



# Second Sunday of Advent

December 9, 2018

## Readings

*This week:*

Baruch 5:1–9

Philippians 1:3–6, 8–11

Luke 3:1–6

*Next week:*

Zephaniah 3:14–18a

Philippians 4:4–7

Luke 3:10–18

## Psalm

The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy. (*Psalm 126*)

## Today

Today's presider is Rev. Larry Percell.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waverley and Homer Streets, Palo Alto. Members of the Thomas Merton community participate in planning these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to "full, active and conscious participation" in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate, there are return envelopes in the bulletin on the last Sunday of each month for your convenience (donations by check or cash are welcome). The donation basket is in the back of church after Mass or available by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC envelope in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

## Calendar

**Sunday, December 9, 9:45 am-12 pm:** Kenya Crafts Faire in Thomas House

**Monday, December 10, 7:00 pm:** TMC Liturgy Committee, Thomas House Library

**Friday, December 14, 6:00 pm:** Friday Fish Fest dinner, Thomas House

## From Thomas Merton

I think sometimes that I may soon die, though I am not old (forty-seven). I don't know exactly what kind of conviction this thought carries with it or what I mean by it. Death is always a possibility for everyone. We live in the presence of this possibility. So I have a habitual awareness that I may die, and that if this is God's will, then I am glad. "Go ye forth to meet Him," and in the light of this I realize the futility of my cares and preoccupations, particularly my chief care, which is central to me, my work as a writer.

I do not feel very guilty about it, but it remains a "care," a focus that keeps my "self" in view, and I feel a little hampered. Though I know by experience that without this care and salutary work I would be much more in my own way, much more obstructed by my own inertia and confusion. If I am not fully free, then the love of God, I hope, will free me...

*--Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

# COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

## **Bring Adopt-A-Family gifts today & Dec. 16:**

For those who selected a green tree tag for a gift for the Seton School families, we are now collecting your wrapped gifts with the green tag taped on the front.

Leave the gifts at the table out in front of church (not under the tree in the back of the church vestibule).

If you wish to bring your gift to Barbara Kent's house at 130 Emma Lane (off Woodland Ave.) in Menlo Park, please call Barbara to arrange a time when she is home (650-323-0879).

Thank you so much for your generosity of spirit at Christmas!

## **Kenya crafts faire December 9:**

Each year Margo McAuliffe brings back handcrafted items from Kenya, which are available to those who make a donation to Kenya Help, a non-profit whose mission is to educate and train women, children and youth in Kenya by providing resources and support.

Come to the Thomas House between 9:45 a.m. and noon on Sunday, December 9, and enjoy the varied handmade items on display in the Bride's Room on the main floor in the back. There are charming Nativity sets, tree ornaments, colorful woven baskets, soap stone bowls, jewelry, shopping bags, fetching crib mobiles, fabric purses, carved wooden animals, Africa puzzles, greeting cards, and more. These make great gifts as well as home décor enhancements.

For a private viewing in Menlo Park, contact Margo at (650) 322-0821.

## **Anti-death penalty petition-signing today:**

Members of California People of Faith will be seeking signatures on petitions against the death penalty at today's Mass. See Terry McCaffrey and Larry Sullivan outside in front of the church after Mass.

**PRAY FOR US:** Please remember in your prayers this week Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, George Bouchey, Tom Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Dick Freeman, Fr. Thierry Geris, Deonna Gill, Emily Gill, Joanne Hasegawa, Fr. John Hester, Dean Judd, Hunter Kubit, Dick Jackman, Alicia Kot, Fr. Bill Leininger, Andre and Alyssa Lippard, Deacon Ysidro and Dolores Madrigal, Mary Rose McGuire, Maureen Mooney, Hayden Pastorini, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, Kay Williams, and T. J. Wooten. [Add or subtract names by e-mailing editors: Michelle Hogan, Kay Williams. See below.]

## **Seton School Library needs volunteers:**

Seton School turned its library into offices about a year ago, and the library books need to be catalogued before being installed in other classrooms.

Vicki Sullivan is looking for volunteers to help with this project on Mondays and Fridays from 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. Contact her at (650) 740-0124, or vicksullivan@comcast.net.

