

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish
Westville

Advent Programme
2018

Prepare a way for the Lord



WEEK ONE: HOPE

Some Suggestions as you begin your Advent

Be a witness to Jesus by your preparation in joyful hope by all or any of the following:

1. Send only Christmas cards and Christmas emails that have a message of the real meaning of Christmas.
2. Spend 10 minutes in prayer every day. Commit to using this daily reflection throughout Advent.
3. Make an extra special effort to attend a weekday Mass (or to attend Mass as often as possible) during Advent. Welcome Jesus in the Eucharist with the same joyful enthusiasm as you would welcome him on the day of his coming.
4. Pray a decade of the Rosary every day ~ focus particularly on the Joyful Mysteries.
5. Make an Advent wreath with three purple candles, one pink - one for each week of Advent and a white candle in the middle to be lit at Christmas - display it in a prominent place in your home, to be used each day for family prayer
6. Also display the Bible in a special place in your home - perhaps close to the Advent wreath.
7. Ask for God's forgiveness for the sins, faults and failings that bother you and participate in the Penitential Service on Tuesday 18 December.
8. Contribute a toy or gift for an underprivileged child.
10. Invite an inactive Catholic or an 'unchurched' friend to accompany you to Mass on Sunday.
11. Avoid using the word 'xmas' and take pride in adding the name of *Christ* to *Christmas*. Point this out whenever you see the word 'xmas'.
12. Tell a child the story of the Birth of Jesus ~ the real story of Christmas.

Sunday 2 December

Scripture: *Luke 21: 25 - 28, 34 - 36*

Reflection

In today's scripture, Jesus frames His message in an apocalyptic manner, a manner in which religious messages symbolically depict the end of evil and the triumph of good. His prophesy made much sense to His audience as in those days, what happened in the night sky revealed the will of God and reflected events that were coming to earth. The world as we know it will come to an end and these will be trying and scary times.

Our Lord does not want us to be anxious about it. He wants us joyfully to anticipate His second coming in a cloud (a cloud represents the presence of God). He is not threatening us but promising us that it will happen. As Christians, we are to rejoice that eternal life in its fullest meaning will begin. We demonstrate our faith in God by the hope we have in the midst of any event. We are to hold our heads up high

looking forward to and not being depressed by the inevitability of the end. We are to be glad that our final redemption is about to take place. In Mass, after the Lord's Prayer is recited, the celebrant embodies the thrust of this passage of scripture when he says: "as we await the blessed hope and the coming of Our Saviour, Jesus Christ".

In order to live out this message we are not to become lazy, lax and lethargic about our spiritual lives, we are not to allow complacency in our relationship with God to creep in. We have to be disciples (those who are disciplined) who prepare for His coming whether in ours or another generation - simply because how we live now will determine how the Son will judge us living or dead at His second coming.

Practical Suggestion

Prepare properly a way for the first coming of Christ, as this is intricately bound up with preparing for His second coming, by making use all the available resources and opportunities offered to you by the Parish this Advent.

Prayer

Father, help me to clear away the baggage in my life as I prepare for Jesus' coming. Amen.

Monday 3 December

Scripture: *Isaiah 2: 1-5 Matthew. 8: 5-11*

Reflection

Way back in the days of my youth, I can clearly remember learning the basics of my Catholic faith from the "Penny" Catechism. The first two questions with their answers in this exercise book were:-

- Who made me? God made me.
- Why did God make me? God made me to know, love and serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next.

How basic is this requirement!

Now looking at today's reading from the prophet Isaiah: I am reminded of these two questions and their answers, because Isaiah sees God's house perched on top of the highest mountain and this prompts him to say, "All nations shall stream to it." So we too must go to God's Holy mountain, if we wish to live with Him in his house. This highlights for us, the very purpose of our lives: we were created to climb God's mountain, which is the way of life laid out by God for us, and Jesus Christ is there too to help us along the way.

But why does God do this? He does this "So that I can live in His wonderful house for ever."

Most of us Catholics, deep down inside our souls, really believe this to be the reward for following Jesus. Regrettably, while we believe, we still keep a wary eye on the road that the world offers as an alternative, simply because the way of the world is a lot easier to follow.

The reality is that God's road is a very demanding road. It requires a total commitment and acceptance of the life God wants us to live, and so many of us tend to give up trying, and instead, take the easy route.

What we need is faith and hope; faith to guide us and hope to be the driving force that keeps us on the right road. Help will then come to us through the example of Jesus, who never gave up on His task to guide mankind and to give us the strength and perseverance to keep on climbing while the Holy Spirit pours God's power into our lives, to ensure that we make it to God's house.

