

Advent Day of Reflection
Dec. 5 2020

Let us place ourselves in the presence of God

The Lord is coming, let us go to meet Him with all the energy of our will. We draw near to Jesus, “the fountain of life and holiness”, with an ardent desire to drink from this inexhaustible fount.

The Lord be with you

And with your Spirit

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke

Glory to you Oh Lord

“When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky. Before all this happens, however, they will seize and

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives.

If you were to pick a scripture passage that would describe the year 2020, you might, as I did pick this reading from Luke. It is the gospel reading of the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary time, the week before the feast of Christ the King. A time when the church focuses on the end times. It is in Cycle C, so we won't hear it in Mass until late November of 2022.

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

Yes, it seems that we truly are in the end times; so much bad news has happened this year that we can easily forget some of the earlier tragedies that occurred. Things that would make headlines in a normal year don't get the attention of the media because of the larger issues that continue to dominate our attention; the COVID 19 pandemic. 1.5 million deaths worldwide and climbing. A pandemic that has affected every aspect of our lives. Tacit approval of Oppression of people that may be different from ourselves. Social unrest. A contested election and a deeply divided country. A record-breaking hurricane season where the Gulf Coast and Nicaragua have been hit with multiple storms, wreaking havoc in places already reeling from poverty. A worldwide economic downturn, lines at food pantries reminiscent of the great depression, arms races with China and Russia, wars, earthquakes, massive wild fires in the US and in Australia. The integrity of our institutions threatened. The list seems endless. We are glad to

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

see the end of 2020, but don't hold out much hope for 2021.

Yes, it seems we are in the 'End Times' as indeed we have been since the Ascension of our Lord, yet it seems so close today.

Our human reaction is to 'hole up' in our COVID cocoon. To protect ourselves and the heck with everyone else. Strip the stores bare and hoard the toilet paper. Yet that is not what we are called to do as Christians. So how do we see the Star of Bethlehem in these times? How can we see God in all of this? How can we, as we heard in Luke's gospel, persevere to secure our lives?

These are the questions we face as we enter the Advent season. A season the Church gives us to provide a time of reflection not only on the Incarnation two centuries ago, but also on the coming of our Savior at the end of time as well. And so, we hear about the end times at the end of the Liturgical year and now in Advent, which means the

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

coming, we spend time reflecting on those two comings.

As is always the case, if we turn to scripture, we can find ways to see God in all of this turmoil. I have spent some time reflecting on the readings for the Sundays in Advent, and have identified four practical ways that we can use to draw ourselves closer to God and find that peace and joy we identify with Christmas even in these times of uncertainty and unrest.

Let us first look at our Gospel from last Sunday. This is from the Gospel of Mark Chapter 13:33-37

Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come

suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"

When we think of being watchful, we usually think of it as being vigilant against an outside threat. A sentry guarding a military base, for instance, or a father keeping a watchful eye on his daughter's dates.

But in a spiritual sense, it means keeping watch on our hearts, that deepest center of our person, the irreplaceable and irreducible "I" of our unique self.

St. Hesychius, an abbot who lived in the 8th or 9th century describes watchfulness this way;

"Watchfulness is a spiritual method which, if practiced over a long period, completely frees us: with God's help from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words and evil actions. It leads, in so far as this is possible, to a sure knowledge of the inapprehensible God, and helps us to penetrate the divine and hidden mysteries. It enables us to fulfill every divine commandment in the Old and New

Testaments and bestows upon us every blessing of the age to come. It is, in the true sense, purity of heart, a state blessed by Christ when He says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'."

St. Hesychios then goes on to say that there are five steps, if you will, in practicing watchfulness.

1. Scrutinizing every mental image or provocation
2. Freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and in praying.
3. Humbly calling on Jesus for help, especially using the Jesus Prayer. "Lord Jesus Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner."
4. Always have the thought of death in one's mind.
5. Fix one's gaze on heaven and pay no attention to anything material.

This advent, try practicing these 5 steps, especially #2. If you spend some time every day, even for a few minutes, in silent prayer, it will go a long way

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

toward achieving that inner peace we all strive for. If you are new to spending time in silent prayer, sit comfortably in a quiet place, and ask God to be with you and help you silence your thoughts.

Concentrate on your breath going in and out and feel the rising and falling of your chest. Feel the rhythm of your breathing, and as you do bring your contemplation to feeling God's Presence. Sit for 10 minutes silently. Remain at peace and let go of any intruding wayward thoughts bringing yourself back to the quiet Presence of God in you.

In our readings for the second Sunday of Advent, the recurring theme in all the readings is repentance, and by extension all of the Sacraments.

While reconciliation is stressed in our scripture passages, we prepare the way of our Lord through life in all the Sacraments, especially the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

In our Gospel we hear of John the Baptist proclaiming a baptism of repentance and the forgiveness of sin.

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

St. Peter challenges us. He speaks of the coming of the day of the Lord when the heavens will pass away and the elements are dissolved by fire. What sort of persons ought we to be? Conduct yourselves with holiness and devotion he tells us.

Isaiah tells us to speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins.

The power of the grace of God's mercy is indeed double from any sin we may have committed. All we have to do is have remorse, confess the sins, and strive to do better. What a great gift we have in the Sacrament of Reconciliation! Take advantage of it this Advent. Another good practice to consider is the Evening Examen, where we look back at our day with God, see what lessons we can derive from our failings, ask for His pardon and peace, and strive to do better the next day. An easy way to practice this is to go to the God in All Things Website

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

(<https://godinallthings.com/prayer/evening-examen/>) and click on the Evening Examen.

