Pondering the Word...

The Anawim Way

Daily Liturgical Meditations

Advent and Christmas Season

November 29, 2026 to January 9, 2027
Cycle B - Year 1

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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 represent 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.

Excerpt from an Endorsement Letter of Bp. Jesse Mercado, DD
Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese 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 29, 2026, 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 B/1.

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

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

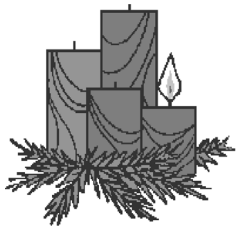
John is the great herald who proclaims that the coming of the Messiah is near. He cries out for repentance of our sins to "make ready the way of the Lord" (Mk 1:3). He teaches us that the way to "make ready" is through humility, acknowledging God as God and ourselves as his creatures. When John was thought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

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

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

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

First Week of Advent



…O LORD, you are our father;
we are the clay and you the potter:
we are all the work of your hands.
Isaiah 64:7

Theme for the Week

Advent reminds us that the Lord Jesus, the source of our hope and joy, has come and that he will come again. Let our whole Advent season be a preparation to make us good "clay": ready to be shaped into his image and likeness. With this disposition, let us open our hearts to joyfully welcome him in his Second Coming and his coming at every moment into our lives.

Advent is a Time to Purify Our Hearts by Prayer and Love for the Coming of Jesus

A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

Today, first Sunday of Advent, in the brief Gospel the liturgy offers us (cf. *Mk* 13:33-37), Jesus addresses a simple and direct exhortation to us, three times: "Watch" (v. 33, 35, 37).

Thus, the theme is *vigilance*. How should we understand it? Sometimes we think of this virtue as an attitude motivated by fear of impending doom, as if a meteorite were about to plunge from the sky and threaten to overwhelm us, if we were not to get out of the way in time. But this is certainly not what Christian vigilance is all about!

Jesus illustrates it with a parable, speaking about a master who will return, and about his servants who await him (cf. v. 34). The servant in the Bible is the "trusted person" of the master, with whom there is often a relationship of collaboration and affection. Let us think, for example, that Moses is defined as the servant of God (cf. *Nm* 12:7), and that even Mary says of herself, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (*Lk* 1:38). The vigilance of servants is thus not one of fear but of longing, of waiting to go forth to meet their Lord who is coming. They remain in readiness for his return because they care for him, because they have in mind that when he returns, they will make him find a welcoming and orderly home; they are happy to see him, to the point that they look forward to his return as a feast for the whole great family of which they are a part.

It is with this expectation filled with affection that we also want to prepare ourselves to welcome Jesus: at Christmas, which we will celebrate in a few weeks; at the end of time, when he will return in glory; every day, as he comes to meet us in the Eucharist, in his Word, in our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need.

So, in a special way during these weeks, let us prepare the house of the heart with care, so that it is orderly and hospitable. In fact, keeping watch means keeping the heart ready. It is the attitude of the sentinel, who in the night is not tempted by weariness, does not fall asleep, but remains awake awaiting the coming light. The Lord is our light and it is good to dispose the heart to welcome him with prayer and to host him

with charity, the two preparations that, so to speak, make him comfortable. In this regard, the story goes that Saint Martin of Tours, a man of prayer, after giving half of his cloak to a poor man, dreamed of Jesus clad in that very part of the cloak he had given. Here is a good program for Advent: to encounter Jesus who comes in every brother and sister who needs us and to share with them what we can: listening, time, concrete assistance.

Dear friends, it will be good for us today to ask ourselves how we can prepare a welcoming heart for the Lord. We can do so by approaching his forgiveness, his Word, his Table, finding space for prayer, welcoming him in those in need. Let us cultivate his expectation without letting ourselves be distracted by so many pointless things, and without complaining all the time, but keeping our hearts alert, that is, eager for him, awake and ready, impatient to meet him.

May the Virgin Mary, woman of expectation, help us to receive her coming Son.

