



ADVENT 2024





FOREWARD

BY: BISHOP FELIPE J. ESTÉVEZ, EMERITUS

Before Father Lawrence Peck entered the seminary, he was a professional journalist. He moved from Texas to St. Augustine to work at the local newspaper, the St. Augustine Record. I was honored when Father Lawrence asked me to participate in his project involving parishioners in providing a written reflection for each day of Advent. This project clearly reflects Pope Francis' dream of a synodal and missionary Church, a Church that affirms participation of the entire people of God and encourages consultation. A synodal Church is deeply focused on evangelization, and this Advent book enables the laity to articulate a personal message for others.

The synodal Church is focused on the Eucharist. The first part of the Eucharistic celebration is the Liturgy of the Word. This book reflects on the scripture readings for Advent, and I have no doubt this initiative is inspired by the Holy Spirit, the preeminent Actor of the synodal Church.

In our present time, we are confronted by three challenges related to Advent. The first is the pressure of the holiday commercialism to buy gifts and host elaborate parties. Secondly, Advent, a time of waiting and preparing, is lost in decorating too early and in the endless playing of Christmas carols long before the actual day of celebrating Christ's birth. Finally, the combination of commercialism and premature celebration creates an atmosphere of anxiety and overactivity. The Catholic faithful need to confront these obstacles with a penitential spirit of preparation for the coming of the Lord in the form of a Child. It is a family celebration with the Child-God and his mother ... of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

The liturgical season of Advent is rooted in our Christian identity. Jesus' first words were, "The Kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15) ... an invitation to hope, first by changing our lives (conversion). An important component of Advent is receiving the sacrament of reconciliation. The Risen Lord entrusted this important sacrament to the apostles (Jn 20:21-23). It is most fruitful for the penitent to carefully follow the recommended preparation for this sacrament:

1. Review his or her conduct in light of the Gospel, asking the Spirit for true repentance.

2. Receive the sacrament of reconciliation through confessing his or her sins and making a sincere act of contrition.

3. Complete the penance given.

At times, we think, "Let me go to confession," but from the Pauline perspective it is the Lord who comes to us to sanctify us making our poor ordinary lives, as St. Paul called it, "a new creation," or as St. Mother Theresa said so well, "making our lives something beautiful for God."

The four weeks of Advent need to be celebrated, first, in our families, and the parish is the network of families. The ritual around the Advent wreath can facilitate that primary celebration, with the head of the household taking the initiative to invite the family to learn about this prayerful Advent practice. The leader should begin the gathering with prayer, which can lead to spontaneous prayers of intercession, and invitation to others to participate. One means of involvement might include reading the Scriptures for the coming Sunday. A prayer to our Lady fits perfectly either at the beginning or the end of the ceremony. The Advent wreath is a most helpful reminder of the meaning of the Advent season which enhances the unity of the family as domestic Church.

Of all the liturgical seasons, Advent is the most Marian season. The Church joins the Most Blessed Virgin in her awaiting the child-God, the Emmanuel. One needs to meditate on the amazing humility of the Eternal Son of God becoming one of us in the form of a most vulnerable babe seen in the arms of Mary. She conceived Him by divine intervention and yet this Child is her own Creator (Colossians 1:16-17). Advent culminates on Christmas. For Catholics, Christmas is not a day, but a season which ends a few weeks into the new year with the Solemnity of the Baptism of our Lord. On New Year's Day, the church celebrates the Solemnity of Mary as the Mother of God, the first official title given to our Lady, the Theotokos. The affirmation of this title was significant for its strengthening the faith in the true identity of Jesus as both human and divine.

The last verse of the Bible is "Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus." In our faith journey, as the people of God, our posture is to be always waiting for his return in glory.





DECEMBER 1, 2024

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 3

Reading I: Jer 33:14-16
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14
 Reading II: 1 Thes 3:12-4:2
 Gospel: Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

Activity: Let's keep open to God's guidance on how we may assist others who need our help. We have parish activities, and there are other organizations and projects in our community that work to assist people who have unmet needs.

BY: DR. TIM GARVEY

Last year, I was involved in a potentially devastating accident. I could have died, lost both of my legs or suffered life-altering internal or closed-head injuries. Thank God none of these occurred. For a long time I was unable to stand or walk, and I am still recovering.

For a period of weeks, I was totally dependent on others. I remain grateful for all of the sincere gestures of support from my fellow parishioners, including prayers, food, transportation, and receiving the Eucharist while homebound.

My special thanks goes to my family members, especially my daughter and three sisters, who dropped everything to help me in my recovery. They all dropped EVERYTHING, on the spur of the moment, to help me. Three of them traveled, the same day as the accident, to Gainesville, over 300 miles, and lived here for weeks. Our parents are deceased, but the endless, immense love my sisters and daughter shared with me that was instilled in us by our parents would make them proud.

Two thousand years ago, Mary and Joseph took care of and protected their child, Jesus. As a child, he was dependent on them for everything. Now, more than ever before, I appreciate what it means to be dependent on others for care and protection.

Prayer For The Day: Lord, we thank you for your generosity and care. As we prepare to celebrate your Coming at Christmas, we ask you to help us to understand how we may provide help to others who are in need. And, we thank you for protecting us from harm.





DECEMBER 2, 2024

MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 175

Reading: Is 2:1-5
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 122:1-9
 Gospel: Mt 8:5-11

BY: BONITA KREMER

In this gospel, a centurion approaches Jesus and asks him to come to his home and cure one of his servants. His faith in Jesus was remarkable. As a centurion, he was not of the Jewish faith, but was respectful of the Jews. It was through this respect that he learned of Jesus and his ability to cure the sick. The centurion's faith impressed Jesus saying he had more faith than anyone else in Israel.

The centurion did not presume to be worthy enough for Jesus to come into his home. Jesus could see into the centurion's heart and the sincerity of his faith. It was not the centurion's

status as a leader of the Roman army, but rather the centurion's faith that resulted in Jesus healing his servant.

Activity: This abundance of faith is something I believe we must all strive to have. We are given the gift of Jesus Christ for the redemption of our sins. He suffered for us and by doing so gave us a way to gain access to heaven. As we are preparing for the birth of Christ in the coming weeks, let us reflect on what the birth of Jesus means for us. May we also share the true meaning of Christmas with others.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Jesus and our Father in heaven, may the Holy Spirit come upon us and fill us with the wisdom to deepen our faith as we await your birth.

DECEMBER 3, 2024

MEMORIAL OF SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER, PRIEST

Lectionary: 176

Reading: Is 11:1-10
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17
 Gospel: Lk 10:21-24

BY: SOFIA STETTER

Luke 11:21 "Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit". Today's readings are full of beautiful lessons that seem simple, but prove to be challenging in our everyday fallen world. Here we have the example of Jesus rejoicing in His Father's will through the Holy Spirit and thanking Him for His revelations

to the childlike, pursuing the truth with open and hopeful hearts and minds.

How often have I mindlessly rattled off in lukewarm prayer, "Lord, help me to do Your will."? Am I just asking because I know it's the right thing to do? Am I hesitant to mean it because I'm afraid God's will won't be aligned with my own desires or I lack the commitment needed to follow through on His plans? Or am I humbly rejoicing in Him and doing my best to listen and act? It's usually the former.





Jesus inspires us not to just ask and hope His answer will somehow align with our own will, but to rejoice. Are we a people that simply receives or do we rejoice in our Lord's plans? As Christians, let us live lives that demonstrate knowing and loving Jesus will lead to rejoicing and fulfillment.

In the first reading, Isaiah is prophesying Jesus' coming in righteousness, faithfulness, justice, mercy, and peace. We are reminded of the peace and harmony God has promised us, as we patiently await the celebration of our Savior's birth. During these trying times of war, political unrest, and the acceptance of sinful behavior, we are also filled with hope for His second coming, and knowing the world will pass away but the kingdom of Heaven is our eternal home.

Activity: When you encounter negativity in others (or yourself), instead of adding fuel to the fire, see it as an opportunity to evangelize. Remember the eternal kingdom we are preparing for, and fill yourself and others with the much needed peace and hope we find in Jesus.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Heavenly Father, accompany us as we imitate Christ in rejoicing in You and Your holy will, through the graces we receive from the gifts of Your Holy Spirit. Help us to always know that You have a plan and that it is good. Work through us to strengthen our bonds as Your children and to welcome others to join us in our faith journey. As we await the celebration of your birth and your second coming, we pray we will rejoice forever on your holy mountain. St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

DECEMBER 4, 2024

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 177

Reading: Is 25:6-10a
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
 Gospel: Mt 15:29-37

another miracle by multiplying seven loaves of bread and a few fish. You might say that was the first Christmas dinner. There is no limit to the generosity of Jesus or to his love for all of us.