## **Next Fish Fest December 14 at 6:00 pm:**



Fish Fest! Tasty breaded fish filets and the ever-tangy Asian cole slaw will be served at the Thomas House on Friday, Dec. 14 at 6 p.m. We are hoping for a post-prandial sing-along under the guitar of one of our music ministry leaders.

Many thanks to people who generously bring snacks and desserts to share as well. All this for only \$5 per person, plus \$2 for a beer or generous glass of wine.

Join fellow pew-mates and friends who take advantage of this satisfying meal, chat and laugh together, enjoying the liberation from deciding "what's for dinner?"

**IMPORTANT TO RSVP:** Helen Baumann, 650-327-9236, hbbbaumann@aol.com, or Kay Williams, 650-270-4188, kaywill@pacbell.net.

## **Seton School pupusas & flan reception Dec. 9:**

St. Elizabeth Seton School families would like to show their gratitude to all St. Thomas Aquinas parishioners with a little reception in the St. Albert the Great Hospitality Center next Sunday, December 9th: 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Our Seton School choir will sing some jolly songs for you; parents will make delicious *pupusas*\* and flan, and coffee/tea/lemonades will be there to enjoy too. Student-led school tours will also be available as we love to show off our school!!

All are invited: please join us for a little Christmas cheer. Questions? Please call Carmel Caligaris at 650-326-1258.

\*A traditional Salvadoran dish of a thick corn tortilla stuffed with a savory filling. It is typically accompanied by *curtido* (a spicy cabbage slaw), and tomato salsa.

**Board:** Gerard McGuire, gerardmc@aol.com, 650-814-2223  
**Bulletin:** Kay Williams (Dec. 9 & 30) kaywill@pacbell.net  
Michelle Hogan (Dec. 16 & 23) myhogan@comcast.net  
**Finance:** Helena Wee, 650-323-7987, shhwee@sbcglobal.net  
**Hospitality:** Jim Davis, 328-2584  
**Liturgy:** John Arnold, 325-1421, jsaoso@comcast.net  
Sally Benson, 408-972-5843, sallymbenson@gmail.com  
**Membership:** Kay Williams, 650-270-4188, kaywill@pacbell.net  
**Needs Net:** Roberta Kehret, 650-494-1488, robkehr@yahoo.com  
**Adult Education:** Jim Davis, 650-704-8002, Jim\_Davis@pacbell.net  
Mary Coady, 650-261-9155, coady\_94025@yahoo.com  
**SpeakOut:** Diana Diamond, 650-323-4787, dianaldiamond@gmail.com

# COMMUNITY FORUM

*Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns*

## ***Time is on our side:***

[By Cassandra Nelson, *Commonweal*, 12/5/18]

Casinos have been on my mind a lot lately, although I'm not a gambler. What I keep thinking about is the way that they're designed to make patrons lose track of time. The absence of clocks and windows is purposeful. If all is going well—at least from the house's point of view—guests can place bets from 4:00 in the afternoon until 4:00 in the morning and hardly notice the hours pass. The goal, of course, is to maximize profits. The longer you're in there, the more chances they have to take your money.

More and more, I wonder if we're all starting to exist in a version of casino-time, where one hour bleeds into the next with little discernible difference. Light pollution is growing in both scale and brightness every year, giving the nighttime an artificial glow. Inside our houses, we bask in a different kind of artificial light, with smartphones and tablets constantly by our sides. Backlit screens, a twenty-four-hour news cycle, and features like AutoPlay and infinite scrolling make it easy to lose sense of time. In fact, technology and social media companies deliberately employ casino-like tactics in order to make websites and applications as addictive as possible. It's not an accident that you can intend to look up one headline, or one video on YouTube, and before you know it, discover that you've consumed a dozen more. Meanwhile, the pay-off of what we encounter online—whether it's the dopamine hit of a well received Instagram post, or horror at the latest bad news—tends to be fleeting. So we keep scrolling down, or hitting refresh, like someone sitting glassy-eyed before a slot machine.

The net effect of such trends can be to trap us in a kind of endless, lonely, and anxious present. And a diminished sense of time... could lead to a diminished sense of hope...

Thankfully, believers have a lifeline in the form of the liturgical calendar, which started up again on December 2. ... Advent is a season of hopeful expectation, covering the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Its name derives from the Latin words for "to come," and what is on its way, this and every year, is Christ and the promise of salvation. Both feel sorely needed at the moment.