Pope Francis, Angelus Message, December 3, 2023
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First Reading: Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

You, LORD, are our father,
our redeemer you are named forever.
Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways,
and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes of your heritage.
Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
with the mountains quaking before you,
while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for,
such as they had not heard of from of old.
No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you
doing such deeds for those who wait for him.
Would that you might meet us doing right,
that we were mindful of you in our ways!
Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful;
all of us have become like unclean people,
all our good deeds are like polluted rags;
we have all withered like leaves,
and our guilt carries us away like the wind.
There is none who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to cling to you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us up to our guilt.
Yet, O LORD, you are our father;
we are the clay and you the potter:
we are all the work of your hands.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Rouse your power,
and come to save us.

R. Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted,
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.
R. Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face and we shall be saved.
May your help be with the man of your right hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.
Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.
R. Lord, make us turn to you;
let us see your face and we shall be saved.



Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Brothers and sisters: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 85:8

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



Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"



Meditation:

A blessed new liturgical year to all! As we begin this season of Advent, our thoughts naturally turn to the reality of unexpected crises. In a world prone to sudden disturbances, we are left with a quiet realization: a crisis or a sudden change is not a question of if, but when.

The experts in disaster management tell us that readiness requires practical steps, like occasional earthquake drills in our schools and offices. Today, the first Sunday of Advent, marks the beginning of the Church's annual spiritual earthquake drill. It is a time dedicated to preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord, making sure our foundations are secure before the shaking starts.

If we look at our calendar for 2027, we notice that this year's Advent journey offers us a full preparation period of exactly twenty-seven days. While this gives us a bit more breathing room than in shorter years, the temptation to procrastinate remains strong. It takes very little time to manage the commercial rush, hang decorations, or schedule family gatherings. But we must ask ourselves a deeper question: how ready are we for Christ to come again? To guide our readiness during these twenty-seven days, the readings invite us to ponder three simple, practical steps: prayer, repentance, and doing our work.

The first step in our spiritual readiness is *prayer*. Talking and listening to God is essential if we are to keep our hearts awake. We cannot maintain spiritual vigilance on our own strength; we must remain in constant communication with the Master of the house.

Our Advent longing for God's presence is beautifully captured in today's Psalm. We plead with the Lord to look upon us: "Let us see your face and we shall be saved" (Ps 80:4). Gathering for Mass on this first Sunday of Advent is a beautiful start to our journey. However, we are invited to let this be just the beginning of our daily dialogue with God over the coming weeks, keeping the eyes of our hearts fixed on him.

The second step is *repentance*, which means turning away from sin. It is sin that ultimately leaves us the most exposed and unprepared for the Lord's coming, rendering our hearts heavy and distracted when sudden trials arrive.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah offers a beautiful prayer that acknowledges our unreadiness due to our failings: "Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind" (Is 64:4-5).

We must honestly admit that we cannot erase our sins by our own efforts. We need the power of God's mercy to restore us. Isaiah reminds us of our deep dependence on God by using the image of creation: "Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands" (Is 64:7). A very practical way to live out this repentance during Advent is to make a good confession, placing our fragile, wounded lives back into the hands of the Divine Potter to be remade.

The third and final point to ponder is *doing our work* while we wait. In the Gospel, Jesus describes us as servants in charge, each with his own work to do while the master is away (cf. Mk 13:34).

What is the work that keeps us ready? Most of our spiritual work consists of caring for one another through the love of neighbor. True readiness is not about isolated self-preservation or fearfully packing a spiritual survival kit just for ourselves. Rather, the most effective way to take care of our own souls is to take care of others. When we serve those who are in need, we are serving the Lord himself. If we reach the end of a day, or the end of this Advent season, and have not made a gift of ourselves in love to anyone else, then we are not truly ready.

As we begin this new liturgical year, Jesus speaks to us with urgency: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come" (Mk 13:33).

Waiting for a physical earthquake brings anxiety because it ends in disaster, but waiting for the Lord is entirely different. The coming of Jesus Christ is a joyful event that we await in hope. Advent is not a time for doom and gloom, but a period of devout and expectant delight. Let us use this opportunity to remain watchful and alert through a commitment to daily prayer, the grace of repentance, and active service to one another.

