



# First Sunday of Advent

December 1, 2019

## Readings

*This week:*

Isaiah 2:1–5

Romans 13:11–14

Matthew 24: 37–44

*Next week:*

Isaiah 11:1–10

Romans 15:4–9

Matthew 3: 1–12

## Psalm

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. (*Psalm 122*)

Today's presider is Msgr. John Sandersfeld.

## Today



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

Wednesday, December 4, 7:00 pm STA Site Committee, Thomas House library

Saturday, December 7, 9 am - noon Advent retreat with Fr. Larry Percell, SAGH (see pg. 2)

## From Thomas Merton

The certainty of Christian hope lies beyond passion and beyond knowledge. Therefore, we must sometimes expect our hope to come in conflict with darkness, desperation and ignorance. Therefore, too, we must remember that Christian optimism is not a perpetual sense of euphoria, an indefectible comfort in whose experience neither anguish nor tragedy can possibly exist. We must not strive to maintain a climate of optimism by the mere suppression of tragic realities. Christian optimism lies in a hope of victory that transcends all tragedy: a victory in which we pass beyond tragedy to glory with Christ crucified and risen.

*--Seasons of Celebration*

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. Visit: [www.thomasmerton.org](http://www.thomasmerton.org).

# COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

## Advent Morning with Fr. Percell December 7:

Advent:  
A time  
for  
peace,  
a time  
for hope,  
a time  
for  
sanity.

Please join us for a morning of prayer, reflections, and discussion as we explore the graces we need this Advent during these troubling times in our Church, our country and our world.

Our guide will be Father Larry Percell, a retired priest of the Diocese of San Jose, former pastor of St. Nicholas Parish in Los Altos, and former spiritual director at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Los Altos.

The retreat will be on Saturday, December 7th, at St. Albert the Great Hospitality Center, 1095 Channing Avenue, Palo Alto. It begins at 9:00 am and finishes by noon. Refreshments will be available. All are welcome. No fee, but donations gratefully accepted. [Info: Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net, 650-270-4188.]

## TMC donation envelope enclosed today:



Please use the envelope enclosed in this bulletin to make your monthly contribution to the support of the Thomas Merton Center. Your dollars make possible the sponsorship of the 8:45 Sunday Mass, monthly contributions to Seton School (\$1,000) and the Ecumenical Hunger Program (\$40), spiritual education talks, retreats, and the publication of this bulletin. Lay-led, self-sustaining, self-generating—this is TMC. Thanks to all who contribute.

## Altar of Remembrance photos:

The photos of loved ones were taken down from the Altar of Remembrance yesterday. Look for your photos in the box in the church vestibule.

## St. Vincent de Paul financial report:

Anne Fillin provided the STA SVCP annual financial report (2018-19) to the parish Pastoral Stewardship Council in November. The donations income (with gratitude to the many donors) of just-under \$60,000 was distributed as follows (round numbers):

Rents/deposits	\$44,000
Utilities	4,000
Food	8,000
Transportation	1,000
Those we serve	2,000
Operations	1,000

Please join us after Mass in the Thomas House for coffee and donuts. We especially encourage newcomers or those passing through town to stop by for food and fellowship.

## Adopt-a-Family continues today:

Before and after the 8:45 Mass today, information and gift tags for students and families chosen from St. Elizabeth Seton School will be available. You may choose to purchase a child's or family's specific gift request or purchase a gift certificate from Target or similar store for a child to purchase a second gift. We are suggesting approximately a \$40 value per gift this year. [This is a separate initiative from the tags on The Giving Tree displayed at the back of church each year.] All



gifts are to be wrapped, tagged and returned to the TMC table at church by Sunday, Dec. 8 or 15. Contact Barbara Kent 650- 323-0879 with questions. Please stop by our table to sign up for a tag.

## Heart & Home Shelter opens December 1:

If you know a single adult woman who would be a good fit for the Heart & Home program, please refer her by filling out an online form at [www.hhcollab.org](http://www.hhcollab.org).

If there's space at the shelter, Heart and Home's team will contact client within 24 hours to have:

- A phone call to assess whether the program is a fit.
- An in-person meeting near the shelter for intake.

A client who is responsive to H&H communications and a good fit for the program can start staying when the shelter opens.

### Contact Info:

Lori Mills and Monique Norte  
Shelter Directors,  
650-600-1555 (call/text/voicemail)  
[shelter@hhcollab.org](mailto:shelter@hhcollab.org)

**PRAY FOR US:** Please remember in your prayers this week Art Adams, Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, Tom Carmody, Kerry Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Jim Davis, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Dick Freeman, 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, Patricia Markee, Nancy Marty, Maureen Mooney, Hayden Pastorini, Alicia Placone-Combetta, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, and T. J. Wooten.

