

Advent Week 1

Sunday December 2, 2018

The First Sunday of Advent

“The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land.

In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: ‘The LORD our justice.’” -Jeremiah 33:14-16

Today is Catholic New Year’s Day! The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical calendar and a great opportunity to reset your clock and your attention to the Lord. Oftentimes we seem to skip right over Advent and jump right to Christmas, as if we have already entered the Christmas season. When we do this, the beautiful opportunity to truly celebrate Advent is missed! Advent is meant to be a season of longing and preparation; awaiting the coming Messiah.

Over the course of these short reflections, many ways to “prepare the way” for the Lord to come into our hearts will be explored that we may get the most from this Advent Season. In today’s second reading, Paul beseeches us, “as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God and as you are conducting yourselves, you do so even more” (1 Thes 4:1).

Advent is a time to grow in our faith, to make more room in our lives for Jesus. As the Church reminds us, the three pillars of the spiritual life, which we will explore this Advent, are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (Cf. Tob 12:8; Mt 6:1-18.). Let us grow in humility through prayer, in discipline of mind and body through fasting, and in generosity through almsgiving that we may follow the example of Jesus and His Apostles to grow in love and holiness this Advent.

Monday December 3, 2018

Monday of the First Week of Advent

“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.’” -Matthew 8:8-10

In today’s Gospel, these words spoken by the centurion to Jesus sound very familiar to us. This is because we recite these words each time we attend Mass, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” The centurion provides us a great example, and one truly fitting to our journey in Advent.

Much like in our everyday lives, the centurion had a particular struggle, in his case it was a servant who was suffering at home much like when members of our families, our friends, or even ourselves are ill and suffering. The centurion, in both faith and humility, brings his need to Jesus, our Lord, who grants his petition because of his faith.

As we begin this Advent, let this serve as a reminder to us to truly pray – the first of the three pillars of our spiritual life as has been mentioned before. In prayer we truly trust that God not only hears us, but through our faith and humility in coming to Him, He answers us, He takes care of us! Let us follow the example of the centurion and remember what we say each day at Mass, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed” as we prepare our hearts to welcome in Jesus after this season of longing and anticipation.

Tuesday December 4, 2018

Tuesday of the First Week of Advent

“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.” -Isaiah 11:1-3

The first reading describes the coming Messiah, a shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse, as a man on whom the Spirit of the Lord rests. Six of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are mentioned here, which we rightly attribute to Jesus, who is Wisdom Incarnate.

Today is also the feast of St. John Damascene, who is the last of the Greek Fathers of the Church and who contributed such a wealth of great theology to the Church. A notable reflection of his relating to our Advent journey is: “The archangel Gabriel answered [Mary]: ‘the Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you’ (Luke 1:34-35). And now you ask how the bread became Christ's body and the wine and water Christ's blood. And I say to you: The Holy Spirit is present and does those things which surpass reason and thought” (On the Orthodox Faith 4.13).

To continue our “prayer” as mentioned before, we see that the Eucharist, which we receive at Mass, is this beautiful gift made possible by the Incarnation of our Lord. Jesus is the Bread of Life, and we receive Him truly Body, Blood, Soul, & Divinity in the Eucharist.

Let us remember that when Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, He was continually led to prayer and fasting. As we are filled with the Spirit, let us remember this great importance of fasting, especially during this Advent, so we may empty ourselves of earthly things to make room for the true Bread of Life, coming to us at Christmas. “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (cf. Matt 4:4), and this Word is the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ.

Wednesday December 5, 2018

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

“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.” -Matthew 15:32-39

As we continue this journey of Advent, let us remember the third pillar of the spiritual life, namely, almsgiving. We recall that prayer helps us to grow in humility, fasting helps us grow in discipline, and almsgiving helps us to grow in faith and trust in the Lord as well as detachment from material goods. This combats what is called the “threefold concupiscence” as John the Evangelist points out, “For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16).

Today’s Gospel reminds us that in difficult times, when it may be tough to trust that we will make it, God will provide for us. In this example, He provides food for the hungry, but this equally applies to whatever our temporal needs may be. In order to trust that God will truly provide for us, let us seek recourse to the gift of almsgiving, which indeed is truly a gift to us.