How will I prepare the foundations of my spiritual life this Advent for any "earthquakes" that may occur in my life? How often am I in communication with the Master of my house? When will I go to confession placing my wounded life back into the hands of the Divine Potter to be remade?

Mary, guide me during this Advent to remain watchful and alert to the voice of the Lord.

Notes



First Reading: Romans 10:9-18

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

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

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



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11
The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.
or ***Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***
The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.
R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.
or ***Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***
The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
The command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye.
R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.
or ***Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
The ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.
R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.
or ***Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***

They are more precious than gold,
than a heap of purest gold;
Sweeter also than syrup
or honey from the comb.
R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.
or ***Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.***

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 4:19
Alleluia, alleluia. Come after me, says the Lord, and I will make you fishers of men. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Matthew 4:18-22
As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.



Meditation:
As we began the holy season of Advent yesterday, the liturgy drew our attention to the promise of God and the virtue of hope. Today, on this first Monday of our Advent journey, we turn to a model of that hopeful anticipation, St. Andrew the Apostle.

Andrew and his brother Simon were ordinary fishermen, laboring daily on the Sea of Galilee. Like most of their countrymen oppressed under Roman rule, they lived with a deep longing for the promised Messiah. Andrew surely shared this hope, yet he likely assumed the Savior would appear in some grand, majestic way in Jerusalem, the center of power. Instead, it was in the middle of his everyday routine, the routine of casting and mending nets, that Jesus Christ met him. The Messiah chose the periphery over the palace, meeting these ordinary men exactly where they were.

Andrew discovered the fulfillment of his deepest hopes right in the midst of his daily drudgery. As a model for us at the beginning of this liturgical year, he demonstrates that we too can expect to encounter Christ in our ordinary routines. God is entirely faithful to his promises,

but his arrival often comes without fanfare, requiring of us a quiet readiness to respond when he calls.

How does this hope for an encounter with Christ become a reality in our lives? We cannot manipulate or schedule his coming, for he is always the one who approaches us first. Our part is simply to respond with unhesitating faith. The word of God both prepares us for this arrival and provides the venue for the encounter.

In the first reading, St. Paul reminds us of the absolute necessity of this inward response, quoting the prophet Isaiah: "No one who believes in him will be put to shame" (Rom 10:11). He reinforces this promise by quoting the prophet Joel: "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (cf. Rom 10:13). God's promise is steadfast, but it waits for our assent.

When Andrew heard the voice of Jesus saying, "Come after me," we do not know the full extent of what he understood, but the Gospel reveals that he believed in his heart. He and Simon immediately put this belief into action: "At once they left their nets and followed him" (Mt 4:20). By faith, Andrew overcame the natural fear of abandoning his livelihood and risking absolute insecurity. He shows us that an unwavering trust in God's fidelity can cast out all our hesitations and anxieties about the future.

The formation of this first-called Apostle began by simply staying with Jesus, listening to His message, and witnessing his deeds of mercy. He learned intimately that the words of the Lord are spirit and life. He took to heart the cost of discipleship, realizing that to follow the Master means to deny oneself and take up a cross. Andrew lived this out sequentially, first leaving his boats, then living as an itinerant preacher, and finally testifying to the Gospel to the very ends of the earth. The faith we inherit today rests upon this very foundation of apostolic labor.

At the end of his life, Andrew's conformity to Christ became total when he was stretched upon an X-shaped cross. He viewed himself as unworthy to die in the exact manner of his Lord, choosing instead this distinct instrument of execution.

As we prepare our hearts during this Advent, St. Andrew encourages us to humbly pattern our lives after the Master, leaving

behind what is old to embrace what is new. Our own daily crosses and self-denials can become an X-form for us—a true gateway out of our former, sinful ways. We can confidently nail our past to the Cross because we trust in the saving power of Jesus. He who called Andrew by the lakeside is the same faithful God who calls us today, molding us step by step into the image of his Son.

How often have I encountered Christ in my daily ordinary routines of life? How does my faithful listening to the word of God prepare me for these encounters? When has my unwavering trust in God's fidelity cast out my anxieties about the future?

Mary, inspire me to humbly pattern my life after St. Andrew and all the Apostles.