Advent is followed by the Christmas season, which celebrates Jesus' birthday and God's entrance into the world. After Christmas there's a short break and then comes Lent, a time of fasting and penance... The forty days of Lent lead up to the Triduum—which chronicles the passion of Christ and his descent to Hell—and then to the triumph of Easter and the glory of Jesus' Resurrection. After fifty days of Eastertide comes Pentecost, which marks the Holy Spirit's entrance into the

world.

And then there's another break, a much longer one, a second stretch of what is called Ordinary Time. The word "ordinary" in this context doesn't mean boring, exactly, although it's likely not a coincidence that Ordinary Time accounts for more than half of the liturgical year, and that at least 50 percent of our day-to-day lives, if we're lucky, passes in a somewhat unremarkable fashion. "Ordinary" here mainly means part of a series. Each week of Ordinary Time is marked by an ordinal number: first week after Pentecost, second week after Pentecost, etc. After six months of Ordinary Time, the whole cycle starts again....

The liturgical calendar can do much to counter casino-time. It returns us to the physical world, for one thing. Pay attention to the priest's vestments, to the colors of the decorations in church. ... Such details remind us that however chaotic the world can seem today, there is still order and meaning. And liturgy by its very nature—descending as it does from the Greek words for "public" and "work"—helps pull us out of loneliness and into community.... The church calendar can lend additional richness to our lives, thanks to the way that it sacralizes all aspects of the human condition. So often today we are surrounded by narratives of endless growth and ceaseless triumph. The way we talk about shareholder profits, university endowments, average SAT scores, and the desired life expectancies of Silicon Valley CEOs suggests that what goes up should really keep going up, indefinitely. If it doesn't, something must be wrong. Meanwhile, advertisements and social media can make it seem like everyone else is living a perfect life, effortlessly. The upshot of these narratives is that many people lack a way to talk about... human weakness, defeat, or death without framing them as pathological.

The liturgical calendar, by contrast, acknowledges that life can't all be hallelujahs here below. It carves out space for mourning as well as rejoicing, for fasts as well as feasts.... In doing so, the church calendar provides a model to strengthen us and dignify our experiences in times of both joy and sorrow.... It also means that suffering and death—for some periods in our lives can feel like a kind of death—is never the end of the story, because Christ conquered death on Easter morning. If you walk away from the slot machine, and out into the dawning light, you can be reminded of this truth every day.

... [T]he rhythm of the church year can carry us along from one season to the next in our lives, and help us find the melody again when we've gotten lost in the noise....

[Cassandra Nelson is a Bradley Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia.]

## Advent Wreath Prayer for Second Sunday of Advent



God of power and mercy,  
Open our hearts in welcome.  
Remove the things that hinder us from receiving  
Christ with joy, so that we may share his wisdom  
and become one with him when he comes in glory.  
For he lives and reigns with you and the Holy  
Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

### ***An inescapable contrast:***

[By Jim Wallis, *Sojourners*, 12/5/18]

George Herbert Walker Bush was a man and a political leader that most everybody liked. . . . “One of the nicest and most decent men I ever knew,” testified leaders from across the political spectrum, “a person with genuine character and dignity.” . . . Many say he was clearly guided by moral and religious principles. I have been especially struck by how many people have spoken about his characteristic humility throughout his career as one of the most powerful leaders of the most powerful nation in the world. . . . He hated bragging and people who did. Instead, he continuously lifted the values and calling of service and even the commitment to sacrifice for others and his country.

All the media reports and memorials on the passing of Bush 41 have listed his many missions over his 94 years. The commentaries have recounted his careers at most every level of elected office — from bottom to top — envoy and ambassador to countries and the world, director of institutions like the CIA, chair of his political party, and many post-presidential missions, like bringing humanitarian aid after disasters.

But I believe the remembrance of the life of George H. W. Bush this week and going forward give this man one final mission: to demonstrate the values that reveal who genuine leaders are, contrasting the values (or lack thereof) that reveal who are not. What does a leader do or not do? What are the markers of true public service that differentiate it from public exploitation?