We are given the beautiful opportunity to grow in detachment from worldly things and allow God a larger place in our hearts and at the same time grow in trust by depending on Him. This Advent season, let us truly set in place legitimate actions to practice prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that we might grow in love and holiness and prepare our hearts for Christ this Christmas.

“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with first fruits of all your produce; Then will your barns be filled with plenty, with new wine your vats will overflow.” -Proverbs 3:9-10

Thursday December 6, 2018

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

"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." -Matthew 7:24-27

Today is the Feast of St. Nicholas! Good ole Saint Nick is the one whom Santa Claus is based upon. This is due to his care for the poor and the myths surrounding him saving three girls from prostitution, restoring three children to life, and saving three men from unjust imprisonment. Leave out your shoes and ask his intercession! St. Nicholas, pray for us!

The contemporary theologian Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange summed up the spiritual life very simply by saying, "The one thing necessary [for the interior life...], is to hear the Word of God and live by it." Think about that for a second—if you listen and truly hear God's Word and live by it, you will be doing all you need to in order to grow in holiness and become a Saint!

Since we have discussed prayer, fasting, and almsgiving so far this Advent, let us take some time to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, that we might hear God's Word and allow it to prepare our hearts to receive our Lord.

Friday December 7, 2018

Friday of the First Week of Advent

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." -Matthew 9:27-30

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of St. Ambrose of Milan. St. Ambrose was the Bishop whose preaching opened the eyes of St. Augustine. St. Ambrose truly accompanied St. Augustine on his journey to find the truth, and this journey resulted in such great fruit for the Church! Let us have our eyes opened through the truth of the Gospel of Jesus just as St. Augustine's were opened when, through the Church, he was instructed in the truth. Sts. Ambrose and Augustine, pray for us!

As we near the end of the first week of Advent, we call to mind the basic principles we are applying to this spiritual journey: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving along with a great attentiveness and receptivity to God's Word. Now that we are dedicated to giving time to God's Word each day, let us focus on trusting Him and believing in His Word, that He might say to us, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." So, just as the two blind men, our eyes might be opened.

Saturday December 8, 2018

Saturday of the First Week of Advent

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, 'Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.' But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end.'” -Luke 1:26-33

"No sin would touch her, so that she would be a fitting and worthy vessel of the Son of God. The Immaculate Conception does not refer to the virginal conception and the birth of Christ, but rather to Mary's being conceived without inheriting Original Sin." (United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 142-143).

What a beautiful way to end the first week of Advent: with the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary! We remember to honor Mary in a special way every Saturday, in a special way during Advent, and particularly on this Feast day. Since God saw it as fitting to come to us through the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, then it is most fitting for us to come to Him through her. It is also most fitting to allow Jesus into our lives through His and Our Blessed Mother.

As a great and simple way to live this out during this Advent, pick up the rosary, which is essentially Scripture on a string. 18 of the 20 mysteries are direct meditations on the life of Christ. While we meditate on these mysteries, we pray the words that come from Scripture itself (the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught us, and the Hail Mary coming from the angel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth during the Annunciation and Visitation).

Mary's soul magnifies the Lord! Picture yourself trying to go directly to Jesus, to see Him with your own eyes, now compare that to looking at Him through a magnifying glass! Our Lady will help us to truly know her Son.

O Blessed Lady, Immaculate Conception, pray for us that we might know and love your Son with tenderness and faith.

Advent Week 2

Sunday December 9, 2018

The Second Sunday of Advent

“The word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” -Luke 3:2-6

As we continue through Advent at the beginning of this second week, the Church moves the focus of the readings away from the second coming of Christ and now to the preparations for the first coming. “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” as John the Baptist cries out in the desert. These words should echo in our hearts as we prepare the way for the Word to echo in our hearts—that is to say, that we receive Jesus Christ, the Word of God into our hearts, in a special way, this Christmas.,

The readings continue with a joyful undertone; a disposition of gratitude and excitement! The Messiah is to be born! What greater excitement could there be? In midst of the excitement accompanied by the joy of family and friends, the hustle & bustle of gift buying, and communal meals, let us not forget to truly prepare the way. “What is the meaning of 'Prepare the way of the Lord'? It means: make ready for the reception of whatever Christ may wish to do.” (St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke*, 6). Remember that this is all about Jesus. It is likely you have heard the saying, “keep Christ in Christmas” and that is just as true here of our goal, to keep Christ in Advent.

