

Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes

Westville

Advent Daily Reflections

The Word was made Flesh

Peace
On Earth



Week Two

**Peace through Communion,
Participation and Mission**

Sunday 5 December

Scripture: *Luke 3: 1 - 6*

Reflection

As the 'Festive Season' gains momentum, the shopping centres fill up, decorations and Christmas trees go up, the sounds of Jingle Bells and Christmas music is all around, we hear the voice of John the Baptist: "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight."

In so many ways it is, as St. Luke says, "A voice cries in the wilderness." When John appeared, calling everyone to prepare a way for the Lord, some listened, many did not. When Jesus came, some were ready, many were not.

The mere fact that you are reading this reflection today is a sure indication that you are alert to the coming of the Saviour, that you have entered into this time of preparation and expectation, and that you are ready to do whatever it takes to 'make his paths straight.' What exactly does it mean to 'make his paths straight,' to fill in every valley, straighten winding roads and make rough roads smooth? It means that we are to remove every obstacle in our lives that may hinder the Lord's coming to us. We need, each one of us, to ask ourselves "What obstacles do I need to remove in my life to create a straight path for the Lord?"

Sin is probably the greatest obstacle! Advent is after all a penitential season and in all parishes additional opportunities are available for us to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before Christmas. Two thousand years ago Jesus was born in a dirty, stinky stable. When he is born in your heart at Christmas, yours should be a heart freed from sin; from the anger, hurts, conflicts, aggression, hatefulness and resentments of the past. It is time to get rid of all that stuff. A time for a spring clean of our hearts and our lives so that when Jesus comes knocking at Christmas (and at the end of our lives) he will find us ready, prepared, and eager to welcome him!

Practical Suggestion

Find out about the opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation for you and your family and take full advantage of these opportunities. Invite someone whom you know who has not been to Confession for a long time to accompany you.

Prayer

Father, in hearing the voice of John the Baptist today, I commit myself to respond and to make a straight way for the Lord's coming by going to Confession to receive the gifts of healing and forgiveness. Then with my heart made new I will be ready to welcome Jesus. Grant me the courage, strength and humility to make a good Confession. Amen.

Monday 6 December

Scripture: Luke 5 : 17 - 26

Reflection

When I read the scripture passage for today, I immediately thought of the beautiful words of the song which Dionne Warwick sang “for good times and bad times, I’ll be on your side forever more. That’s what friends are for.” Isn’t this what we are called to be like as followers of Jesus?

We read of the paralysed man who had absolutely no chance of getting close to Jesus, but his friends demonstrated their incredible faith and went out of their way to make sure that somehow they managed to bring their friend right into His presence.

We have the privilege of coming into the presence of Jesus every time we attend Mass and we experience the intimate reality of His presence every time we receive Him in the Eucharist. How fortunate we are that we don’t have to battle through the crowds to have an intimate experience of Jesus. He makes himself available to us and gives of Himself generously and at no cost. All that we need to do is accept Jesus’ invitation and ask Him to come into our heart.

Advent offers us a great opportunity to invite those who have stopped going to Mass and no longer receive the Eucharist, to return to the practice of their faith so that they may once again have a personal experience of His love, healing and mercy which He so freely offers to us.

We read in Verse 10 that when Jesus saw the faith of the paralysed man’s friends, He healed the man. God is always willing and able to work wonders in people’s lives when we testify to the faith that we have. There is the true saying that “Faith is caught not taught.” The greatest testimony we can offer to others is the example of our faith lived out in the ordinary day to day stuff of our lives.

Practical Suggestion

As a result of the Covid precautions, the number of people permitted in closed spaces is still restricted, however most parishes offer weekday Masses where the number of attendees is much smaller. While the Sunday Mass Obligation is still an integral part of our Catholic Faith, the Archbishop has extended this Obligation to weekday Masses. Everyone who is able, should attend Holy Mass at least once a week. Invite your friends and family to attend a weekday Mass with you during Advent.

Prayer: Father, I thank you that by Your abundant grace, You have given me the opportunity to have a personal relationship with Jesus by receiving Him in the Eucharist. Grant that through His living presence in my life, I may be healed in body, mind and spirit and strengthened in my faith. Amen.