[Add/subtract names by e-mailing Kay Williams, [kaywill@pacbell.net](mailto:kaywill@pacbell.net).]

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**SpeakOut Committee:** Diana Diamond, [dianaldiamond@gmail.com](mailto:dianaldiamond@gmail.com)

# COMMUNITY FORUM

*Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns*

## **How you can help Pope Francis:**

[By Robert Mickens, Blog post on “Go, Rebuild My House”, publication of Sacred Heart University 11/15/2019]

In *Evangelii gaudium*, the most important document of his pontificate, Pope Francis urges every bishop and local Church around the world to “undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform”.

This apostolic exhortation, also known as “The Joy of the Gospel,” seeks to “draw out the pastoral consequences” of the Second Vatican Council. It does so by offering “guidelines” for a “new phase of evangelization... marked by enthusiasm and vitality.”... “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation,” he says.

“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities,” Francis insists .

Transforming, channeling and rethinking are all synonyms for changing such customs, structures and ways of doing things.

“We should not be afraid to examine them,” the pope says, even if they have deep historic roots and are beautiful. The litmus test is whether they still communicate the Gospel to people of our times.

The fact is that many of the Church’s customs and structures have become symbols of a self-preservation that is pathologically inward looking. They’ve become part of a comfort zone that the pope is trying to shake us out of; part of an illness that we don’t even realize is ailing us...

The pope issued *Evangelii Gaudium* in November 2013. That’s six years ago. But in these six years, how many dioceses around the world have actually begun the “resolute process of discernment, purification and reform” that the pope calls for? How many bishops in the United States have done so?

As a national body, they certainly have not. Judging by the business-as-usual proceedings at the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ fall meeting in Baltimore this week, one wonders how many of these prelates have even read the pope’s apostolic exhortation.

Reform-minded Catholics in the United States are right to be discouraged by an episcopal leadership that is so clearly out of sync with Pope Francis and the priorities and tone he has set for renewing and reforming the Church. The bishops are not following either the spirit

or the letter of *Evangelii gaudium*. And let’s not even talk about his encyclical on the Care of Our Common Home, *Laudato Si’*.

Many of the bishops – and priests ordained within the past 25 years – seem to be more attached to the magisterium of Benedict XVI, but in an ideological way that turns the former pope’s more carefully nuanced theological musings into weapons for the culture war they are waging against “modernity.”

They and the clericalist laypeople that support them are obviously trying to outlast Francis, who is 83 years old next month. Their dream is that it won’t be long before there is a new pope who will base his pontificate on the “we have always done it this way” mentality.

This dream is a nightmare for those Catholics who...love and support Pope Francis and his vision for a reformed Church and a more united global family....

How can reform-minded Catholics help the pope in this arduous task of rebuilding a house that is in such a clear state of collapse? He cannot do it alone.

**First** of all, be generous in responding to the request he makes almost every time he ends a speech or address: pray for him. Don’t underestimate the power of prayer. Pray, also, for all bishops and priests – those who are supporting Francis, those who are indifferent to him and those actively working against him.

**Second**, actively encourage all those in ministry (ordained or not) to read the “The Joy of the Gospel.” Invite them, along with other friends and people of your parish, to form a study group to look more carefully at the document and find ways to implement its guidelines. There are many practical steps that can be taken even without formal permission from Church authorities. They can contribute to a process of transformation, development and lasting change.

**Third**, invite people who have drifted away from the Church or have never felt welcome to join you at your regular place of worship. You will likely have to accompany them closely, at least at the beginning. But this, too, can be catalyst for introducing new energy for change.

**And, finally**, do not give up hope. The psalmist gives encouragement by proclaiming, “Put not your trust in princes, in mortals that cannot save.”

Instead, be assured that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church and, as Lady Julian of Norwich said so famously in the 14th century, “All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.” It may sound naïve. It may sound silly. But it is the truly Christian response.

[Robert Mickens is the English editor for La Croix International website.]

## ***Advent preparation of heart--and vision:***

[By Jaime L. Waters, *America*, 11/15/19]

For many people, December is about preparing for Christmas: buying gifts, decorating trees and celebrating with family and friends. But the readings that begin Advent give us a different and more challenging starting place, reminding us that we must prepare not only our homes but our hearts for the arrival of Jesus Christ.