BY: ANN SNAVELY

When Jesus went up to the mountain, great crowds came to Him. I imagine families came with their sick and lame to see Jesus. He healed the lame, blind, deformed, mute, and many other afflictions. Just think what a wonderful time that was for all of those people. It was just like Christmas. What a wonderful gift if you came with your blind child and Jesus healed that child and they could see Jesus and you for the first time. What a wonderful gift that would be. A deaf mute could hear his father for the first time.

For three days Jesus cured the disabled of their ailments. No one had anything to eat for three days and Jesus felt sorry for them all, so he had his disciples find food for them. Jesus performed

Activity: Today, as you sit to eat, remember that as you give thanks in prayer, to reflect on our Lord's love for you and His providing for not only our food but all that sustains us in life.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord, I give thanks to You for your unending love and the way that you care for every need that I have, both the seen and the unseen, that you grant in every moment of my life. Amen.





DECEMBER 5, 2024

THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 178

Reading: Is 26:1-6
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 118:1, 8-9, 19-21,
 25-27
 Gospel: Mt 7:21, 24-27

BY: SOPHIA K. ACORD, PH.D.

Jesus gives clear instructions in today's gospel: to enter the Kingdom of Heaven we must do God's will. We are called to listen to Him, act on His words, surrendering our will to His like a wise man who builds his house on bedrock. If this directive seems imposing, remember that God is love [1 John 4:8]. This is our just, omnipotent, and joyful God, who pardons sin, delights in clemency, and lifts up the poor! When we surrender our will to God, Christ lives in us and His light works through us. We become His hands and His feet shining light through the world in His name.

I experienced this surrender through a struggle with infertility. The world says that if we just try one more doctor, one more treatment, we will get pregnant. But seeing parenthood as a choice under our control is to trust man instead of God. In turning this trial over to God, and listening to His will for our family, God gave us the miraculous gift of parenthood through adoption. When our

son's first mother gave him life, God's word bore fruit and multiplied His love and light throughout the world.

In this busy time of Advent, let's quiet ourselves and listen to God in a special way. The happiness God has in store for us comes when we put Him first. He can take our every burden and turn it into something beautiful. Using our free will to choose God's will, even when we don't see His plan fully, is a profound gift that gives God glory and brings us together as His people.

Activity: Spend 10 minutes in quiet contemplation of Mary's response to the Archangel Gabriel, "May it be done to me according to your word" [Luke 1:38]. Ask the Holy Spirit to share His plan for you, listen to what God desires, and act on it in some small way today.

Prayer For The Day: God, I love you and I adore you. Thank you for your call into this vocation. Give me the courage and strength to love your will and to live out your will in my life. From St. Patrick: May the strength of God pilot us, May the wisdom of God instruct us, May the word of God direct us. Always ours this day and for evermore.

DECEMBER 6, 2024

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 179

Reading: Is 29:17-24
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14
 Gospel: Mt 9:27-31

BY: KIEM TRAN

The surgeon came by and checked up on me in the hospital room. His compassionate eyes returned to me once more before he exited, and as an afterthought he reminded me to eat before rushing off. The OB-GYN also came by and checked up on





me. Her compassionate touch was gentle, cool, and unforgettable. She didn't use gloves--I was not contagious to her, I thought. But she, too, could not cure my illness nor tell me what had caused it. It was the last week of October 2020.

I could relate well to the desperation of the two blind men wanting to be healed in Matthew 9:27-31 from experiencing a week-long stay at the hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was missing my children and husband. The emergency surgery on the 5th day during my hospital stay did not provide a complete cure. Feeling alone and hopeless, a volunteer suddenly came and asked me if I needed anything. I asked for three things: water to drink, prayer, and to turn off the lights. I was alone again in a dark hospital room, lying on the hospital bed begging God for mercy and healing.

The next day I was discharged, I asked my husband to take me to church so I could ask a priest to bless me. A week later, I asked for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. The Sacrament removed my anxiety of potentially having a life-threatening disease. With each recurring visit to the surgeon, for additional surgical procedures, I was praying to

God for healing. Finally, on December 16, 2020, an infectious disease doctor was able to identify the condition and stopped the unnecessary courses of antibiotics, antifungal medicine, and unnecessary repeated surgeries. The chronic condition didn't have a known cure. I was prescribed other types of medication and injections that had horrible side-effects. Years later, while praying to God in the church to be healed after communion, I heard a voice coming out of nowhere that declared "You are healed."

Indeed, "The Lord is my light and my salvation" and there is nothing to fear.

Activity: Today and everyday, when faced with difficult situations, call on His Sacred Holy Name in prayer and ask for others to pray for you. Pray for them, likewise.

Prayer For The Day: In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.
Dear Lord, May I be filled with the Light of Life and be ready to meet the Prince of Peace when He comes. Amen.

DECEMBER 7, 2024

MEMORIAL OF SAINT AMBROSE, BISHOP & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Lectionary: 180

Reading : Is 30:19-21, 23-26
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
 Gospel: Mt 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8

BY: MARIJKA ULANOWICZ

At the ripe old age of 56, I enrolled in the master's program at the Washington Theological Union. At first glance it might appear to have been an unexpected move. After all, I had already completed graduate studies in musicology many years earlier. I had raised three children. I was happily involved in many parish ministries. What

more could I want?

But looking back, it was something that had been quietly gestating in my mind throughout my life. In fact, as a Ukrainian Greco-Catholic, I came from a priestly family (my grandfather, great-grandfather and many uncles were all priests), so I'd joke that by studying Theology I was merely returning to the family business. Therefore when our pastor suggested that I pursue theological studies, my immediate response was, "Yes, of course"—and that has led to a life of fulfillment.

Today (December 7) is the Feast of St. Ambrose,





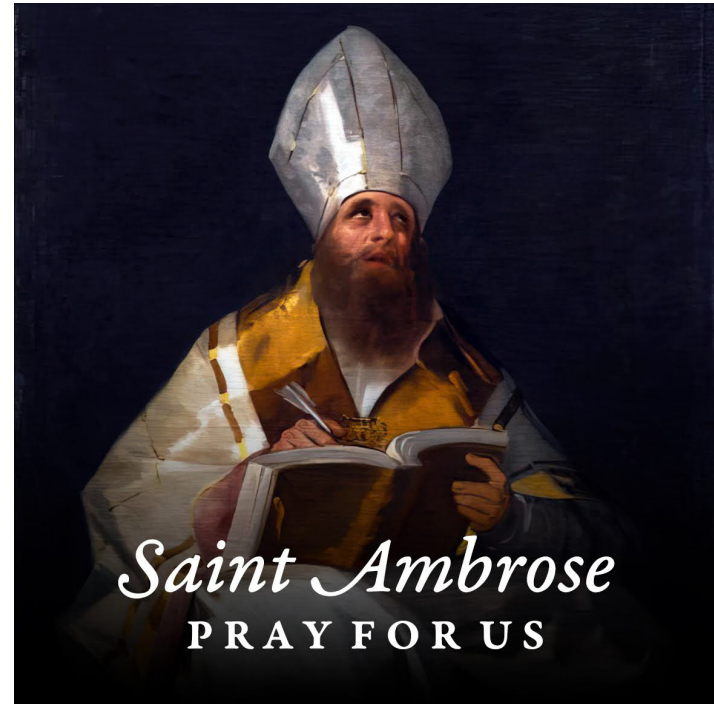
Bishop and Doctor of the Church. Probably looking back at his life, he would have said this was a most unexpected vocation. In the fourth century, as Roman governor in Northern Italy, he was called on to bring peace in Milan between two religious factions. He succeeded and both parties spontaneously and unanimously voted him to become Bishop. At first he strongly resisted their decision. It was only after the Emperor and the Pope confirmed his election he finally agreed, BUT first he had to be baptized (!) and educated in Theology, Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church. Six months later on December Seventh, 374 he was ordained Bishop of Milan.

One of the great figures of early Christianity, scholar, writer, orator, Ambrose was also the one whose preaching finally led another great mind of Western Christianity, Augustine of Hippo, into the Church.

Activity: Consider mentoring young people to help them see the unexpected ways that God is

calling them into your life.

Prayer For The Day: Loving God, open my spiritual ears to hear your voice calling me ever deeper into your life and giving me the courage to follow. Amen.