St. Andrew, pray for us.

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

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.
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.
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.
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:
As we continue to ponder the virtue of hope, which was introduced on the first Sunday of Advent, our readings today deepen this reflection and lead us to one key Person of Hope – the Holy Spirit.

In today's first reading, Isaiah prophesies about the coming Messiah, the shoot that will "sprout from the stump of Jesse" amidst the turmoil that the Kingdom of Judah is facing under King Ahaz. One clear sign of the Messiah will be the presence of the Spirit of the LORD resting upon him. He will be filled with gifts of the Spirit. The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit that we know from our catechism are based on this passage: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude (Strength), Knowledge, Fear of the Lord, and Piety (Delight in the Lord) (cf. *CCC* 1831). To receive the seven Gifts means to receive the fullness of grace from God. And this fullness of grace results in peace – symbolized by the wolf as a guest of the lamb, the leopard lying down with the kid, the calf and young lion browsing together, and the baby playing by the cobra's den. Amidst all the turmoil that we face in our lives, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the abundance of his Gifts are solid reasons for hope. The Holy Spirit assures us that the coming of the Messiah into our lives will give us lasting peace.

One of the fears that disturbs our peace is the prospect of a day of judgment at the end of time. How are we to have hope in the face of an inevitable terrible upheaval? Today's Responsorial Psalm assures us that when Judgment Day comes, "justice shall flourish" and "fullness of peace forever." The Messiah is a just judge who "shall have pity on the lowly and the poor." He comes to save, not to condemn.

To allay any lingering fears about the coming judgment, we can also recall that in the Holy Spirit, we have an Advocate (cf. Jn 14:16). If we strive to conform our lives to Jesus Christ our Messiah, the Holy Spirit will defend us. The opposite is also true though. If we live our lives totally opposed to Christ, the Holy Spirit can stand as our cross-examiner. He who knows the depths even of God can truly scrutinize our hearts (cf. 1 Cor 2:10-11). The Spirit "enlightens the eyes of his servants," as we learn from today's Gospel Acclamation. His power is not reserved to some future day when we will need him but is already present now, helping us through the turmoil that we face. He enlightens

the eyes of our hearts so that we can identify ways that we are living opposed to Christ and can take steps to change and be transformed.

Today's Gospel speaks of the wisdom of the childlike, which we can associate with the virtue of humility. Through humility, we are able to understand the ways of the Holy Spirit. The passage opens with a beautiful expression: "Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." Here we see the unified action of the Son and the Spirit, whom St. Irenaeus referred to as "the two hands of the Father." The Redeemer and the Sanctifier work together to lead us into eternal life. Embraced by such loving and powerful "Hands" who bring peace, our hope is realized.

The words of St. Paul to the Romans offer us a good summation of today's reflection on hope, the Holy Spirit and our Advent journey: "…the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what the intention of the Spirit is, because the Spirit intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will" (Rm 8:26-27). With the Father as our Potter, we are being fashioned by the power of the Holy Spirit into the mold that is Jesus Christ.

How often do I call upon the Holy Spirit in the midst of all the turmoil that I face daily? In what ways can I practice childlike humility to cultivate Christ's peace amid my current life turmoil? When have I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit transforming me into the likeness of Christ?

Mary, nurture me daily to be more humble and simple.



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:
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:
With the arrival of December, our social calendars start to get filled up. We start to plan our holiday gatherings, vacations, Christmas parties, and family reunions. 'Christmas is in the air,' as we say. There is an overall feeling of joviality and abundance – both of which are reflected in today's readings.

Isaiah prophesies that "the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines." As if to make sure that we get the message, he repeats and amplifies it: "juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines." In the Psalm, we honor the Lord for leading us to verdant pastures and restful waters. In that place of rest, he spreads the

table before us and anoints our head with oil. The Lord provides abundantly and serves attentively. In the Gospel, the whole large crowd "ate and were satisfied," and there were seven baskets full of leftovers. These passages assure us that the Lord gives in overflowing abundance – which is a good reason for hope, an Advent theme that we have been reflecting on since Sunday.