A wonderful way to accomplish this lofty goal is to take the spiritual life seriously. There may be no greater time of the year to tackle this head one. Advent provides for us a unique opportunity for deepening our spiritual lives, for making sacrifices, for penance, for prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and true meditation and contemplation, but all done with excitement! We are so accustomed to approaching fasting and sacrifices with a sorrowful demeanor. This Advent, let us take the opportunity to pray and fast, to give to others, and to prepare the way of the Lord in our hearts with those big smiles on our face and charity in our hearts.

Monday December 10, 2018

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

“And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set him in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘As for you, your sins are forgiven.’” -Luke 5:18-20

It is no secret that the Church pews are just a little more packed on Christmas than most other Sundays of the year. Although this is unfortunate that those Christmas goers do not join us the other Sundays of the year, we rejoice in God for their presence with us for those couple days at the end of December. Reach out to these people, introduce yourselves to them, invite them to your Parish activities, and in what may seem odd to some of you, offer to pray with them! Ask them what they may be needing this holiday season and put your faith into action!

The early Christians were recognized for their joy and their love. This is not just a nice sentiment, but Christians were truly recognized by being different than others in the world. Imagine if you were so filled with joy, particularly the joy of the Gospel, that when people looked at you they remarked, “Wow, I want that!” As has been said, Advent is your opportunity to have that in your own life. Continue the joyfulness in your sacrificing, trust God that He will provide all you need. Even when you give alms, maybe give a little more than you normally would and trust that He will provide for you, because trust me, He will.

Now is your opportunity to exhibit that joy for others to see and to have faith in God. Take advantage of the holiday season and even of the fact that more people will be in Church. Reach out to a friend or neighbor, maybe a family member who hasn't been to Church in a while and invite them to join you and your family. That way Jesus will see your faith and be able to say to them and to you, “As for you, your sins are forgiven.”

Tuesday December 11, 2018

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.’” -Matthew 18:12-14

Today’s Gospel is a parable that we have heard many times, so many times that it may even go right over our head by how accustomed we are to hearing it. Think about this for a second: a man has one hundred sheep and one goes astray, he then leaves the other ninety-nine to go and find the one. We have heard this so many times that we take it for granted, but the reality is, a shepherd is not going to leave ninety-nine vulnerable sheep alone where they could be attacked by wolves to go and get one of them, he would send someone else to find the sheep or get someone else to watch the ninety-nine while he did.

Jesus’ disciples would have responded, “No way would he leave the ninety-nine!” Jesus is making a claim here that is supposed to be thought provoking. He is trying to show the radical love of God for us, that He loves us so much that all of His infinite love is given to each and every one of us individually as if we were the only one that mattered to Him. There is no lost cause, there is no one too far to be saved. As Christmas approaches this year, remember that if you were the only one in the world needing saving, God would have become man just for you.

Wednesday December 12, 2018

Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." -Luke 1:39-45

Blessed Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe! Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Patroness for all the Americas and of the unborn. She appeared to St. Juan Diego with child in her womb in the 16th century after a hostile time of human sacrifice by the Aztecs. As a result, in the 7 years following the apparitions, 8 million people converted to Catholicism in Mexico.

Mary is our mother, the one whom Christ comes to us through. Just as the Ark of the Covenant, in which dwelled God's presence along with the tablets of the ten commandments (representing the Law), pieces of manna from Heaven (the bread from heaven), and part of the staff of Aaron (representing the High Priesthood), Mary is the New Ark of the Covenant where God Incarnate dwelled. In Mary we find Jesus who is the Bread of Life, the new Law, and the new High Priest!