DECEMBER 8, 2024

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 6

Reading I:	Bar 5:1-9
Responsorial Psalm:	Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6.
Reading II:	Phil 1:4-6, 8-11
Gospel:	Lk 3:1-6

BY: GINNY MANCE

Challenges. This is a kind way to refer to tasks to accomplish, issues to solve, emotions to quell, and on and on. This theme of challenges seems to be on the hearts and minds of most everyone I know, including myself. And this day and age, being what it is, provides an ample serving on a daily basis.

JOY! Oh, but if only we'd all follow how the Word guides us to handle all of these challenges! Yes! JOY results! It can be ours, minute by minute. And

yes, that requires a lot of time in prayer. The Word advises us to live our lives in constant prayer. So, instead of only dedicating a small portion of the day to a quiet place where our daily prayers are offered, we should also walk with our Lord, talking and listening along the way. There will be many outcomes of a lifestyle such as this, and one will be JOY!

On this 2nd Sunday of Advent we await and prepare for the birth of the Son of Man, Creator, Redeemer, Prince of Peace, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Oh, what Joy is This! In the face of life's challenges, thinking about the realities of who Jesus Christ was as he walked this earth, simply brings me joy knowing that I belong to Him, and I'm alive because of Him.

Life will always present challenges to each of us,





full spectrum, small to big. Walking with Jesus, listening to Holy Spirit, asking for intercession from Blessed Mother, all bring clarity, resolve, action, and sometimes peace that in time God will heal our wounds and carry us through.

If there exists a people who have suffered greatly, the People Israel are certainly one. In our 1st Reading, that deep valley of despair is lifted by God with His promise to them:

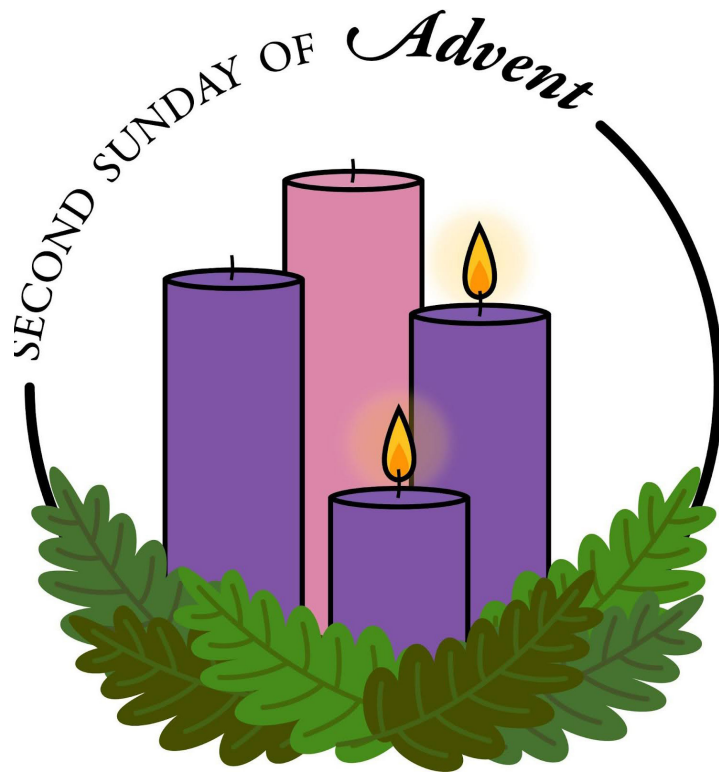
The forests and every fragrant kind of tree have overshadowed Israel at God's command; for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory with his mercy and justice for company. (Bar 5:8-9)

So, too, in our lives our Lord still leads us in joy by His light of glory with His mercy and justice for company. In our 2nd Reading, Philippians Ch. 1, in Paul and Timothy's letter, we are all encouraged: And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Activity: Today, and onward, take every

opportunity that arises to speak with God, not just to Him. Appreciate Him, ask Him how to react to difficult situations and then listen. You'll be ever-grateful for the solutions that will come to mind.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord, help me to be mindful of your presence for this entire day. I desire your companionship in my life, please walk with me and talk with me. Amen.



DECEMBER 9, 2024

SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Lectionary: 689

Reading I: Gn 3:9-15, 20
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4
 Reading II: Eph 1:3-6, 11-12
 Gospel: Lk 1:26-38

BY: FR. LAWRENCE

God loves renewal, and it happens in everyone's

life. God has great mercy and can make old, broken things new. God does so with us and just as he has with all creation. God always brings newness and refreshment. We can look to the readings today to see that.

In Genesis Adam and Eve, who were born in a state of innocence and without any sin or urge to sin, listen to temptation and give in, and give us a





fallen nature. This is not what God intended, but they freely did this act. God corrects this act by giving us Jesus and Mary.

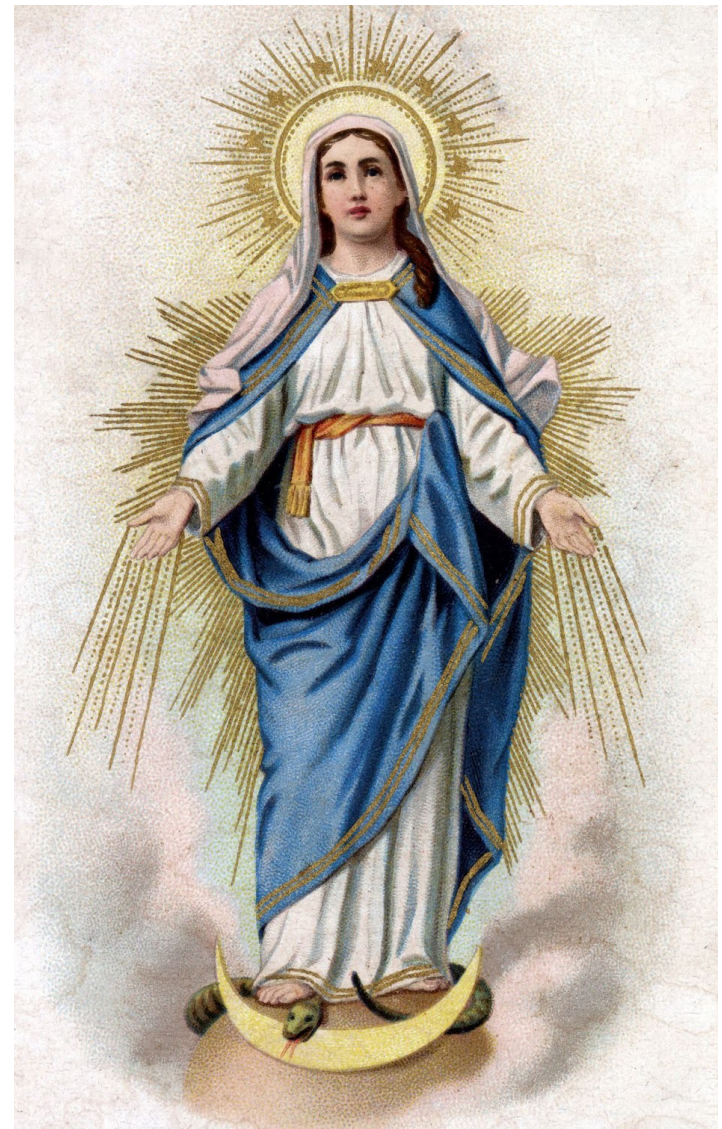
Mary, the Immaculate Conception, is born in a state of innocence, due to the saving merits of Jesus Christ her son. She does nothing to gain this, but it is a free gift. When Gabriel visits Mary, she gives her fiat and is obedient to God's word. Just as Eve, a virgin, was disobedient, Mary, a virgin, is obedient. This is why the church fathers call her the New Eve. The new mother of all the redeemed as Jesus gives her to us from the Cross. Jesus is the New Adam, the one who is obedient "...even to death, death on a Cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him..." (Phil 2: 8-9)

As Jesus is exalted, so is Mary his mother. She has a special place in salvation history to make atonement for Eve. Just as Peter was asked if he loved Jesus three times to make up for his three denials. God gives us the opportunity to make things right. The Sacrament of Confession, or as Bishop Victor liked to call it the Sacrament of Peace, is how we can do this: admit we have fallen short, and try to cooperate with the grace of God to not sin again. And then to do some penance to make up for the sin.