Tuesday 7 December

Scripture

Matthew 18: 12 - 14

Reflection

It is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. In today's Gospel Jesus tells the parable of the Good Shepherd. After having lost one sheep out of a hundred, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine and goes out of his way to find the lost one. If we were in the same situation as the shepherd, our logic would suggest that we forget about the one lost sheep and focus on the ninety-nine. Fortunately, it is never the will of our loving Father that anyone should be lost.

Since 5 March 2020 when the first case of Covid-19 was reported in our country, we have had to endure tremendously challenging times. Many have lost their sense of direction, especially in regard to their faith. We can all agree that some of our brethren have not returned to our community of faith since we were dealt with Covid. Some have not attended Mass or any other communal gathering for over a year. They probably feel lost and isolated from Christ's flock.

Now is the time to Come Home! Advent offers an opportunity for a new beginning, and it starts, with the decision to Coming Home to the Father's House. God's love for us is unconditional! He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring back the lost. Not only is our God loving but he is also merciful and forgiving. He will never forget any of us, his children.

In addition, the prophet Isaiah assures us that: *He (GOD) is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother sheep.*

Practical Suggestion

Identify one person you know who needs help in finding their way back to God and to the community of believers. Reach out to them and invite them to Come Home to the Father's House.

Prayer

Lord, Shepherd of all your people, deliver us from the many troubles, worries and cares that assail us. May we always do what is pleasing in your sight, as we wait for the coming of Jesus. Keep us safe in the care of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday 8 December

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady

Scripture: *Luke 1: 26 - 38*

Reflection

The Greatest YES! Today's Gospel tells us of the essence of the Word made Flesh – Mary conceiving her Son, our Lord and Saviour, through the Holy Spirit.

Would Mary have really understood the implications of what the Angel Gabriel revealed to her? She was probably no older than 15, already betrothed to Joseph, and now she is told through an apparition that she is going to conceive a son – but not with Joseph! She must have been terrified. Yet, how deep must her faith and trust in God have been to have answered God's call with an emphatic, unconditional YES! *"I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me."* Her devotion to, and faith and trust in God gave Mary the peace of mind that she would be guided and strengthened by God to enable her to deal with whatever the consequences would be of her ready acceptance of God's message to her.

Mary must have been listening for, and open to receiving, messages from God. Are we listening for His messages to us? How open and ready are we to accept his call and the implications that follow it? Mary is our example of how we should be listening for our call from God and how we should respond to that call with a resounding YES! Let us pray that our fears and our natural hesitancy to move out of our comfort zones may not get in the way of our generous and positive response to God's call.

God's call to us is not likely to be as dramatic as his call, delivered by the Angel Gabriel, to Mary. This means that we need to be listening more carefully! We often face turning points in our lives. At these turning points we may receive a call from God to move in a direction that seems harder than the route we were on. The new direction may also appear not to be in line with our own dreams. Is our faith in God strong enough that we can be at peace with following His call?

Practical Suggestion:

Start a habit of reflection at the end of each day. Spend a few minutes reflecting on the opportunities, decisions, and suggestions you might have heard or read or been introduced to in the course of the day. Pray that God opens your mind and heart to recognising and accepting His call.

Prayer:

"I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me." Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the

incarnation of Christ your Son, was made known by the message of an Angel, may, by His passion and cross, be brought to the glory of His resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Thursday 9 December

Scripture

Isaiah 41: 13 – 20

"For I, Yahweh, Your God, I am holding you by the right hand; I tell you, 'Do not be afraid, I will help you'"

Reflection

Human beings are fearful people. The biologists tell us that fear is 'hardwired into our mind-body systems'. As soon as we perceive some threat to our safety or well-being, fear or anxiety manifests itself. It arises out of our need to be 'in control', and when that power is taken away from us, anxiety or fear rises.

Today's world is filled with situations that are way beyond our control – on personal and global levels! There is the ever-present threat of conflict and violence spilling over into our lives; there is the threat of Covid 19, with all its variants, which has made the world a very different place, and raised anxiety and fear levels everywhere; there are the dire warnings about 'global warming', which threaten our very existence... and then there is the fear of death which so many people harbour.

