
