But we can also do penance for each other. We can pray for everyone who has sinned. This is the point of the communal penance service. It is not primarily about the individuals that come, but about the whole church. Jesus, through Mary's yes, gives us a chance to say yes to God again. Let us not waste it, but let us come into the newness of life God wants to give us.

Activity: Pray about something from your past that you are not proud of. What is it? How did the action hurt yourself or others? Reflect on this, and then think about something you can do to make good on that action. A minor example would be to make up for littering, I could go out and pick up trash in my neighborhood. Or, if someone I know has committed a sin, I could do a penance for them.

Prayer For The Day: Heavenly Father, you make all things new. Renew your Holy Spirit within me, and help me to know my sins, to be contrite over them, and to do acts of penance. Our Lady at Fatima tells us that Jesus is much offended by our sins, please send us the grace to sin no more and grow closer to your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. May our Blessed Mother pray for us.





DECEMBER 10, 2024

TUESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 182

Reading : Is 40:1-11
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 96:1-2, 3, 10-13
 Gospel: Mt 18:12-14

BY: CHRIS STETTER

The passage from today's gospel always irritated me, so I read and reread it. During a long walk and short prayer I began to laugh. I had the audacity to identify with the 99 who were left though they were faithful. Rejoicing more over finding the lost 1 over the 99 was upsetting.

Why am I part of the 99? Born Catholic, I went to Catholic school all the way through high school and received all the sacraments. Further reflection revealed that God has been trying to track me down since birth. At first He came in the form of my parents who were good examples of active participation at church. They kept me active in the faith and were always there to keep me on the straight path when I went astray. Sadly it's easy to take people and faith for granted when they are always there.

God saw me veering off the path as a young adult. This time he came in the form of a lovely

Colombian girl. One day she asked me if I was going to church with her. I had not been for a while and hesitantly said uhhhh no? She smiled and asked, "Are you going to church with me tomorrow? We have been going to church ever since with both becoming increasingly active in the church.

Seeing Jesus in the people around me helps me realize that if I can bring comfort to them I can help make straight the highway to God. It also helps keep me humble and makes me realize that I was never part of the 99 but to God I am the 1.

Activity: Take a moment to reflect on the people in your life God has sent to bring you back to the fold. See if you can identify anyone in your life for whom God is asking you to take on the role of the good shepherd.

Prayer For The Day: God, especially in this time of Advent I thank you for sending your Son to save us. Please help me seek you out just as you constantly search for me. Let me see your presence in my fellow passengers on this journey and help me to be the hands and feet of Jesus to others, as others have been to me. Amen.

DECEMBER 11, 2024

WEDNESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 183

Reading : Is 40:25-31
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10
 Gospel: Mt 11:28-30

BY: ROBIN BEUTLER

Matthew 11:28, how powerful this reading is in my life. It might look like life is always good and I've got it all organized, but that was not the case, especially in my younger years. Youth is supposed to be a carefree and easy time. Having a learning disability in the 80's was difficult with some of my





family not understanding why my brain couldn't connect with the rules of the English language. Additionally, being a child in a fractured family can be hard and feel heavy.

I have always talked with the Lord, and He has always been there with me even on the darkest of days. I asked the Lord to heal my feelings of never being good enough. I struggled with not being able to live up to the standards placed in front of me, mostly by myself and some others. In those moments when I have called out in prayer God stepped in. He lightened the tightness in my chest, and quieted the noise in my head, and I knew all I had to do is what He tells me to do.

I was raised in a family that didn't attend church regularly. I didn't understand why talking to God, whose house I only went to a handful of times, would make me feel better but it did. My husband

and I started attending church regularly with our son, then sons and for a time our foster children, too. I heard this verse, and it started to make more sense to me. God doesn't take our problems away, but leaning on Him helps us get through life, including the good, the bad and the ugly. Knowing this, I can go forth all the days of my life because He is with me.

Activity: Today, take a moment to quiet your thoughts, and talk with the Lord about your good, bad and ugly moments.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Father, you know me, you know my stresses and my worries. Please help me quiet the noise and listen to your will for me, and give me the strength to follow the path you desire. Amen.

DECEMBER 12, 2024

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Lectionary: 690A

Reading : Zec 2:14-17
 Responsorial Psalm: Judith 13:18 b,c,d,e, 19
 Gospel: Lk 1:26-38

BY: SR. RAQUEL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Today's great feast day honors Our Lady of Guadalupe, commemorating her apparitions in 1531 to Juan Diego (now a saint) in Mexico. God has given us such a wondrous gift in the revelation of His Mother in the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe! When Juan Diego was troubled because of his uncle's illness, our Lady's tender words to him were, "Am I not here who am your mother?" Her words reflect a characteristic of her Son, as the angel Gabriel's words to Mary in today's Gospel when he says: "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you". Lastly, we remember Jesus' words at end of the Gospel of Matthew when He says "I am with you until the end of the age." In sum, we can

hear both Jesus and Our Blessed Mother tell us "Do not be afraid, I am with you."





I remember struggling while I was discerning my vocation. I started kneeling in front of a huge image of Our Lady of Guadalupe that remains in my old room at my mom’s house and I would pray three Hail Mary prayers every night, asking for her help. Now, in thanksgiving, as a religious sister, I still return to her, kneel and pray those three Hail Mary prayers. I know she is receiving me and listening to my prayers. She helped me back then and continues to journey with me. Jesus and Our Blessed Mother are close and are ready to listen and encourage us during our pilgrimage here on earth, they remind us that “they are with us.”

Activity: Approach an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and speak to her as your mother. Then speak to God the Father as your Father and thank them both for being your Father and Mother.

Prayer For The Day: Father God, thank you for the apparitions of Our Blessed Mother on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico. Remind me I have a tender mother and can go to her for encouragement. Blessed Mother, thank you for being my Mother and for helping me grow closer to you Son, Jesus. Amen.

DECEMBER 13, 2024

MEMORIAL OF SAINT LUCY, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

Lectionary: 185

Reading: Is 48:17-19
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6
 Gospel: Mt 11:16-19

BY: DR. LUCY GUERRA

During this Season of Advent, we are reminded to prepare our hearts for the Coming of Christ. In today’s readings, we are called to listen to the teachings of the Lord and follow His Commandments. Just as the prophet Isaiah promises prosperity and vindication if we hearken to God’s ways, the Psalm reminds us that those who follow the Lord will have the light of life.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of the generation that does not recognize the signs of the times. He compares them to children who are stubborn and refuse to see the truth before them. Just as some rejected John the Baptist and Jesus Himself, we are reminded to be open to God’s wisdom and recognize His presence in our midst.

As we journey through this Season of Advent, let us reflect on our own lives and how we are preparing for the Coming of Christ. Are we listening to the

teachings of the Lord and following His ways? Are we open to the wisdom God is trying to reveal to us? Let us strive to be like the just man in the Psalm, planted near running water, yielding fruit in due season, and always prospering in the ways of the Lord.

Activity: Today, and throughout the Lenten Season, offer a small act of charity as a daily offering to be reminded of the meaning of Lent and Christmas.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord, May I be filled with the Light of Life and be ready to meet the Prince of Peace when He comes. Amen.





DECEMBER 14, 2024

MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Lectionary: 186

Reading: Sir 48:1-4, 9-11
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 80:2ac, 3b, 15-16, 18-19
 Gospel: Mt 17:9a, 10-13

Cross, our saint of the day quotes: “The cross leads to resurrection, agony to ecstasy, darkness to light, abandonment to possession, denial to self to union with God. If you want to save your life, you must lose it.”

BY: SUSAN CARR

When we came to Gainesville and found St. Patrick Church, we began our journey of spiritual renewal. Though we were very involved in our Church and Temple in New York City for 32 years and received many of the Lord’s blessings during this time, a deepening of our spiritual journey led by the Spirit began at St. Patrick’s.

And so, our time of the Cross, the three years of Howie’s illness and passing unto the Lord, was vreceived from our St. Patrick’s family. You taught us to pray to the Lord for trust and strength in Him. We couldn’t conceive of our struggle through these times without it. We thought we came to Gainesville to support our family, but rather the Lord brought us to St. Patrick’s to bring us closer to Him.

As today’s epistle leads us: “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, ...I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling...But as it is written: What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit.”

Activity: Approach an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and speak to her as your mother. Then speak to God the Father as your Father and thank them both for being your Father and Mother.