So, if we have faith, we must agree that as difficult as it might be, God's house is worth the effort.

Practical suggestion.

Read the scriptures, especially the Gospels, and keep your spiritual eye firmly fixed on the goal which is God's house, while avoiding a gaze at the steepness of the road that leads to His house. This will help you to avoid the feeling of failure when you stop and take the easy road designed by the devil. So You must pray, that God will give you the faith to keep climbing just as Jesus did on His way to the cross.

Prayer.

Dear Lord, give me the strength and the courage, plus the determination to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as He struggled along the road to the cross. Remind me, that He did this for me, so that I too may follow the way of the cross and be led to His holy house where I shall live for ever and ever. Amen.

Tuesday 4 December

Scripture: *Isaiah 11: 1 - 10*

Reflection:

Isaiah was prophesying about the Messiah – the ultimate King who would bring justice once and for all. The metaphor he uses is that of a 'waistband'. When we think of 'waistbands' today we generally associate them with men's clothing from a past era, or as something decorative. In times gone by, however, waistbands were totally practical – they kept one's pants from falling down! That was the fate of justice and faithfulness in Isaiah's time – they had 'fallen down', and the poor cried out for someone to bring change.

Jesus was, and is, the promised Messiah, and when He took up His public ministry, the poor and disenfranchised heard the voice they had waited so long for! He challenged those who exploited others; He taught His disciples that justice and faithfulness were to be focal points for them; and He asks us, His newest disciples to have the same concerns. Our society is an echo of the one Isaiah was dealing with – our poor and exploited are also crying out for someone to speak on their behalf. Let us evaluate our thinking and our attitudes towards these issues. Do we have a track record we can be proud of?

Practical Suggestion:

Is it possible to do something for the poor this Advent and Christmas? The tags on the SVdP Christmas Tree provides a wonderful opportunity.

Prayer:

Lord, give me a heart that is on fire for you. Fill me with your Spirit of courage, that I may be a faithful witness to your values. Amen.

Wednesday 5 December

Scripture: *Matthew 15: 29 – 37*

Reflection

While preparing for today I became quite hungry and, if you are doing your readings in the morning, you will understand my thoughts of food, having fasted all night, when we read;

- Isaiah, telling us of preparing a banquet of rich food and fine wines;
- The psalmist also preparing a banquet and then,
- Jesus, having cured the lame, crippled, blind, and dumb and, many others, sees the need to feed them and all who are gathered to hear His word.
- Food everywhere – being prepared.

At the end of the Gospel reading we learn that after feeding the crowds with all that they needed, there was still an abundance of food (7 baskets) left over. So what! I have had my fill – which is nice – I am OK but, is that where I leave it?

Isaiah tells us that; “the Lord of hosts (God) ‘will remove the mourning veil covering all people’ ” - which sounds so wonderful but, as we know, God (and Jesus) is not physically with us and, having used the disciples to distribute the fish and the loaves, I can only imagine that we now, as Jesus’ disciples, are being directed by the Holy Spirit to help remove the veil that covers so many - who have no ‘Hope’ - to take from what we have (not our excess – although we can use that too) and share with those in need – not only of healing – but also a hand that will guide them through to the other side of the veil to “Hope, Peace, Joy and Love”.

Jesus calls us all to be brothers and sisters, in His Family, and, if we accept this “calling” to be His disciples, how easy it will be for us, knowing that Jesus is on our side to “Prepare a Way for the Lord” for those in need!

Practical Suggestion

Take a SVDP money box and return it as soon as you can so that you can fill it - again and again... Your abundance will go a long way!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are my Shepherd. Help me to follow as you guide me along the right path. May I share with others, the banquet that you have prepared for me. Amen

Thursday 6 December

Scripture: *Matthew 7: 21, 24-29*

Reflection

Advent is a special season set aside by the church as a time for us to prepare our minds and our hearts to receive Jesus in a meaningful way at Christmas. Today's reading is the conclusion of the well-known discourse "The Sermon on the Mount" in which Jesus gives us the blueprint for living a full and extraordinary life.

Book stores sell a wide array of inspirational literature and we are intrigued by the writings of those men and women whom many consider to be wise teachers, giving their views on the best way to enjoy a fruitful and successful way of living. It is common to read and share thought-provoking posts on Facebook and other social media sites, many of which are truly motivating and inspiring. In Matthew Chapters 5, 6 and 7, however, we read how Jesus taught His disciples everything we need to know about living this life according to His perfect design. Not only did He stress the importance of listening to what He was saying but more importantly, he emphasised the need for us to act on his words.