In the Davidic Kingdom, for example with David and Solomon who each had a number of wives, it was not a wife who was the queen, but the mother. Solomon's queen was his mother Bathsheba, who held the position known in Hebrew as the *Gebirah*, which means, "Great Lady." The *Gebirah* was the Queen-Mother. She was proof by lineage that the current king was the heir of the former king like with this example of Bathsheba being the wife of David. The *Gebirah* also held a special office in the kingdom—she was the principle intercessor for the people. Citizens of the kingdom would bring their needs to the Queen-Mother who would then present them to the king in a way more likely to be answered than if they had gone straight to the king.

Since Jesus is the new Davidic King, that makes Mary the new Queen-Mother, *Gebirah*, and principle intercessor for the people! Let us have recourse to Mary, who shows us the way to allow Jesus into our hearts, and allow her to lead us closer and closer to her divine Son, Jesus.

Thursday December 13, 2018

Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

“Jesus said to the crowds: ‘Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force. All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come. Whoever has ears ought to hear.’”
-Matthew 11:11-15

As we near the end of the second week of Advent you may be encountering the difficulties of maintaining your resolutions, prayers, sacrifices, devotions. But do not give up! Jesus reminds us in today’s Gospel of the difficulties and suffering in the Kingdom. Some teachings are hard, some times are difficult, and there will be times when it is not easy to hear the truth. Let us be encouraged and be those with ears to hear, sitting at the feet of Jesus to receive our nourishment and refreshment, hanging on His every word.

The Gospel reminds us of our littleness and what it means to be great in God’s eyes. “The least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Humility is our answer, humility is the hinge on which the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice rely on. Let us humbly rely on God’s strength, rather than our own, and receive all that is being offered to us by God. Let us not forget to meditate on those words on the sacred pages of Scripture, especially the accounts in the Gospels about the coming of the Messiah and the prophecies in the Old Testament which prepare the way! As we listen attentively to what God has to say, remember Jesus’ words to us, “Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

Friday December 14, 2018

Friday of the Second Week of Advent

“Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on his law day and night. He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers.” -Psalm 1 1-3

Today is the memorial of St. John of the Cross, the reformer of the Carmelite Order. St. John of the Cross is most well known for his work, *The Dark Night of the Soul*. The Dark Night of the Soul is actually not a book of its own, but it is part four of the book, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. The work details the active and passive purifications of the soul as it ascends upwards towards God. This is a beautiful thing; the truly holiness that can be achieved in this life by you and by me, not only for cloistered nuns and religious.

This would be a great spiritual read for Advent or any time you desire to kick-start your spiritual life. The basic thought of the work is that we have attachments to things, we have bad habits worldly things that come between us and God. Sometimes these things are sinful, sometimes they are vice, and sometimes they are just distractions from God. If we are able to detach ourselves from worldly things, there will be more room in our hearts for God. This is a great reminder to double-down on our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving! Really give things up so that in detaching from other things, we might only have an attachment to God.

Just as the reading in the Psalms says today, we will be blessed if we do not follow the counsel of the wicked, walk in the way of sinners, or sit in the company of the insolent. We ought to set our delights on the law of the Lord and meditate both day and night! If we do this we will be continually fed by God’s Word and by grace, we will bear good fruit, and prosper in all we do.

Saturday December 15, 2018

Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

“As they were coming down from the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus, ‘Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ He said in reply, ‘Elijah will indeed come and restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.” -Matthew 17:9A, 10-13

Sometimes God’s answers come in ways that we aren’t expecting. Like in today’s Gospel, the disciples did not recognize John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the prophecy in which Elijah would return to bringing restoration before the coming of the Messiah. Even many of the Jews did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and rejected Him. This serves as a reminder to us, that God’s ways are not our ways, God’s ways and thoughts compared to ours are higher than the heavens over the earth.

As we reach the end of the second week of Advent, let us detach ourselves even from our own wills, that we may cling to God’s will for our lives. He most certainly has your best interest in mind, and even greater! God wants you to be holy, and He gives the gift of being able to become holy. Know that at times, this will require suffering just as Jesus suffered. The suffering may be normal daily difficulties or even a beautiful participation in Christ’s suffering in a redemptive way. The road at times is not easy, but it is more worth it than anything in this world.