Through the many spiritual journeys experienced at St. Patrick’s masses, homilies, Thursday night seminars, Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers, FreeDOM, Homebound Ministries, and our friendships, deepened our spiritual development. Though somewhat fearful, as per St. John of the

Prayer For The Day: Father God, thank you for the apparitions of Our Blessed Mother on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico. Remind me I have a tender mother and can go to her for encouragement. Blessed Mother, thank you for being my Mother and for helping me grow closer to you Son, Jesus. Amen.





DECEMBER 15, 2024.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 9

Reading I: Zep 3:14-18a
Responsorial Psalm: Is 12:2-3, 4, 5-6
Reading II: Phil 4:4-7
Gospel: Lk 3:10-1

BY: LYN N. VELIZ

“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” (Phil 4:6) This verse has been one of my favorites since I was a teenager, and it remains with me now. It is a verse that can always be applied to life, regardless of age or what is happening at any given time.

I am a constant worrier, but I was not always like that. As a kid, I never worried about anything. I was quite the opposite, carefree and easygoing.

In my late teens everything changed. My older sister, Danielle, was unexpectedly killed in a car accident. She was 20. It was an awful thing to try to understand and it would be something that I would never fully grasp. My whole family dynamic had suddenly changed. We were lost in our grief. It was too much to handle, especially at such a young age. I was not the same person anymore.

Since then, worry, anxiety and fear are battles I still struggle with daily. Whatever your fears may be, you cannot allow them to overcome you. That is much easier said than done, but that is where my favorite verse (Phil 4:6 -above) comes into play. Talk to God. Tell Him your worries and fears. It does not mean

they disappear, but it does mean you are never truly alone in anything. It means you can cap your struggles and keep on going.

Activity: When worry and anxiety take hold of you, replace your fears with thoughts of gratitude. Remind yourself God is in control, and He has granted you gifts and blessings beyond measure.

Prayer For The Day: Heavenly Father, please ease my mind of worry. Replace my fears with thoughts of gratitude, so I may focus on You and the gifts You have granted me. Amen.





DECEMBER 16, 2024

MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 187

Reading : Nm 24:2-7, 15-17a
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 25:4-5ab, 6, 7bc, 8-9
 Gospel: Mt 21:23-27

BY: DR. NICHOLAS CASSISI

As he sat on the curb in New York city, he was frightened, worried, and near panic, and with good reason. Only 19 years old, had never been out of a small town in Sicily, didn't understand or speak English, didn't have much money, and the person he was to meet two hours ago, was nowhere to be found. Not having many options, he began to pray to the Virgin Mary, asking for help, and in return promised to be devoted to her during his lifetime.

Not long after praying, a stranger came up to him, spoke in his language, and offered to help. The stranger remained with him until his friend arrived, some three hours late. The stranger left without giving his name, and was never seen again. The nineteen-year-old man was my father, and he kept his promise and was devoted to the Blessed Mother his entire life. On August 15, 1950, he died. It was The feast of the Assumption. A coincidence, possibly, a miracle probably.

I too have often prayed to the Virgin Mary, especially during times of turmoil, illness,

surgery, and worries. I have often reflected on my father's event, and have come to the conclusion that miracles happen in my life every day as well, some major, and the majority minor. Examples such as a near miss in an automobile accident or not dying from COVID during the pandemic, although I had the disease, or a special intention I didn't think would happen. Again, coincidences or miracles?

I have tried to place my entire trust in Jesus, but I found myself doubting that what I was asking would happen. I tried to bargain with Him until I realized I have little to bargain with.

Activity: Jesus, please give me the ability to place my trust in you completely, for I know your love for me is great and everlasting and You are always there for me. Give me the strength to always accept your will. Please be at my side today to help others with acts of kindness, and love, and to bring joy into someone's life.

Prayer For The Day: Instead of reciting the usual prayers of the Our Father or Hail Mary, talk to them as you would your best friend, and ask for their help and guidance Acknowledge all they have done for you now and in the past, and thank them for the miracles you have experienced in your life. Remember they are always by your side.





DECEMBER 17, 2024

TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 193

Reading: Gn 49:2, 8-10
Responsorial Psalm: 72:1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17
Gospel: Mt 1:1-17

BY: MEGAN HAMPTON-PUSEY

on the season they are in we must give positive and sometimes negative advice. With that being said we shall never lose sight that God ultimately sets forth the path he wants for us.

We are all children of God and need to remember to help each other and continue to seek God's grace. We must continue to love, teach, and guide all of God's children, young and old, to His loving care. In this season, consider how you can lead others to the town of Bethlehem for Jesus' Birth. Share God's love for them to bring them closer to God and his Son.



Activity: Please reflect on how you can share the gifts God gave you to help someone in the community, through providing a warm meal, a winter jacket, or a prayer with someone going through a difficult time. Do not let fear of the unknown deter you. God created you in his image. Through these actions you can share God's word.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord, we are so thankful for your greatness. We pray that all of your children accept your love and guidance. In this season of preparing for the celebration of your son's birth, let us share your love and teachings through both words and actions. Amen

As parents we try to help and guide our children to ensure they live up to their potential. Depending

DECEMBER 18, 2024

WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 194

Reading: Jer 23:5-8
Responsorial Psalm: Ps 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19
Gospel: Mt 1:18-25

BY: SARA GEISER

In the time of Mary and Joseph, Jewish customs and societal expectations were particularly strict, especially concerning marriage and sexual morality. Mary's pregnancy before marriage would have been viewed as scandalous, subjecting her





to severe social criticism, ostracism, and likely punishment. Joseph's initial decision to divorce her quietly was an act of compassion, aimed at protecting her from public disgrace. However, when the angel of the Lord revealed to Joseph the divine nature of her pregnancy and commanded him to take her as his wife, it required immense faith and courage to follow through. Despite the harsh whispers and judging eyes they likely encountered, Joseph's obedience to the angel's command underscores his remarkable integrity. By accepting Mary and the unborn Jesus, Joseph provided a stable family environment, which was crucial for Jesus' early life and development.

Compassion in Dealing with Social Stigma: Joseph's response to Mary's situation teaches us the importance of empathy and kindness. It is essential to approach others facing social stigmas or challenges with compassion and support.

Divine Presence: The name "Emmanuel," meaning "God is with us," offers profound comfort in uncertain times. This assurance reminds us that we are not alone and that divine presence accompanies us through our struggles.

Openness to Divine Guidance: Just as Joseph received guidance through a dream, we must remain open to receiving inspiration and direction from unexpected sources. Being attentive to such guidance can help us navigate life's challenges more effectively.

Activity: Choose one (or more) of the following questions, and reflect or journal your response:

- What does faith mean to me?
- How can I show compassion to others facing social stigma?
- Describe a time when I followed guidance from an unexpected source.
- How can I trust in God's plans when facing

Prayer For The Day: Dear Heavenly Father, We thank You for the example of Mary and Joseph, whose faith and obedience inspire us. Help us to trust in Your plans, even when the path is unclear. Grant us the strength to show compassion and kindness to those facing challenges and social stigma. Remind us always that You are with us, offering comfort and guidance. Open our hearts to receive Your divine direction, and help us to act with integrity and faith in all we do. Amen.



There are several timeless lessons we can draw from this story:

Faith and Obedience: Even under seemingly impossible circumstances, we must trust in God's plans. Facing difficult situations with faith and integrity is a testament to our devotion and strength.





DECEMBER 19, 2024

THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 195

Reading: Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 71:3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17
 Gospel: Lk 1:5-25

BY: GWEN EVANS



Elizabeth had presumably done all the right things during life. While certainly a fallen human being like most of us, the Holy Spirit declares in Luke 1 that she and Zechariah were just in the eyes of God and faithful to His law. Despite this, they suffered a cruel circumstance – childlessness. For Jews of the Ancient World, this was seen as a curse and an indication of God’s disfavor (a reason for gossip, scandal, and shunning from others in their faith community). The beautiful thing about this couple is that despite what must have been a very great trial, they remained faithful to God, living to honor Him and each other as best they could.

As the years went by they continued to pray about

their painful situation. All this couple wanted was an heir and a child of their own to love, as a sign of the fulfillment of their marriage covenant. It must well have seemed like no one was listening, and that perhaps in some mysterious way they had offended the Most High and were destined to live and die under a cloud of His disfavor.

Zechariah was fulfilling his regular duties as a priest when he was visited by the Angel Gabriel who said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer.” Not only did Elizabeth bear a son in her old age, but the boy would be ‘great in the eyes of the Lord’ and ‘a prophet of the Most High’. (Luke 1:13,15,76-77)

God gave them the greatest of all the prophets. Israel wanted a military leader that would restore the throne of David and oust the Romans. God gave (through their lineage) the One who would overthrow the kingdom of darkness and bring us eternal life with Him forever.