But to make our Advent preparation more meaningful, it would be worth pondering the circumstances behind the abundance that the readings profusely proclaim. In the first reading, the circumstance is the Lord's promise to remove the burden of sin from his people. He will destroy the "veil" of suffering and the "web" of death. For this promise to be fulfilled in us, we must heed the call to contrition. To receive the abundance that the Lord has promised us, we need to be humble and contrite. Translated into action, this means receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is a very good Advent practice to go to Confession as a means of preparing for the celebration of the coming of the Lord. Through the priest's absolution, the Lord wipes away tears from our contrite faces so that we can behold with joy our God to whom we looked to save us.

In the Psalm, the key circumstance is our being led by the Good Shepherd. This means we must follow him if we want to live in the house of the Lord all the days of our life. We have begun a new liturgical year. Advent is a good time to let go of that favorite sin that keeps on recurring. It is a good time to make more space for God and let him take the reins in running our lives. Let us follow him more closely than ever, especially in mercy and charity. Our Advent should be full of almsgiving and corporal acts of mercy.

In the Gospel, the circumstance in which God's abundance is revealed is the hunger of the crowd. We can ponder this hunger in two ways. One is physical hunger, representing the dire need of our brothers and sisters. Our own practices of self-denial free us and our resources to serve the hungry; we entrust our seven loaves and few fish into the hands of the Lord, and he returns them to us to give to the hungry. While fasting is more commonly thought of in connection to Lent, Advent too is a time to fast in preparation for the feast. The liturgical colors of Advent and Lent are the same, the same of the stole used by priests while hearing confessions. The violet liturgical color connotes

penitence. The celebration of Advent, therefore, must also be penitential. The other way of looking at hunger is spiritual hunger, our deep longing for the Lord. This hunger can only be satisfied by God himself. Advent then calls us to an intensified prayer life, and to the repeated plea, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Today's Gospel Acclamation proclaims that the Lord is coming to save his people. Our Advent will be truly blessed if we are prepared to meet him – if we leave sin behind, follow the Lord with humility and expectant hope, and channel our hunger into prayer and service. Then we can look forward to a Christmas rich with spiritual abundance and joy.

Whom have I neglected that I must actively serve through a corporal act of mercy this week? What specific recurring sin must I bring to Confession today? What spiritual practices will I undertake this Advent to intensify my prayer life?

Mary, guide my contrite heart to empty itself and follow your Son this Advent.

Notes

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



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 tackles the Advent themes of hope and preparation head on. The focus of our hope is entry into the Kingdom of Heaven, and only those who prepare by doing the will of the Father are ready to enter. Jesus challenges us to go beyond living as nominal Christians. Simply repeating, "Lord, Lord," or relying on any other external religious practice is insufficient. We must do the will of our Father in Heaven.

To help us ponder this more deeply, Jesus uses the example of building a house. Real-life house building takes time, effort and resources; one must commit to the whole process from initial planning to completion. Our preparation for entering the Kingdom of Heaven is similar. Just as a house is built systematically, one stone after another, we can consider our daily Advent preparations as the step-by-step process in the whole "house building project" of entering the Kingdom. But the key to a successful project, one that will survive the test of time,

is to build on a rock foundation. For us, building on rock involves listening to the word of God and acting on it.

The building of our spiritual life requires *humility*. We can see this in the first reading. Echoing the house theme of the Gospel, the prophet Isaiah refers to the Lord as the "eternal Rock." Immediately after this, Isaiah prophesies about a reversal of fortune – those in high places are humbled and the lofty city is brought down to be trampled underfoot by the needy and the poor. The proud are built on the sandy foundation of their own strength, while the humble put their trust in the Lord.

We will find humility more appealing if we reflect on the humility of Jesus himself. In our Advent preparation, we can recall and deeply ponder the hymn in St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians where he says that Christ, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance" (Phil 2:6-7). The Lord's decision to empty himself of glory and take on our human nature is what we celebrate in the Christmas season. As we prepare to welcome him, we do well to follow his example of humility.