Although we make our way through the difficulties of this life, let us not forget the beauty of our redemption and the glory to be revealed. “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us” (Romans 8:18). We move forwards with hearts filled with hope and that constant joy of Christ’s love for us!

Advent Week 3

Sunday December 16, 2018

The Third Sunday of Advent

“Brothers and sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” -Philippians 4:4-7

The third Sunday in Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday. You will notice that the priest is wearing a rose-colored vestment and the rose-colored candle will be lit on the Advent wreath. This Sunday stands out as a reminder to “Rejoice!”

Christmas is right around the corner and at this point there is a good chance you are running around, scrambling to finish all of your last-minute tasks on your to-do list. There is the temptation to become anxious, stressed, and frustrated. Gaudete Sunday provides the opportunity to step back and rejoice in the Lord! Remember that the season of Advent is a joyful time of preparation for the coming of the Lord, a time in which the Church both prepares for the coming of Christ Incarnate at Christmas and the Second Coming of Jesus the Judge where we stand in hope of our redemption. The Catechism reminds of this for the season of Advent in paragraph 524:

When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Jesus reminds us many times to not fall into anxiety, or *merimna* in Greek. This is a word that He uses to describe the “cares of this world” or anxieties of this life. As a call back to the Gospel for the first Sunday of Advent, Jesus says that our hearts will become drowsy if we give into “the anxieties of daily life” and “that day [will] catch you by surprise like a trap.” Jesus mentions this same word, *merimna*, in a well-known parable, that of the sower and the seeds, in which the seed planted in the thorns is choked. The anxieties of the world are the thorns that choke the seed of the Gospel planted in our hearts.

Let us remember to rejoice this Gaudete Sunday as we continue our journey this Advent and not set our focus on the cares of this world, but on the joy found in the love of Jesus.

Monday December 17, 2018

Monday of the Third Week of Advent

“Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations.” -Matthew 1:17

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” -Luke 1:31-33

We tend to overlook the accounts of the genealogies in Scripture as boring and superfluous for our own spiritual lives, but there is truly a great significance to these. In Matthew’s account of the genealogy of Jesus, not only does he show that Christ is of the seed of Abraham, who was promised that through his seed all generations would be blessed and his descendants would be more than the stars in the sky (cf. Genesis 17). But also, Christ is shown to be a descendent of David, and therefore in the royal lineage of the Davidic Kingdom.

Jesus is prophesied to come and restore the Davidic Kingdom and sit on the throne forever. Therefore, there is a significance to Jesus as being the new David, the new and everlasting Davidic King. A few examples are that, the Davidic King had 12 chief officers just as Jesus chose 12 disciples, the Davidic Kingdom had the mother of the King as the Queen, just as Jesus has Mary for His Queen, etc.

The beauty of this is that God is re-establishing His covenant with man, but through Jesus it is incapable of failure. A covenant is not a contract, it is not an exchange of goods and services, but rather an exchange of persons. Instead of God saying to us, “this is mine, and that is yours” He is saying to us, “You are mine, and I am yours.” A covenant is technically, “an extension of kinship by an oath.” So essentially, God makes us His family in actuality, and the oath is done by Jesus’ love for the Father and sacrifice on the Cross, which is only made possible through the Incarnation which comes at Christmas.

Tuesday December 18, 2018

Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

*Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’*

*When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.” -
Matthew 1:20-24*

With the short fourth week of Advent this year, Christmas is a week from today! As we begin to make the final preparations with our families and loved ones, let us not forget to continue to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. We know that He will “save his people from their sins” which includes us today. Let this final week of the Advent season serve as a time to intensify your spiritual practices, meditate on which sins Jesus is saving you from in your personal life.

In growing in the spiritual life, there are two important things to give focus to. Each person has a weakest area and a strongest area. Your weak point is called your “predominant fault.” This is the root, in the deepest recesses of your soul, to your biggest struggles. Much of our time we spend trying to treat our symptoms without looking at the deep inner problem. The one who meditates and examines his or herself to identify their predominant fault will grow immensely in the spiritual life.