Is God delaying the answer to your prayer? You are about to receive an upgrade!!

Activity: Take time today to journal about an event (or two) where your faith was tested with a long wait for God’s answer, but the answer was far better than what you asked for. Give thanks for God’s tender love for you and thank Him, knowing that whatever trials you face, He will work everything out for your good!!

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord, St. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 2:9 “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Thank you for the gift of Your Son and the promise that my waiting is not in vain. Your answer is always more than I could ask for or dream. Amen.





DECEMBER 20, 2024

FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 196

Reading: Is 7:10-14
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 24:1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6
 Gospel: Lk 1:26-38

BY: BARBARA JESSIE

Luke 1:26-38.

In the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." She was very perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be

no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be done with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Gospel of Luke notes the thoughtful, reflective aspect of Mary. On two occasions, he describes her mulling over the whole thing in her mind as she went about her life (Lk.2:19, 51). The Magnificat tells of her radical sense of justice and her ability to express trenchant social criticism (Lk.1:46-55).

Mary is the perfect example of Faith, Love and Courage. Thinking back to when I was her age would I have had the courage to take on what the Lord was asking? Would I have had the faith that he would protect me from scrutiny by those near me? In my heart I would like to think that I would, but in reality I would worry about what others thought and not what God was asking.

Activity: Put aside some quiet time during the day to pray the Rosary and reflect on the mysteries. The Rosary is Mary's gift to all of us.

Prayer For The Day: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Behold the handmaid of the Lord: Be it done unto me according to Thy word.





DECEMBER 21, 2024

SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 197

Reading: Sg 2:8-14
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21
 Gospel: Lk 1:39-45

BY: VERONICA DAQUILA



We don't need to see God working in the world, solving our personal problems, understand what God is doing or even know his plans before we can "leap for joy". Just like Mary, today we are called as Christians to bring Jesus to others. And, like Elizabeth, we are also called to recognize the presence of Jesus in others.

Our world arrives at our doorstep looking for nothing more than someone to open the door and offer a blessing, just like Elizabeth did so many years ago for Mary. While Elizabeth did not change the world that day, she did offer a blessing and then let God do the rest. Like Elizabeth, we can also offer a blessing to those who are alone, scared, confused, or simply looking for someone to show them they care. Through these blessings we continue the church's mission to show the world that Jesus loves every one of us unconditionally.

As I reflect on today's Gospel, I realize that our St. Patrick's community practices this calling daily and especially at Christmas. During the Christmas season, the Angel Tree provides an opportunity to bless others when we "open the door" with our gifts for those in need and letting them know God loves them. The joy we receive in recognizing the presence of Christ, is God's Christmas gift to us. We need to make sure we use His gift wisely, so our love for our fellow man leads us to eternal salvation.

The meaning of today's Gospel, according to the Holy Fathers is: "Mary and Elizabeth's joy reminds us of how the Church ought to respond to Christ's incarnation." It contains simple, but very important lessons that real love is self-sacrificial; what's in the womb is a human life; we are called as Christians to bring Jesus to others as Mary did, and to recognize the presence of Jesus in others like Elizabeth did. It is the story of salvation and love. At the time the world was in turmoil and Elizabeth recognized the child Mary was carrying would be its salvation through showing us the ultimate gift of love in His self-sacrifice.

Mary inspires us to live a life full of compassion, generosity and gratitude, and to give back to God all the gifts He has given us. So how do we do this?

Activity: Bestow a blessing by lifting the spirits of someone who might not see a reason to celebrate Christmas. Have your family visit those in a nursing home and ask them to share a Christmas memory. Donate food to a food pantry for Christmas baskets. Provide Christmas presents for children in need.

Prayer For The Day: Father, like you did with Elizabeth when Mary visited her, help us deliver blessings to those in need with enthusiasm and joy. Amen.





DECEMBER 22, 2024

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 12

Reading I:	Mi 5:1-4a
Responsorial Psalm:	Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19
Reading II:	Heb 10:5-10
Gospel:	Lk 1:39-45

BY: MAURA DAQUILA

did away with the need for continued or repeated sacrifices that we read about in the old testament. By God's will we were sanctified and brought out of sin and into the family of God. It was God's will that we be rescued by Jesus. Obediently, Jesus came and rescued us. In dying for us Jesus lifts us up, restores us and brings us into God's family.



What does God want for Christmas? Or more importantly, what does God want for us? Does he want us to act in a certain way? Live in a certain way? The list can go on and on. But what is on God's Christmas list? Not sacrifice and offerings. In today's reading we learn that God was more concerned with preparing Jesus for His work than in sacrifice and offerings. Jesus knows what God wants. And what God wanted is exactly what we needed - our sins to be forgiven. What God gave us that first Advent/Christmas season ensured our eternal life. A gift of love that no other gift can surpass.

God gave us a Savior. A physical human being to do what we ourselves could not because of our sin. God's will is not simply that the Savior be born, but that He die on the cross for our sins. Jesus' death

Advent is not just about Christmas. It begins with Christmas but does not end there. It is not simply that the Savior was born. It is about Jesus doing what we could never do. While sin had to be punished, God desired that Jesus endure the punishment so we would not face ultimate separation from God. We can celebrate Christmas knowing that Good Friday and Easter are ahead with their promises of eternity.

Activity: This season, take time to see Christmas through the eyes of Jesus. Reflect on the ultimate sacrifice this tiny babe made for love of us. He came to bear our sin and die in our place. To see Christmas through His eyes is to trust our lives to Him.





Prayer For The Day: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus into the world. Thank you for His perfect life, lived in His perfect body so He could die the perfect death. He is the offering You

accepted as full and final payment for my sin and the sin of the whole world. He alone paid for my sin and is my Savior. Amen

DECEMBER 23, 2024

MONDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Lectionary: 199

Reading: Mal 3:1-4, 23-24
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 25:4-5ab, 8-9, 10, 14
 Gospel: Lk 1:57-66

BY: MARI LOU JENSEN



and sales that begin before Thanksgiving, and stop as soon as Christmas Day arrives. Trees are placed at the curb, and decorations are taken down before the season for celebrating and rejoicing in the holy baby who came to save us all ends

I spent most of my nursing career in the newborn nursery. Look at a newborn baby and marvel at God's greatness. At the instant of his birth he can breathe, cry, suckle.... so amazing!

Everyone always prays for and expects to have the perfect healthy baby, and thanks be to God we usually get just that. On rare occasions an infant is born who is so sick or has so many complications that make life impossible. So difficult to see God's plan but HE has one. It has been my privilege to be able to Baptize these little souls. Something I will never forget.

Today's gospel records Elizabeth and Zechariah naming their baby JOHN, and soon after Zechariah was able to speak again, praising and blessing God. The people of Judah were amazed as they discussed all of these things and said surely the hand of God was with him. St. John was |one of the messengers of GOD.

He is coming! Will we be ready to accept the messenger of the Lord to show us the way? To follow the way of the Lord will not be easy but so worthwhile, Eternal life.

During Advent we are all busy cleaning, baking, shopping and wrapping all those gifts. Let's stop and spend some quiet time getting ready to receive the infant Christ into our hearts.

I am sure everyone notices the carols, decorations

Activity: Bake a birthday cake for JESUS.

Prayer For The Day: Please GOD help us to have peace in our hearts and our families, and with BLESSED MOTHER's intercessions through all our rosaries bring peace to our troubled world. Amen.





DECEMBER 24, 2024

TUESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT, MASS IN THE MORNING

Lectionary: 200

Reading: 2 Sm 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16
 Responsorial Psalm: 89:2-3, 4-5, 27 and 29
 Gospel: Lk 1:67-79

BY: SARA RAGAN

In the first reading, King David said, “Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!” A few verses later the Lord tells Nathan to “go tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD’ Should you build me a house to dwell in?’” Growing up, I remember all of the preparations over the course of the Advent season. The wreath would be lit, each evening, and the Advent calendars with scripture on each door. One of the things I remember the most is how every Christmas Eve morning, we would go to our neighbor’s house for brunch. The Nativity story was always read, and we took time to pray together before eating. Later that night we would all ride together to Midnight Mass. Celebrating the meaning of Christmas together stands out to me, even after all of these years.