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah draws attention to the Lord's mountain in Jerusalem, Mount Zion. In Israel's history, mountains are often places of divine encounter and instruction...Moses receives the law on Mount Sinai. While reflecting on Mount Zion, Isaiah describes it as an elevated focal point that guides people to "walk in the light of the Lord" (Is 2:5). Centuries later Paul writes to a community in Rome, "Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom 13:12). Seeking to convince his audience to live lives inspired by Christ, Paul, like Isaiah, uses light as a metaphor for living justly. These texts remind us to orient our lives toward the Lord.

The Gospel reading from Matthew then talks about the necessity of preparation in order to orient our lives toward God. This kind of preparation stands in contrast to the comforting rituals of getting ready for the holiday season. Instead, Matthew depicts Jesus recalling a period filled with so much corruption and sin that the Lord destroyed the earth by flood (Gen 6:1-7; 7:11-24). Modern readers, like Matthew's ancient audience, are probably unnerved by hearing about tales of destruction past. Why does Advent have such an ominous start?

Even though Advent is leading up to the celebration of Jesus' birth, today's Gospel reading comes from the end of Matthew. Jesus tells the disciples to be vigilant for the *parousia* at the end of days, the second coming of Christ connected to a period of final judgment. Jesus declares that the disciples do not know when Christ will return, so they need to stay ready. In the liturgical context of Advent, this language reminds us to prepare for Christ's arrival not only at Christmas but at all times in our lives. The following chapter of Matthew gives guidance on how to prepare for the Lord.

In the famous scene of judgment in Matthew 25, Jesus tells his disciples that they have encountered him in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner and all those in need: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). To prepare for the Lord, we must realize that the Lord is already with us. We need not wait until Christmas or the end of days to encounter Christ. We should see Christ in all people, especially those who are most vulnerable and in need of mercy and love.

So, deck the halls, feast and be merry, but let us not forget that to truly prepare during this Advent season, we must be guided by the light of Christ and see Christ in the people we encounter in our daily lives. #

## ***Love Prevails--a book review:***

[By Bill Tammeus, *National Catholic Reporter*, 11/27/19]

*Love Prevails: One Couple's Story of Faith and Survival in the Rwandan Genocide*, By Jean Bosco Rutagengwa with Daniel G. Groody (Orbis Books)

.....

In the 1994 Rwandan genocide, at least 800,000 people, mostly from the Tutsi ethnic group, were slaughtered in 100 days...Belgium came to rule that east-central African land in 1916 and, decades later, left it ripe for exactly the kind of irrational murderous rage that took place in that largely Catholic country, a rage described in deeply personal ways in this new book.

As the BBC recounted in a retrospective 2011 story about how the genocide happened, the colonial rulers of Rwanda, early in their reign, "produced identity cards classifying people according to their ethnicity. The Belgians considered the Tutsis to be superior to the Hutus. Not surprisingly, the Tutsis welcomed this idea."

Hutus and minority Tutsis battled for supremacy until the airplane of the president (a Hutu) was shot down in April 1994, causing Rwandans to erupt into lethal bedlam as hardline Hutus took revenge on the Tutsis and some moderate Hutus for that killing.

What Jean Bosco Rutagengwa, a Tutsi, tells here is the remarkable story of how he and his fiancée (now wife, Christine) stayed alive (barely) and how he almost abandoned his Catholic faith amid the unfathomable blood and gore that destroyed most of their families. But it's also the story of how he finally recovered that faith....

When genocide broke out, the author notes, many Rwandans "did not think that evil could prevail over the forces of good. After all, Rwanda was a majority Christian nation, with an impressive church presence"...

The many near-death experiences suffered by Rutagengwa and his fiancée — including their stay in what later became famously known in a film as "Hotel Rwanda" — are the stuff of thriller movies. Somehow, he writes, luck, courage, prayer and inexplicable circumstance combined to keep them alive when their deaths often seemed minutes away.

Over and over, Rutagengwa must confront the reality that Christians — mostly Catholics — brutalized one another: ...His question was: "How does one live with the enormity of evil and remain a sane human being?" It's a question we all confront if we're paying attention.

Rutagengwa's answers may not, in the end, be our own, but his experience can guide us toward a life rooted in eternal values even if we're trying to survive hell on earth.

[Bill Tammeus writes the daily "Faith Matters" blog for The Kansas City Star's website, a column for *The Presbyterian Outlook* and a column for *Flatland*, KCPT-TV's digital magazine. His latest book is *The Value of Doubt: Why Unanswered Questions, Not Unquestioned Answers, Build Faith*.]