Conversely, each person also has an area that they are most receptive, or docile, to the working of grace in their life. This is an area that you will typically respond to the Lord’s inspirations more easily than others.

In this last week of Advent, let us try to determine our predominant fault and ask for the graces contrary to it, as well as finding out our area of greatest openness to grace. With these two combined, we may advance greatly in our spiritual lives to prepare for Christ to enter our hearts this Christmas.

Wednesday December 19, 2018

Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

“But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.’” -Luke 1:13-17

Today’s reading recounts of Elizabeth conceiving and bearing St. John the Baptist, who will “be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb.” The Biblical narrative describes the events leading up to the conception of Jesus, the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, and ultimately the Nativity of Our Lord on Christmas. One notable point that may be drawn from this is the mention of John the Baptist being filled with the Holy Spirit even in the womb. This happens in an interesting way if we continue through the first chapter of Luke, past the Annunciation, and to the Visitation, “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41).

John the Baptist leaps in the womb and is filled with the Holy Spirit by the sound of Mary’s greeting. What was so special about Mary’s greeting. Call to mind the words of Christ, “For from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). The Annunciation had just happened, where it is written that Mary pondered the words of the angel in her heart. She had taken this Word of God spoken to her, meditated upon it, allowed it to fill her heart while she received the Word Incarnate in her womb. As she continues to Elizabeth, this Word resonates with her and fills her heart, so what she speaks to Elizabeth comes from the fullness of her heart, which is God’s Word.

Imagine what would happen through you, through your words, through your greeting, when you meditate on God’s Word, on the Sacred Scriptures, apply them to your own life, pray with them, and speak it out. Let us follow Mary’s example in meditating on the Word of God.

Thursday December 20, 2018

Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

“Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’” -Luke 1:38

With only days remaining until Christmas, now is a good time to take a step back and reflect, to stop and take a breath, to calm our minds and our hearts. Let us look to Our Lady as the example of this; the Mother of God making her journey to the census in Bethlehem. Think of Mary’s silence and serenity in the midst of adversity. Think of the pressure that came with being chosen to be the Mother of God, the Mother of One born to die for the redemption of many. Think of her confidence in God as evidenced in today’s Gospel.

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

Mary truly heard the Word of God and lived by it. She allowed it to transform her and lead her. This is the example we ought to follow as Christmas quickly approaches. Let us pick up the Word of God and ponder it in our hearts. What is the Lord trying to say to you today? What is He trying to say to you in these last days before Christmas?

Friday December 21, 2018

Friday of the Third Week of Advent

“Hark! my lover—here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Here he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices. My lover speaks; he says to me,

‘Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come! For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and you are lovely.’” -Song of Songs 2:8-14

The Church beautifully chooses the reading from the second chapter of the Song of Songs for the first reading, which describes the bridegroom coming for his bride. The book Song of Songs is frequently misunderstood because of its symbolism and literary structure.

To sum it up, there is an ancient Jewish tradition of a bride-to-be waiting to be picked up by her bridegroom-to-be in the middle of the night. The bridegroom shows up with the wedding party to bring his future bride to their celebration. Song of Songs recounts a bride waiting in anticipation for her lover to show up and to pass the time, she tries to sleep. There are a few dream sequences which occur in which she dreams of her lover and wants to sleep until he arrives so that time will pass more quickly. “I adjure you, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not awaken or stir up love until it is ready!” (Song of Songs 8:4).

The true Bridegroom is Jesus, who has come to wed His Church, which becomes the Bride of Christ. Jesus shares with the Church a deeply nuptial relationship. Through covenant, we become both children of God and espoused to Christ. Song of Songs even describes the nuptial embrace as eating and drinking deeply of each other—which can be seen in the nuptial embrace between Christ and His Church in the Eucharist, where we partake of His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, and He becomes one with us who are the Mystical Body of Christ.

As Advent moves towards a close, we prepare ourselves to receive Christ, the Bridegroom, into our hearts.

Saturday December 22, 2018

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever.”

Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and then returned to her home.” -Luke 1:46-56

With the conclusion of the third week of Advent, the Church meditates on Mary’s Magnificat and the remainder of her time spent with Elizabeth before returning to Joseph. As has been mentioned, Mary was filled with the Word of God. Even here in the Magnificat, she echoes the prayer made by Hannah in 1 Samuel as well as words from the book of Sirach in chapter 10 (“God overturns the thrones of the proud and enthrones the lowly in their place.” -Sirach 10:14) just as a couple examples.

This is simply further proof that Mary exudes the perfect example on being a disciple of Jesus, especially in the obvious example of being filled with God’s Word. Mary says that her soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, or in other translations you may have heard, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” This word magnify best serves our point here. Many would say that you should be able to approach Jesus directly, or that you can go straight to the Father because Jesus said so (cf. John 16:23), but it is through God’s will that we approach the Father through Jesus, we know Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and that we receive Jesus through Mary.

If Mary’s soul truly does magnify the Lord, then we ought to approach Him through her, and not only through her example, but through her prayers and mediation. Imagine trying to read the small print of a newspaper without assistance. How much easier would it be to read if you had a magnifying glass? Let us allow Mary to magnify the Lord in our lives, that we may come to know her more intimately than we otherwise would be able to, and let us follow her example in being a true disciple of Jesus throughout the remainder of this Advent and the Christmas season quickly approaching.

Advent Week 4

Sunday December 23, 2018

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

“Thus says the LORD: You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times. Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, and the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel. He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.” -Micah 5:1-4a

This Sunday is the final Sunday of Advent in what is the second shortest possible Advent. Last year the fourth Sunday of Advent was Christmas Eve, this year we have Sunday of Monday to do our final preparations for Christmas.

In the readings for today, the Church connects the peace and restoration the Lord will bring, to Mary as the Ark of the Covenant traveling through the hill country of Judah, to the one sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ helps us to call to mind His certain return with the second coming, so in a way, these readings help Advent to come full-circle. We recall what the Catechism says about the celebration of the Season of Advent in paragraph 524:

When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor's birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Let us always remember the purpose of it all: Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming to set us free from bondage, to bring good news to the afflicted, to preach liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners (cf. Isaiah 61)! As we conclude this Advent, let us constantly bear in mind the reality of our salvation in Christ Jesus who became Incarnate for us!

"The Lord Jesus had compassion upon us in order to call us to himself, not frighten us away. He came in meekness; he came in humility." St. Ambrose of Milan, On Repentance, 1.1.3

The Christ child is almost here, now is not the time to abandon our spiritual devotions for this Advent, “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us* and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2a).

Monday December 24, 2018

Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent

Christmas Eve

“Zechariah his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied, saying:

‘Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty Savior, born of the house of his servant David. Through his prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hand of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life. You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.’” -Luke 1:67-79

It is now Christmas Eve, the Monday of the fourth week of Advent. This Advent has been a fruitful time preparing our hearts so that the Savior might come and dwell with us. These times of preparation, the prayers and sacrifices, the fasting and almsgiving, the spiritual reading and Scriptural meditation, the rosaries and intentional mortification are not reserved for Advent, they are not reserved for Lent. Let us take what we have learned this Advent, let us receive the great blessings God has in store for us tomorrow and the Christmas Season, let us receive even the Christmas gifts God has for us, and move forwards always.

Through these spiritual exercises, let us always be living in a state of constant Advent. Let us be waiting for Christ and preparing a way for the Lord in our hearts always. In the spiritual life there truly is no maintaining, like in most relationships. Either you are growing in your relationship with God or you are regressing. The beautiful part of this, as the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas remarks, as we approach God and grow closer to Him, we accelerate. We are like an object of large mass falling towards the earth, we continue to speed up. This is a good way to measure your spiritual life. Look at your life now compared to last Advent. Not only should you be closer to God, but if you continue to trust in His mercy, seek Him daily, and grow in docility to the Holy Spirit, you will notice that your rate of growth and development of your relationship with God is accelerating.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, we pray you have had a blessed Advent, will have a blessed Christmas, and we will see you in the Eucharist!