Another aspect of our Advent preparation is a reconsideration of what we truly value in life. Today's Psalm asserts that "it is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man" or in princes. Is our life centered on seeking human affirmation and affection more than on the will of the Father? Do our holiday celebrations focus too much on material things and passing pleasures? Do we rely on human ingenuity over God's providence? Advent calls us to prepare, not only for an event, but for the arrival of a Person who seeks to be with us, the *Emmanuel*. Our values ought to more and more reflect our love for him.

In addition to humility and the reordering of our values, we can find a third point to ponder in today's Gospel Acclamation: "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call him while he is near." There is a sense of urgency in this season of preparation. Last Sunday, we reflected on watchfulness and time. We human beings think of time as unfolding progressively through history; so for us, Advent is about the past event when Christ was born, the present moment when the Kingdom has come, and the future day when the Lord will come again to reign in

glory. But God's time, *kairos*, is ever present and always opportune. He urges us to make the most out of the time that we have *now*. We must not waste time in idleness, or in the pursuit of worldly, temporal treasures. Our use of time should be shaped more and more by our call to service in the Kingdom of Heaven. During this Advent season, we pray fervently to the Lord, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart" (Ps 90:12).

Today we can look to St. Francis Xavier as a model for this sort of spiritual wisdom. He knew how to number his days aright. With extraordinary zeal for sharing the Gospel with non-believers, he served as a missionary to the most distant nations. Indeed, "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

What religious habits am I hiding behind to avoid making the real changes God wants? How am I focusing too much on material things during Advent and not on the preparation of the birth of Jesus? What specific task am I delaying that God is urgently calling me to do now?

Mary, help me build my life on the eternal Rock.
St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

Francis Xavier was born in the Basque region of Spain on April 7, 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. Francis first arrived in Goa, India around 1542 and then Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan, baptizing more than 30,000 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 on December 3, 1552 off the coast of China, and was canonized with St. Ignatius Loyola on March 12,1622 by Pope Gregory XV. He is the patron of all foreign missionaries.

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



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:
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:
Throughout this first week of Advent, we have been the virtue of hope. What exactly is hope? The *Catechism* defines it as the "confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God" (*CCC* 2090).

Today's first reading gives us clear and concrete images of the divine blessings that we can confidently expect from God: a barren land turned into an orchard and then a forest; the deaf hearing and the blind seeing; the lowly and the poor rejoicing; and an end to tyranny, arrogance and evil. When this prophecy was written, Israel had collapsed, and Judah was on the threshold of war. It was a time of turbulence, tribulation and uncertainty – more a setting for despair than for hope. But it was precisely into these dire circumstances that the message of hope was planted. We learn from this that hope, which looks

forward to future blessings, must be exercised now, in the face of present hardships. When we are sick or burdened, when we feel overwhelmed or crushed to the ground, when we feel trapped in our sinful lifestyle and all our attempts to break free have failed – in all these bleak circumstances, the virtue of hope makes us confidently expect divine blessings.

One divine blessing that we hope for is what we proclaim in today's Psalm: "The Lord is my light and my salvation." More than an expectation of quick practical solutions to all our difficulties, hope is confidence in God's presence with us through them all. He is walking with us as a saving light when we are in darkness. "The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?" Holding on to our belief that we "shall see the bounty of the LORD in the land of the living," that is, in Heaven, we persevere as we "wait for the LORD with courage." This Psalm also inspires us to hope for the beatific vision, which is to "gaze on the loveliness of the LORD and contemplate his temple."

Perhaps the two blind men in today's Gospel are not thinking of "the beatific vision of God," but they want to see! They are clearly examples of hope as they call out to Jesus with "confident expectation of divine blessing," pleading, "Son of David, have pity on us!" They teach us that hope is itself a kind of seeing; though their eyes are in darkness, they can see in faith that the Lord is near, and that he can grant them physical sight. In Christ's statement, "Let it be done for you according to your faith," we see the inter-connectedness of hope and faith. Faith is belief in the very person of the Lord, which makes it possible to have hope that he can do something great for us. With faith and hope, the two blind men "see" Christ, and he grants them a healing – confirming their faith and strengthening our hope.

