

## From the Pastor—December 6, 2020

**Focus on Jesus** I am so proud of so many of you for keeping your eyes on Jesus during these times. In my interactions, or hearing about various situations, I know that you are placing your faith in the Lord. I, too, am trying to focus on Jesus as best I can. Let's keep encouraging each other and be wary of each's others needs. Let's do the best we can in all of our volunteering, praying, and worshiping of Jesus, being "worshipful" whether you feel comfortable attending Mass in person or watching via livestream or TV. Please know of my prayers.

**5 Masses** I decided to schedule five Masses for Christmas. The idea is that we want to limit large congregations; having more Masses will help to spread people out. Please see the rest of this week's bulletin for the exact schedule.

**Advent** It seems that Advent each year kind of sneaks into our world very quietly and meekly, with our thoughts more directed toward Thanksgiving, Black Friday, and football. I want to encourage you, not so much to forego these events, but rather to make sure you give Advent your full spiritual attention. I think the Lord has much to say to us this year as we prepare our hearts for Christmas. In ordinary, non-pandemic times, it might be easier to have one eye on football's epic match-ups and one eye on what is happening at church with lighting purple and pink candles. However, you may agree with me that Advent this year takes on special meaning. Have an open heart for what God might be ready to say to you. Have a quiet heart. Know that Advent is a great time to choose an extra penance or two. Make a good confession, or two. Don't let Christmas and all its joy sort of make a last-minute appearance in your life. Like all good things, Christmas must be prepared for. Please know of my prayers for you.

**Immaculate Conception Meditation** The Church celebrates on December 8<sup>th</sup> the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, THE Lady of Advent, and also the patroness of the United States of America and the Diocese of Lincoln. The great St. Anselm preaching about a thousand years ago extolled the Blessed Mother in this way: "*God is the Father of the created world and Mary the mother of the re-created world; God is the Father by whom all things were given life, and Mary the mother through whom all things were given new life.*" Today's mystery of Mary being conceived without sin is, by my thinking and wording, the fulcrum upon which the balance of salvation history rests. Mary was created without sin, as were Adam and Eve created without sin. So Mary came into this world as a gift of sheer grace to fallen mankind, mankind which suffered the catastrophic sin of our first parents. Her being conceived immaculately was the beginning of light coming into a fallen, darkened world. The light of her conception shines through to us clear into the 21st century so that we can see through that darkness which seems so pervading and so thick. St. Anselm's sermon goes on to say, "*Without God's Son, nothing could exist; without Mary's Son nothing could be redeemed.*" Pray for deeper entry into the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception and ask her to help you understand better her Son, who comes in bodily form to redeem us from all sin.

**E-mail News Beginning** When the Covid hit last spring, I successfully communicated for a few weeks via sending e-mails to those for whom I have addresses on our parish database. However, my gmail system started massively kicking back my communications as "undeliverable", which irritated me to no end. I am thankful to deliver to you what I think is a great solution, via an e-mail service called Constant Contact. Our members should begin soon to receive parish e-mail messages. At first, you may need to check your "spam" file in case your computer doesn't recognize the Constant Contact as being part of your primary senders. The e-mails will contain links to the parish bulletin, familiar pictures of our churches, and ways to click to places on our web site that are helpful to you. I am looking forward to this new communication!

**Last Sunday's Homily** Here is a recapture of some of my main points from last Sunday's homily.

The First Letter of John in the New Testament lists these obstacles which impede our growth as Christians: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. As we are now embarked upon our Advent journey, how might these obstacles be affecting us?

The input from our five senses shape how our intellect and will influence our decisions. Overloading one or more of the senses, like eating too much even though the food tastes good, causes great flaws to our decision-making. We seek the most comfortable way.

Lust of the eyes really refers to the eyes of our soul. This obstacle is based upon a deeply entrenched greed. Our intelligence and our gift of reason causes us to say to self, "I've got this handled," leaving God out of the equation. Such a flawed spiritual eyesight tripped up Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when the serpent said, "you shall be like gods."

The pride of life flows from the first two obstacles. It is more than physical pleasure or comfort, more than vanity or self-love. Our pride becomes so deeply seated that we live a life surrendered to everything but God, a life of presuming in our own good more than God's goodness.

Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Stay well, stay strong, in Christ!
---

**God Bless You!!!**

**Father Grell**