Here it is, Christmas Eve. Preparations for Christmas celebrations are in full swing. Our homes are being decorated, food is being prepared, and the presents are all being wrapped. Possibly we are all done with our preparations and enjoying the day or helping to decorate the Church. Maybe we still have things on our “to do”

list and are scrambling to get it all done. Have we remembered His presence? Have we thought about building a place in our home and hearts for Christ to dwell? Have we put as much effort into preparing for the Mass of Christmas, as we have for the celebrations in our homes?

Activity: Take some time today to reflect upon your Advent. Think about how your journey with the Lord has been. Ponder the beauty of the Incarnation of Christ and fully enter into the Christmas Mass you attend.

Prayer For The Day: “Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus, Come and be born in our hearts!” ... A verse from a favorite Advent song in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atria





DECEMBER 25, 2024

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

Lectionary: 13, 14, 15, 16

Reading I: Is. 52: 7-10
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 98: 1,2-3, 3-4, 5-6.
 Reading II: Heb. 1 1-6
 Gospel: Jn 1: 1- 18

BY: FR. AUGUSTINE NWAGBARA, SMMM

St. John the Evangelist begins his Gospel account by tracing the origin of Jesus as the Word who was with God the Father from eternity; “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...the Word became flesh and he dwells among us.” (Jn.1:1,14) The Word according to the Evangelist is in tandem with what God said in Genesis 1. It is correct to see the birth of Christ as a new creation.

Christmas therefore celebrates the Word who had been there in the beginning with the Father and through whom all things were created, and He became flesh in time and space and dwells among us to demonstrate God’s everlasting and unconditional love for humanity. One of the outstanding elements of the Christmas celebration is the light. All the various lights with their different colors point to Jesus who is THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. The colors of green and red point to the hope which the Lord Jesus gives humanity through the sacrifice of his life.

Both the ancient Jews and the Roman pagan world celebrated light at this time of year. The Jews celebrated the menorah (Hanukkah) while the ancient Romans celebrated the sun-god Apollo on the Winter solstice. However, the Christians outdid all these by celebrating the Nativity of the Son of God - Jesus as the Light of the world. The big question for each one of us today is; Am I seeing the birth of Jesus into this world as the birth of the light into my life? Do I need this light in my life? And if I do, in what aspect of my life

do I need him to radiate his salvific light? Let us not be like the people of the old to whom Jesus came, but they did not receive him. Believing and receiving Jesus as the Light, entails allowing his principles to make an impression in our lives and also allow Jesus’ values and teachings to form the bedrock of our lives.

Again, within the period of Christmas and beyond, we celebrate God’s unconditional love for humanity. As Scripture says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:23) But





God in His infinite mercy and love decides to send us His son to redeem us and redirect our ways towards Himself. Therefore, THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION shows us how much the Lord truly loves us. It also reveals the humility that goes with the mission of reconciliation. Though Jesus was in the form of God, he humbled himself and took human form so as to reconcile us to the Father. (Phil 2:6) We are therefore invited to imitate this divine example of love and humility and to reach out in love and humility to others. Christmas is a time to show love to those around us who are in dire need of love. It is love that heals the broken and wounded world. A little act of kindness given to someone who is in need would add value to the whole Christmas celebrations for us. Certainly, many of us have a lot to reconcile with some of our family/community members or our colleagues at work. Some we have offended and some we bear grudges against for offending

us. This is a time to offer someone an olive branch. Therefore, as we rejoice and celebrate the Christmas festival, may the love and reconciliation which the New Born Child Jesus at Christmas brings, renew our lives and give us the necessary humility and grace to reach out in love to those who really need our Love, our Reconciliation, and our Forgiveness.

Activity: Speak greatness about someone using your Words.

Prayer For The Day: May the radiance of your birth light up the night of the world. May the power of your message of love thwart the proud snares of the evil one. May the gift of your life make us understand ever more clearly the worth of the life of each human being.
-St. John Paul II

DECEMBER 26, 2024

FEAST OF SAINT STEPHEN, FIRST MARTYR

Lectionary: 696

Reading: Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 31:3-4, 6, 8ab, 16, 17
 Gospel: Mt 10:17-2

BY: BRYAN SMALLWOOD

In our increasingly secular culture, fully celebrating Christmas as a Catholic is challenging, which is reminiscent of St. Stephen's steadfast faith against opposition. Stephen's unwavering commitment to his beliefs, despite facing hostility, personally resonates with my own experience of spending holidays with loved ones who do not support my religious practices. I came into Catholicism later in life. Antagonism about practicing my faith from a faceless stranger online is one thing, but the pain is greater when it comes from the people I love the most.

Similar to St. Stephen, who faced debates and anger from those around him, I too encounter

differing perspectives and skepticism, leading to moments of tension or misunderstanding. Yet Stephen's response, filled with the Holy Spirit, exemplifies a grace and peace that I strive to emulate. His vision of God's glory and Jesus' presence, even in the face of persecution, serves as a reminder of the transcendent nature of faith — a source of comfort and strength.

At family gatherings, I find solace in prayer and reflection, much like St. Stephen gazing heavenward in communion with God. It's in these moments that I reaffirm my beliefs and seek compassion amidst diverse viewpoints. While the family I grew up with may not share my faith, their perspectives challenge me to do my research and articulate my beliefs with humility and love, echoing Stephen's spirit.

Ultimately, like St. Stephen's martyrdom, being the sole religious voice can sometimes feel isolating or daunting. However, just as Stephen found





peace in surrendering to God amidst persecution, I find reassurance in trusting that my faith, rooted in love and truth, can be an example to my family and contribute to the tapestry of our familial bonds, enriching our gatherings with depth and meaning.

Activity: Reflect on St. Stephen's courage and

faith. How do you stand firm in your beliefs while fostering harmony and respect?

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord, fill me with Your Holy Spirit as I navigate a world where my faith stands apart. Grant me wisdom and compassion to reflect on Your love amidst differing beliefs. May Your presence bring peace and understanding to those around me

DECEMBER 27, 2024

FEAST OF SAINT JOHN, APOSTLE & EVANGELIST

Lectionary: 697

Reading: 1 Jn 1:1-4
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12
 Gospel: Jn 20:1a and 2-8

BY: ESTHER & JOE BRANCH

Today, the pressure to be politically correct in all things is driving many of our decisions. When we may have taken the leap to forge a new path or try a new direction, we now stop to think if it will be socially accepted or the possible repercussions of how others view our actions. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with the old adage of look before you leap or you reap what you sow, but have we gone to an extreme?

Jesus came to show us a new way. His disciples were seen as extreme in their words and actions. Their followers had to consider the consequences for their allegiance to the Messiah. I'm sure many of them had the mindset to watch and listen for a bit and see what happens. Does that sound familiar? How many of us sit back and wait for others to take the first step or set the tone? How many times will we pass on an opportunity because we are afraid of what others may think? Is social media running your life?

We read in this Gospel account how one of the apostles arrived at the tomb before Peter. But it doesn't have him busting forth to be the first to deal

with the situation at hand. On the contrary, it tells the story of how the first disciple to arrive merely bent down and peered into the tomb, waiting for Peter's lead. Peter, the disciple who jumped overboard on the fishing boat to follow Jesus, and who asked Jesus to wash his whole body at the last supper, did not hesitate to enter the tomb without fear, but anticipation and wonderment. Peter believed and was ready to accept whatever he found with full confidence that it would lead him once again to Truth, Light, and Eternal Life in Jesus. Do we have Peter's resolve to go forth each day without doubt that Jesus will be there? Jesus will not let us down. If we believe, we do not have to worry about making the wrong choice. Jesus is always the right choice. Peter's all-in-attitude is the example for how we must live our faith life. Are you all in? We must act with steadfast resolve - with the zeal of Peter - so our joy may be complete.

Activity: Take the opportunity to encourage others and help spread the message of acceptance and forgiveness. Take a moment to write a letter, text a tweet, send an email, post a message anyway you can to let those who try to tempt your faith know they are forgiven. Be especially brave and forgive yourself for allowing fear to keep you from living your faith.

Prayer For The Day: Heavenly Father, comfort our hearts from the fear, stress, and anxiety of





this world. Help us to face our challenges with the gusto Peter had as he approached the tomb of our Risen Savior. Keep us from peering around the corner to find the Light of Jesus, but rather, bring our torches to light the way for others. We ask

your forgiveness for the times our fear fills us with doubt. We thank you for showing us each time we fall, that we can trust in You to be our Comfort, our Light, our Truth, and the way to Eternal Life.