Our saint for today is another witness to hope. St. John Damascene is best known for his fight against iconoclasm, the erroneous belief that the worship of God must be entirely "spiritual" and so we must rid ourselves of any images or physical representation of God. The iconoclasts took the teaching against idolatry to an extreme, to the point that they, in effect, denied the mystery of the Incarnation. In Christ, God gives us a physical image of himself; he is God with us, Emmanuel, the One whose arrival we are preparing for in Advent. Rejection of images weakens our hope. It weakens our confidence that we can behold the

blessing of God's beauty, even though imperfectly, in the present moment. St. John Damascene fought this error and championed the beauty and majesty of Christian art as an aid to our seeing by faith.

How am I experiencing hope in the face of present hardships? How will I actively seek Christ's presence in my darkest moment today? What specific blind spot must I bring to Jesus for healing now?

Mary, strengthen me daily to persevere in my faith in eternal life. 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 the Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1890. He is one of the greatest Fathers of the Eastern Church.

Notes



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:

Today's Psalm response reminds us of the spirit of the Advent season: "Blessed are all who wait for the Lord." We who wait for the Lord with hope anticipate the blessing of his arrival as we prepare the way. The hardships that are part of our preparation do not overcome the abiding spirit of joy; we are being blessed even as we await him.

Together with the whole Church we pray Psalm 147, a joyful hymn of praise to the Lord. The Psalm proclaims a series of reasons why it is

fitting that we praise him: he is good and gracious; he gathers his people who have been dispersed by persecution; he heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds; he sustains the lowly while the wicked he casts to the ground. We recognize that the Lord's goodness, like that of a good shepherd, is directed toward the benefit of his sheep, the people whom he loves. Yet he is more than a shepherd. His power extends to all of heaven and earth. He even knows the name of each star. So we sing: "Great is our LORD and mighty in power: to his wisdom there is no limit!"

The combination of tender care and great power is revealed in Jesus' ministry in towns and villages throughout Galilee. His heart is moved with pity for the suffering people, and he cures their every disease and illness. The crowds "were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd." This is a description of the human family when we are cut off from God. We wander about seeking happiness and security, only to meet an endless series of disappointments. Our wanderings leave us troubled, yet we keep seeking in hope, for to stop would surely lead us to despair. The Lord sees our need and comes to us. He did not create us to be lost sheep. He is moved with pity when he sees us wasting away in emotional and moral exhaustion. The Good Shepherd comes to save us and gather us into his Kingdom.

The great prophet Isaiah foresaw the day when the Messiah would come. In today's prophecy, Isaiah reveals how the Lord, our divine Teacher, will guide us. The Shepherd does not force the sheep to follow him. He does not impose his will on us. Instead, he provides us with the light, knowledge and strength we need in order to follow him. Isaiah tells us that this experience is like hearing a voice telling us, "This is the way; walk in it." When we are in danger of getting lost, straying from the path of goodness, the Lord's voice calls us back.

Normally we do not hear the Lord as an audible voice. He speaks to our hearts, not our ears. Our capacity to hear and respond to the voice of God is rooted in the *conscience*. When we listen to our conscience, we can hear God speaking. "It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of *interiority* is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination or introspection" (*CCC* 1779).

The Advent liturgy, then, is drawing us to our interior life – not to make us self-centered or narrow, but to make us more sensitive to the gentle, guiding voice of the Lord who points out the way in which we are to walk. When we listen to his voice and follow him, we are no longer lost, troubled, abandoned sheep. We are secure, joyful and grateful. And because the Lord has been so good to us, we can extend to others the Gospel of the Kingdom. Without cost we have received; without cost we are to give. As we draw near to the heart of the Lord, our own hearts become more like his and we are moved with pity for our fellow sheep who do not yet know the love of the Lord, our Shepherd and our Savior.

What are some of the joys I experience despite the hardships as I prepare for the coming of the Lord? Why is it important to be sensitive to the voice of the Lord in the depths of my conscience? Where am I wandering in search of happiness instead of resting in the Shepherd's care?

Mary, teach me to listen to the Lord as he speaks to my heart.

Notes