It's a wonderful practice to spend time reading the Scriptures and meditating on them but we are then called to take action based on whatever inspiration we have received during that period of quiet contemplation. We read in James 1:22 "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."

In these next few weeks of Advent we are called to "Prepare a Way for the Lord" by our actions. It is good that you have set aside time to read these Reflections and I encourage you to read the Practical Suggestion each day and make the effort to use these suggestions and ideas as a way to make your preparation for the birth of Jesus a truly spiritual encounter.

Practical Suggestion: During the coming weeks, spend a few minutes each day reading a portion of Scripture from "The Sermon on the Mount" in The Gospel of Matthew Chapters 5 to 7 and endeavour to do something small in keeping with whatever prompting you received during those moments of silent meditation.

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending Jesus to teach us how to live our life to the fullest. Inspire us as we read Your Word and help us to do one small thing with great love every day. Amen

Friday 7 December

Scripture: *Matthew 9: 27 - 31*

Reflection

How amazing! Even though these two men are blind they still see Jesus as the Son of David! If only those who had the physical ability to see could see what these blind men saw!

This Advent we are called to see with the eyes of our hearts, our inner being, the eyes of faith. When we do we notice the glory and goodness of God all around us. Most especially we see Jesus in the Eucharist and experience his presence in the

Sacrament of Reconciliation. These two sacraments enable us to have a personal encounter with Jesus just as the blind men did. Jesus reaches out to touch us as well and in doing so he heals us!

Their joy was unbounded! They forgot the instruction of Jesus not to tell anybody. They talked about it to everybody. But then that's what an encounter with Jesus does for us as well.

Advent is an opportunity to see with the eyes of faith and to bring others into this vision as well. In the mad rush of preparations for Christmas we see and hear John the Baptist in our midst, calling us to Prepare a way for the Lord. Those for whom Christmas has no spiritual meaning do not hear his call, his invitation. The way of the Lord is cluttered with the busy-ness of this time of the year. For those who are able to see and hear this is a time to clear away all obstacles and barriers, anything that stands in the way of the Lord's coming to us and into our world which so desperately needs his presence.

Practical Suggestion

Today let Jesus touch you so that your eyes may be opened to what you are doing (or not doing) as we come to the end of this first week of Advent, the week of Hope. Make time to go to Mass tomorrow, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady. Allow yourself to be filled with the presence of Jesus and carry him in your heart as Mary carried him in her womb.

Prayer

Take pity on us Son of David and let us see with the eyes of faith so that our faith may win us our salvation. Amen.

Saturday 8 December **Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady**

Scripture: *Genesis 3:9-15, 20, Luke 1:26-38*

Reflection

Fear, Scarcity, Hope and Abundance.

God asks "Where are you, Adam?" But Adam is so afraid it separates him from God's love, telling him instead: you are naked, vulnerable, protect yourself! His fear is so overwhelming, Adam cannot even respond to God's question; all he can do is make an excuse, and blame another.

Jerusalem too was afraid of the Lords coming. The city like us, felt safe in the knowledge of what it could handle, but the visitation of the Lord, the unknown, we cannot handle.

When God visits His people, He brings great joy, leading us to conversion. We are afraid of this conversion because it means allowing the Lord to lead us. We all know what it is like to be afraid, exposed, and hurt. We know what it is to be afraid there will not be enough and scarcity will rule the day. We are afraid we will be exposed,

judged and found wanting. We are comfortable with fear because we know what it is like to live afraid. We cannot give because there will not be enough. We cannot open up because then we will be revealed. We cannot say yes because...

Then there is Mary who, though greatly troubled at Gabriel's greeting, does not hide but waits. It's not that she wasn't afraid; she just didn't succumb to her fear. Then she hears: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God." Although she was greatly troubled, she was asked not to fear in the moment where mankind's future hung in the balance.

God became man and dwelt among us as Jesus, Emmanuel, only because Mary believed by faith. Not because she didn't feel afraid, but because she refused to be led by her fears. This is why we praise her, and venerate "The handmaid of the Lord."

Practical Suggestion

Pray a decade of the Rosary today: the First Joyful Mystery the Annunciation. As you pray this decade think about how God is asking you to be Mary in our time – to bring his Son Jesus into our world. Will you say 'yes' as Mary did?

Prayer

Father, may I be true to your call just as Mary was. Strengthen me as you strengthened her so that I too may be a bearer of Jesus and make his presence known in my life, my home and my family.

These Daily Reflections for Advent 2018 were written by George Cominos, Lawrence Surgeson, Irene Helsdon, Deacon Mark Wardell, Veronica Donnelly, Fr Desmond Nair, and Tony Clewlow. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Advent!

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Westville. Advent 2018