Daily Mass, as often as possible, with reception of the Eucharist, and frequent confession are great things to do to brighten that light of Christ within us.

The readings for the third Sunday of Advent reflect the beginning of not only of joy in our hearts, but a sense of mission as well as we approach Christmas.

Violet is the liturgical color of Advent. Violet is a dark and penitential color, but it is also the ancient color for royalty and wealth. Through baptism, we have been immersed in Light and Life, and we have been given the royalty of being children of the King of Heaven. So, violet expresses well both these aspects: darkness and royalty. Yet, on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, we see Rose as the liturgical color. Gaudete translates from Latin as rejoice and is the first word of the Entrance Antiphon at Mass. Rose is a softening of violet. It is violet approaching white. In that Rose color we begin to discern the white of Christmas. We remember that Christ has already come. The Word has been made flesh, we have been redeemed and yet, we still wait for our

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

King to come again. This is the already and not yet of the Christian life, the mystery of Faith, that we express after the Consecration at Mass.

Just as we discern the beginnings of the white of Christmas in rose color of Gaudete Sunday, through our watchfulness and life in the Sacraments, we begin to discern the ever-increasing light of Christ in our hearts and the purpose for which He gave it to us. We rejoice in our newfound light, our release from darkness but also in our newfound mission to tell others about this Light.

Isaiah expresses this sense of joy and mission in our first reading. ***“The spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release prisoners.”*** He goes on to say; ***“I Rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the Joy of my Soul.”*** And why? Because as he begins to see out of the darkness, he finds himself clothed with a robe a salvation, wrapped in a mantle of justice, adorned like a bridegroom with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with Jewels.

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

And in our responsorial psalm taken from the Magnificat, Mary tells us that her soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. Why? Because the Lord had done great things for me. He has mercy on those who fear him. He has filled the hungry with good things, and He has remembered his promise of mercy.

Paul too, in our second reading from his first letter to the Thessalonians tells us to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in all things give thanks. Here too, though, he tells us what we must do with this Light of Christ. Do not quench the Spirit, don't despise prophetic utterances, and test everything; retaining what is good.

And in John the Baptist, who we read about in our Gospel on Gaudete Sunday, we hear of the mission that we, through our Baptism, have been given.

“A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.”

This advent let us strive to not only rejoice in in God our Savior, but also to proclaim to the world the greatness of

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

the Lord. The need for the corporal works of mercy is great in this the year of the pandemic, but let us not neglect the spiritual works as well. In your charitable outreach this advent, find ways to proclaim the gospel to those who God puts in your path so that they too can experience the joy and peace of Christ no matter what their circumstances may be.

So, our scripture readings have taught us that we must be watchful, to live life in the sacraments especially reconciliation and the Eucharist, and to rejoice in Christ and proclaim His Good News to others.

What then, can the scripture readings for the 4th Sunday of Advent teach us?

The path which leads to God is spelled out in scripture; ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”*** (Mt7:21)

Later in Matthew Jesus says ***“Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.”*** (Mt12:50)

St. Teresa of Avila even after having moments of ecstasy and mystical communications would say “The highest

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

perfection consists not in interior favors, or in great raptures, or in visions, or in the spirit of prophesy, but in the bringing of our wills so closely into conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realize He wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might, and take the bitter with the sweet.”

That, I think is the lesson from the gospel of the 4th Sunday of Advent where we hear the story of the Annunciation. Mary is told by the Angel what the will of God is for her, and her response? “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word.

Let us this Advent, then, strive to conform our will to God’s as completely as Mary has. For to become saints, we must have total conformity of our will with God’s. It is necessary, then, that there should be nothing in our soul which is not in harmony with the divine will, and that our actions be motivated by His will alone.

God expresses His divine will first in foremost through his commandments especially the beatitudes and His greatest commandments, Love God and our neighbor. Yet His will is also expressed in a particular way through

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

each of our duties in our state of life and in the various circumstances of our life.

What do I mean by our state of life? Well for a priest for instance his state of life is the care of souls. His duties revolve around that mission. For lay people our duties are those required by our families, our profession, our social activities and our good citizenship.

God's will is also manifested in the circumstances of our life, from the most important down to the smallest detail. Health or sickness, wealth or poverty, good times, bad times, ***"We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. "(Rom8:28)***

Our sanctity is not dependent on doing extraordinary things, but doing the ordinary things; the duties of our state in life and our particular circumstances with diligence, to see every duty as an opportunity to unite ourselves to God; to love him more dearly. Not only when we are filled with His consolation but also when we are tired, sad, lonely. Pope Pius XI once said; "It takes uncommon virtue to fulfill with exactitude, that is, without carelessness, negligence, or indolence but with

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

attention, piety, and spiritual fervor, the whole combination of ordinary duties which make up our daily life.”

Certainly not an easy task. It will take a lifetime of practice, yet at the point of our death, or at the second coming, we need to be able to tell God; Thy will be done. If we practice conforming our will to His throughout our life, that final surrender will come with joy and peace.

I started this reflection by reading from the Gospel of Luke about the end times. Later in that chapter Jesus is describing his second coming;

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

Watchfulness, Life in the Sacraments, Rejoicing and Mission, and conforming our will to God’s will. If we work on these practical steps, not only in Advent, but throughout our lives it will bring us a close as we can in this world to Divine Intimacy, that deep relationship with God in the Trinity. And in

Advent Day of Reflection

Dec. 5 2020

that intimacy, we can, in the midst of plagues, earthquakes, storms, social unrest, in the midst of all these signs, we can indeed stand erect in joy and peace, for our redemption is at hand.