God's words come at a very opportune time: "I am holding you by the right hand; I tell you, 'Do not be afraid.'" Jesus assures us that He will always be there for us, that He has seen and experienced it all, and knows how frail we are. He is 'holding out His hand'! Place your hand in His and face the future, unafraid!

Practical suggestion

Reflect on your own level of anxiety; if you find that it is beginning to rise, discuss it with someone, perhaps someone who needs reassurance even more than you do! Share the words of God with that person and resolve together to change your outlook!

Prayer

Lord, help me not only to hear Your words, but to really believe them, so that trusting in You, I will face each day with serenity. I pray this in Your name



Friday 10 December

Scripture

Matthew 11: 16 - 19

Reflection

You will never please everyone! How true this is! It is near to impossible to satisfy everyone and to meet everyone's needs all the time. It is a hard lesson in life to learn because we want to please everyone all the time.

Jesus had first-hand experience of this. They had something to say about John the Baptist "He is possessed" and they had something to say about him "Look a glutton and a drunkard."

Jesus was never afraid of what people said about him. He knew that his mission was to speak the truth about God who loves and cares for his people, about salvation, and about the way we should live our lives. He was crucified because of what he said and did. When he left Galilee and went to Jerusalem he knew what would happen, but it did not deter him, neither did it cause him to alter or change his message.

The things that we do during Advent are not popular. Neither are the things the Church asks us to do. We choose to be different, to focus primarily on the spiritual rather than the frenetic activity that characterises this season. There are many people who are relieved when Christmas Day is over; they are tired and worn out by all the work and activities that go into preparing for Christmas Day. For those who enter into this time of spiritual preparation, Christmas begins on Christmas Day. We enter into and are enriched by the Christmas Season – not just one day of eating, drinking, gift giving and receiving. It doesn't matter what other people say or think about us and the way we go about our Advent and Christmas. We're never going to please everyone. Jesus knew that!

Practical Suggestion

"There is a time for everything and a season for everything under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). This is our time to prepare. In just two weeks it will be Christmas Eve. How are you going to make your Christmas (not just the day but the season) a spiritual celebration and experience? If you are part of a family, talk about this at dinner tonight.

Prayer

Father, fill my heart with Advent Peace, the peace your Son Jesus came to bring. Help me to live in peace with everyone, especially those who annoy me and are hostile towards me. Make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.



Saturday 11 December

Scripture

Matthew 17: 10-13

Reflection

Peter, James and John are walking down Mount Tabor with Jesus, having seen Him transfigured and gazed at his glory in the presence of Moses and Elijah.

Elijah who had lived some 900 years before, had been one of the greatest religious leaders of the Israelite people. He was a physically robust man, very unusual, very unconventional and one who survived many ordeals. He warned the people of impending doom because they were not following the Commandments given by God to Moses about 600 years before. He proved the authenticity of his God over the priests of Baal at Mt. Carmel, and brought renewed peace to his people. The Jewish people believed he never died but was whisked away in a fiery chariot.

Around 450 years later, in the last book of the Old Testament Malachi 4:5, God spoke through that prophet saying that He would send Elijah before the coming of the Lord. About 430 years after that, when the angel appeared to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, he told him that John would minister to the people “with the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17).

In the gospel today, Jesus remarks that Elijah had already been and the Jews had missed him. They still do and at every Passover meal, the door is left open and a seat kept at the table for Elijah. Some mistook Jesus as the one who came in the spirit and power of Elijah. (Luke 9:19).

Does the hand of God, the thread of His Almighty presence in Scripture bring us any sense of peace? To know that He has the whole of time in the palm of His hand and knows of every future event?

Practical Suggestion

Develop the habit of finding peace and solace in the Scriptures. Look for events that were foretold hundreds of years before that became a reality and draw strength that God is really in charge (even during this time of the pandemic).

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, never allow us to abandon our efforts to find a peace that is beyond all understanding, a peace that transcends our immediate turmoil. Amen

These Daily Reflections for Advent 2021 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Veronica Donnelly, Fr. Wandile Cagwe, Mike Montocchio, Irene Helsdon and George Cominos. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Advent.