At his passing, the reflections on Bush’s life and leadership could paint a clear contrast at such a historically dangerous moment in American life — a moment in which we grapple for words like decency, character, dignity, empathy, humility, service, sacrifice, or morality to assign to those in leadership.

It’s true that the Bushes were entrenched in the elitism of American patrician leadership — with all the injustice and hypocrisy that contains. Columnist E.J. Dionne said, “Nevertheless, our country would be better if elites were as public-spirited as Bush was and if conservatism reflected his Eisenhower style of balancing capitalism with public action, striving with compassion.”

This week is revealing an inescapable contrast between personal and public values and practice by a passing

president and the ruling one. If we allow that to become a national reflection, and even a national moment of prayer and repentance, might this week help us save the soul of our nation?

Now let’s be clear here: George H. W. Bush was no saint, and, as Dionne put it, “saints don’t win elections.” The 1988 campaign, in which he won the presidency, was an ugly one against Michael Dukakis. The infamous Willie Horton ad deliberately exploited racial fear and hatred for political gain, and even Lee Atwater, the dirty politics expert who led Bush’s campaign, ultimately apologized for it in a death bed repentance. That kind of Republican use of racism is historically connected to where we have come today with Donald Trump — and Trump’s racial tribalism has now taken over the Republican Party.

Bush often went along with Republican politics as a loyal systems guy. As Todd Purdam said in the Atlantic:

“In his first Senate race, in Texas in 1964, he abandoned his family’s moderate Republicanism to join Barry Goldwater in opposing the landmark federal Civil Rights Act as an invasion of privacy rights. But he agonized in a letter to a Jewish friend and supporter: ‘What shall I do? How will I do it? I want to win, but not at the expense of justice, not at the expense of the dignity of any man—not at the expense of teaching my children a prejudice I do not feel.’”

Just four years later, as a member of Congress from Houston, he bravely supported the 1968 Fair Housing Act over the opposition of many of his constituents.

Bush later supported important updates to the Clean Air Act. The Americans With Disabilities Act was perhaps his most important domestic accomplishment, marked by one of the largest bipartisan bill signing ceremonies in American history. Democrats who were there reminded us this week of what Bush said: “Let the shameful walls of exclusion finally come tumbling down.”

Bush’s greatest contribution came in the foreign policy arena. His characteristic humility and his mother’s instructions against bragging helped Bush to manage the very complicated and dangerous process of ending the Cold War. He wasn’t one to spike the football or dance on the falling Berlin Wall; his skills at building relationships were certainly helpful, as he and Mikhail Gorbachev negotiated a tremendous change in the world order without bloodshed.

Political disagreements, even substantial ones, persist this week as we remember the oldest living president in American history. But the personal values, family values, and moral values of the man memorialized this week in the National Cathedral are overriding politics. Because the Bush family is so hospitable and honorable, the current president was invited to the service — but he was not invited to speak. Instead he was in the presence of four other living presidents. I wonder if this very awkward, even perhaps painful day for him, might cause some personal reflection on his part about contrasting values. For our nation and our nation’s leaders we are always instructed to pray and hope for redemption. #

## ***50 years after Merton's death, conference at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago explores his life and legacy:***

(by Heidi Schlumpf, *National Catholic Reporter*, 12/7/18)

Chicago — Last month, just days before the midterm elections, CNN anchor Chris Cuomo ended an episode of his nightly show — which had focused on recent demonization of immigrants — with a lengthy quote on totalitarianism from Trappist monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton. Although the cited passage from the 1960 book *Disputed Questions* was about Europe in World War II, Cuomo said Merton's words are "exactly about what is going on here right now — frighteningly exact." Cuomo is not the only one touting Merton's contemporary relevance. Despite lukewarm enthusiasm by some church leaders, Merton's writings on interfaith relations, racism, social justice and contemplation continue to inspire Catholics 50 years after his death.

"His message seems to endure and to be as prophetic today, if not more so, than when he wrote it," said Paul Pearson, director of the Thomas Merton Center, an archive of Merton's papers, a museum and a research center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. On spirituality, social justice and interfaith dialogue, "everything Merton says is still relevant today," Pearson noted, adding that if he were still alive, Merton would probably be writing on "fundamentally the same issues."