DECEMBER 28, 2024

FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS

Lectionary: 698

Reading: 1 Jn 1:5–2:2
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 124:2-3, 4-5, 7cd-8
 Gospel: Mt 2:13-18

BY: BILL CERVONE

The Baby is three days old now. He seems so normal - sleeping, crying, eating, sleeping again. Yet Mary knows He is far from normal, that He is indeed divine, God Himself. Even as she holds Him she knows this because the angel of the Lord has told her so and she accepts and believes this. And she loves Him, this tiny Baby, her child, her Savior.

Now Joseph, who has accepted this as well on the word of Mary, has also seen the angel of the Lord. What he has accepted on faith alone from what Mary has told him is confirmed for him, too. But how can it be that this small, apparently helpless Infant poses such a threat as to have the angel of the Lord warn him to flee? It seems impossible, as daunting as taking flight to Egypt. And yet he does so.

Such is faith. Few if any of us ever confront anything so profoundly difficult as what has happened to this unassuming couple, Mary and Joseph. What it must have cost them in emotional and spiritual energy just to get through this betrothal, this pregnancy, this birth and now this flight from the last of whatever their normal life was! How did they do it? Faith! And that is the lesson in this to us. Faith eases the path we are on. Faith provides comfort, solace, and direction. Faith can be hard

sometimes, but ultimately through it is the answer we seek.

Activity: Is there something in church teaching that you question? That is difficult to understand? Spend a few minutes meditating on this dilemma and let your faith lead you to acceptance, even of those things that as mere humans we cannot understand.

Prayer For The Day: Lord, deepen my faith. Let me never question You. Lead me on Your path, through faith, until I finish this world and join with You fully in the next.





DECEMBER 29, 2024

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY & JOSEPH

Lectionary: 17

Reading: Sir 3:2-6, 12-14
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
 Reading II: Sir 3:2-6, 12-14
 Gospel: Mt 2:13-18

BY: ABIGAIL SMALLWOOD

Between the births of my first and second child, I lost multiple babies to miscarriage. During this dark chapter of my life, the temptation was to give into the feelings of despair, stress from so many medical appointments, guilt that I couldn't just be content with the child I already had, and anger. I felt isolated in my grief, and more devastatingly, I could not feel the presence of God.

Some have compared Mary and Joseph's three day search for the child Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem to seeking God during our personal times of separation from Him. The three day search also foreshadows those three days between Jesus' death and His resurrection, a time when the disciples may have felt that God was far away. Jesus tells Mary and Joseph He must be in His Father's house, doing His Father's work. They do

not understand this. Mary takes what she did not understand and pondered it in her heart. She put her trust in God.

I have to consciously remind myself that God's time is not my time, that my will is not His will. That is so hard for me to remember sometimes! Our suffering has a purpose and is part of His plan even if we, like Mary and Joseph, don't understand that plan. Just like the joy Jesus' parents experienced on reuniting with Him, so can our joy be when we reunite with God.

Activity: Think about how you are separated from God today. What is God trying to teach you through your trial? How is God trying to reach you through your trial? How could you respond?

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of Mother Mary to be an example for us to put aside our worry and open our hearts to trust in God's plan. Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, pray for our families and have mercy on all.

DECEMBER 30, 2024

THE SIXTH DAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

Lectionary: 203

Reading: 1 Jn 2:12-17
 Responsorial Psalm: Ps 96:7-8a, 8b-9, 10
 Gospel: Lk 2:36-40

BY: SHERYL EDDIE

I thought this would be easy, I loved the book

prepared by fellow parishioners last year and was eager, yet nothing came to me. The assignment was lingering, first draft passed due. But.... I had things to do, business to attend, family vacation to plan, and boom a relative became ill and needed me.

Circumstances put me in a mountain cabin with





nothing around. It was a trip to help with healing, mental and physical. We stepped outside and gentle rain was falling, the mountain stream running below, and there wasn't much to say. We gently rocked back and forth. We were quiet, we were patient as we were both in awe at the beauty, marveling at the majesty, and taking in the moment. Gratitude washed over me, having this moment to share and just be, is an incredible gift.

The 6th Day is about the family's preparation. This day is centered between the celebration of the birth of Christ and Epiphany. It is about the preparation for what is about to be revealed. If we sit still and allow our hearts to be filled with the presence of the Lord, peace will come to us, and all will fall in place.

It is difficult to prepare without "doing"; however the Gospel tells us to Do as Anna did. She wasn't running around cleaning, cooking, buying presents, traveling and so forth. She was in prayer. She was still. She was quiet. She was patient, and

the birth was revealed to her.

In the eyes of God, all are equal. God does not pick favorites; we are all worthy and He desires all of us, rich or poor, powerful or weak, to come to Him in adoration and love. You are worthy, be still, be grateful, be quiet if only for 5 minutes.

Activity: In the morning(s) before you get in the swing of your day..write down one thing you are grateful for, and why. The next day or 2 and so on. Increase until you reach 7. Each week start again... or continue. You can remain grateful for the same blessings. For example, if you had a great night's sleep and again a few later, it's okay.

Prayer For The Day: Lord thank you for all my blessings. Today, I especially want to thank you for _____, _____, _____, As I start my day I will be patient, I will be still and open my heart to be filled with your spirit to do your will.

DECEMBER 31, 2024

THE SEVENTH DAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

Lectionary: 204

Reading: 1 Jn 2:18-21
 Responsorial Psalm: 96:1-2, 11-12, 13
 Gospel: Jn 1:1-18

BY: EDWIN W. BEUTLER

The Reality of things. This is something we must ponder; 'Who is walking the path both with mind and body?' We are constantly told by many people that very few will make it to heaven, and even people we thought were good may not make it. Why would this be the case? Why would there be so many people in the church who would turn on it? The answer is that many people are not taught the whole message of God. We need to show the world and those around us what christianity is, and who we truly are. We must go out and talk to those we know, and show them the faith, to keep this generation's society from destroying the church.

If the church is destroyed then humanity is lost, with no more light left to guide them, only our broken nature. I've already seen what we are promoting among the younger generations, and the 'morals' they've tried to push on me. They are trying so hard to make it look like the church is irrelevant and spreading false teachings to degrade it, so we become lost in spirit and become their cattle to herd. We must not let our faith waver if hope is to remain.

Activity: Bring your faith to a conversation, e.g. Part of my belief is ... I want you to do this so people will begin looking at faith through the lens of truth.

Prayer For The Day: Dear Lord please help me to walk the path toward your light, and show others there is nothing to fear. I trust in you Lord.





JANUARY 1, 2025

SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

Lectionary: 204

Reading: Numbers 6:22-27
 Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8
 Reading II: Galatians 4:4-7
 Gospel: Luke 2:16-21

BY: SR. YVELYNE MARIE BERNARD, HMSS

Please! No more New Year resolutions. You're just going to feel ashamed of yourself in a week for failing and in a month you'll just stop trying. Moreover, New Year resolutions tend to be tainted with a spirit of pelagianism where the focus is solely on me, myself and I: I will do this and I will do that. I will accomplish this and I will eradicate that.

Yet, if Momma Mary has anything to teach us it's to remember and to keep and to ponder the mercy of God in our hearts. He should be our resolution. Why? Because He told us to invoke His name so we might be blessed, because without His blessing we cannot have peace. Why is it important for us to maintain our peace? I think you already know the answer or you wouldn't entertain the idea of making New Year resolutions, year after year. With these attempts, we are trying to seek equilibrium, security, and a sense of knowing we are going to be okay.

Trying to seek peace in these ways will always fail because they are self-centered and not God-centered. And we know this. Yet we convince ourselves, nonetheless, that next year we'll try again and we'll just try harder. Do not fall into that trap this year. This year, look to Mary as your model of true resolve. Be resolved to become aware of every blessing you receive in a day, and thank God for them. Be resolved to cultivate a

spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving for every joy celebrated and every sorrow endured, for every victory accomplished and every failure experienced. Be resolved to ponder the fact that you have the face of God shining upon you at all times—Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it! Could you imagine how differently you would walk around your home and your workplace with this resolution?!

God wants to bless you because He knows you need it. Make God your New Year's resolution.

Activity: Get a Gratitude journal or in your current journal write down at least five blessings and graces you are aware of receiving each day.

Prayer For The Day: Come Holy Spirit, open my eyes to heavenly realities so I might see every situation from heaven's perspective; open my ears so that I may hear the truth and remember it even when attacked by lie; pierce my heart and love me in my most wounded places; make my heart like that of Mary and seal me in the Precious Blood of Jesus to the glory of God the Father. Amen





ADVENT 2024