Monday (Dec. 10) marks the 50th anniversary of Merton's tragic accidental death — he was electrocuted by an electric fan near Bangkok, where he was attending an interreligious monastic conference. The anniversary is being marked by events around the world, from Russia to Argentina, from Cleveland to Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, where Merton lived and was buried.

Pearson is one of a dozen Merton scholars — many of whom were not yet born when Merton died — who will present at a conference at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago this weekend. Titled "Disappear From View?: Thomas Merton Fifty Years Later, and Beyond," the gathering kicks off Friday evening with a keynote by Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr — whom some see as a spiritual successor to Merton — and continues with a daylong schedule of talks, panels and Mass on Saturday....

Pearson sees interest in Merton "growing rather than declining," not only in the United States, but around the world, with more dissertations on his work coming from Eastern Europe and Asia, and an increasing number of courses being taught about him. At Bellarmine, a class on Merton is offered every semester and usually has a waiting list, even though many young Catholics don't know Merton or his work. Students love learning about contemplation, prayer and silence, but Merton is often their first exposure to Catholicism as something other than dogmas and moral laws, said Gregory Hillis, associate professor of theology, who teaches the course. "There's a craving for a deeper spiritual life that comes from a deep sense of anxiety that people have," said Hillis, noting that "most of these students have never lived in a situation when we haven't been at war."

Like many of a previous generation, Hillis read Merton's best-selling 1948 autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, when he was young, and it profoundly influenced his life. He applied

for the job at Bellarmine, in part, to study Merton and is writing a book on Merton's Catholicism. In a fit of "youthful exuberance," he even got a tattoo of a drawing by Merton...

Merton's famous prayer, which begins, "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going ...", first introduced Michael Brennan to Merton in the 1970s, when he was facing possible draft into the Vietnam War. Now the coordinator of the Chicago Chapter of the International Thomas Merton Society, Brennan sees the spiritual writer as a "contemporary hero" who speaks to today's social and church issues. "He has a great deal to say in this day and age, particularly on compassion, peace and justice, and empathy," Brennan said. "I think he's as relevant today as he was in his day." Brennan calls Merton "a spiritual director from afar," with a "common-sense approach to life." He heeds Merton's call for contemplation by taking time for silence at the chapel at O'Hare Airport, where he works as a baggage handler.

But it is Merton's writing on justice — and particularly on race — that many say needs to be most heeded today. Early on, Merton saw racism as a problem of white privilege and a structural sin. Author and filmmaker Cassidy Hall believes Merton's work is eerily relevant. "It's a constant reminder of the work still unfolding for peace, social justice, equality, human rights, and more," she said in an email to NCR. After reading Merton for the first time seven years ago, Hall was inspired to make a pilgrimage to all 17 Cistercian/Trappist monasteries in the U.S., which resulted in the documentary film "In Pursuit of Silence." She is now working on a short documentary on Merton's final years in the hermitage...

But Merton's openness to interreligious dialogue made some Catholics nervous — then and now. In 2005, when the U.S. bishops were creating a catechism for young adults, in which each chapter begins with a profile of an exemplary Catholic, Merton was originally included but removed. "The generation we were speaking to had no idea who he was," then-Pittsburgh Bishop Donald Wuerl, chair of the editorial oversight board, said at the time. But he also alluded to concerns that Merton's studies of Eastern religions implied a lack of commitment to Catholicism.

Nothing could be further from the truth, say Merton scholars. And Pope Francis must agree, having chosen Merton as one of four Americans he highlighted in his speech to Congress in 2015. Merton "remains a source of spiritual inspiration and a guide for many people," the pope said. "Merton was above all a man of prayer, a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time and opened new horizons for souls and for the church. He was also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions."

Chicago conference organizer Steven Millies said Merton was a "restless believer" who can speak to today's "nones" and others who struggle with institutional religion. "He struggled with the tradition as much as he wanted to live inside it," said Millies, director of the Bernardin Center. "I think it's helpful to go back to someone who was a thoughtful, believing, questioning, critical commentator and observer of the social condition, who was trying to find a way to connect with the world outside the church," he said.

[Heidi Schlumpf is NCR national correspondent. Her email address is [hschlumpf@ncronline.org](mailto:hschlumpf@ncronline.org).]