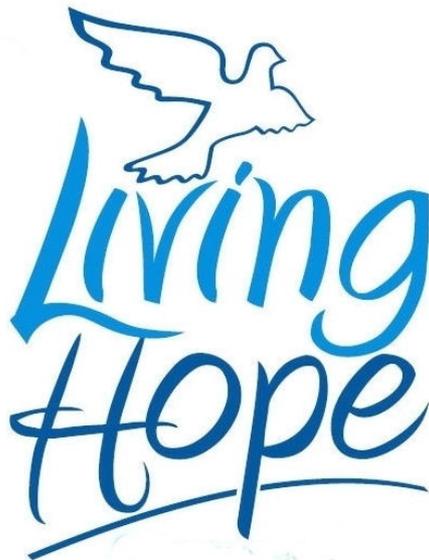


**Archdiocese of Durban**

**Advent Daily Reflections**

**The Word was made Flesh**



**Week One**

**Hope through Communion,  
Participation and Mission**

## Sunday 28 November

**Scripture:** *Luke 21: 34 - 36*

### Reflection

Many call this the 'Festive Season,' some wish each other 'Happy Holidays' and 'Merry Christmas!' but none of these are accurate. It's not holiday time for most and, as the year draws to an end, it is certainly not really festive for many, and Christmas is still four weeks away!

This is **Advent**; a time of spiritual renewal and preparation. For us Christians it is a sacred time. We invite you to immerse yourself in this Advent Season and to allow yourself to experience what it means to be expectant, and to actively prepare for the great feast of Christmas. We can't really experience the joy and peace of Christmas if we don't prepare properly. Our faith calls us to something different from the 'Festive Season', 'Happy Holidays' and, as Jesus describes it in today's Gospel, this time of "debauchery and drunkenness."

Jesus cautions us to "Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness, and the cares of life." It's an appropriate warning as we begin Advent.

In so many ways this is a most wonderful time of the year, marked by many customs and traditions. In the midst of everything, we are called to "stay awake," to be alert to the nearness of the Saviour's coming. It is not as if we have to be fearful and be filled with a sense of dread. No! If we live as authentic Christians, following the way of Jesus, with hearts that are connected to the heart of God, and waiting in joyful hope, then we have no reason to be fearful. Remember the words of the hymn: "When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart." This is the way we are to *live* Advent!

### Practical Suggestion

As you begin Advent today, make a choice and decision to *live* this Advent in Joyful Hope! This first week of Advent is the week of Hope. Read the Gospel of Luke, which is the gospel for Year C which we commence today. Experience the Hope which is revealed in this Gospel.

### Prayer

Father, guide my Advent journey which I begin today. Be with me as I prepare my heart and my life for Jesus to be born again in me. May I, like Mary, be a worthy bearer of the Saviour, and bring his presence into the world. Amen.

## Monday 29 November

**Scripture:** *Matthew 8 : 5-11,13*

### **Reflection**

In the scripture passage today, we read those familiar words that we pray at Mass during the Communion Rite “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word ...” The centurion displays his incredible faith by asking Jesus, “the Word made Flesh”, to simply say the “word” and his servant would be healed. Jesus heals the servant as a result of the centurion’s faith.

By our prayers and intercessions we can play such an important role in the healing and coming to faith of others. We need to realise that with faith the size of a mustard seed, our prayers can bring about miracles in people’s lives. There is so much power available to us through the working of the Holy Spirit, if we would only take the time out to pray.

Advent is a time when we not only look within ourselves to prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus at Christmas, but also a time when we should be looking outward, noticing those who may be in need of our prayers.

Jesus came to bring healing to a world that even at that time, experienced great suffering. He came to touch the lives of people and to demonstrate His unconditional love for everyone, irrespective of status, culture or any of the other means by which we tend to label people and put them into boxes.

We are all in need of holistic healing, not necessarily only physical healing but also healing of mind and spirit. Like the centurion, we are able to come to Jesus in prayer and ask Him for His healing touch for ourselves and for others. In many of the healing accounts that we read in the gospel, Jesus replies to the person’s request for healing by saying “Of course I want to heal you – be healed.” Matthew 8:3. Here we see evidence of the utter generosity and compassion of Jesus.

As people of faith, we are called to live out our faith daily. This is always obvious by the way we choose to treat others. “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love ....” Or will they?

**Practical Suggestion:** We have been created with an inbuilt desire to be with people. Covid has been instrumental in restricting our personal contact with others. There are many people who still feel isolated and who would welcome a telephone call and a chat. Make the effort to connect with someone this week and to let them know they’ve been in your thoughts.

**Prayer:** God my Father, you sent Jesus to bring healing to a world which so desperately needed Him. He came to teach us how to be kind, compassionate and merciful. More so now than ever, our world needs Jesus. Help me to be the one to bring His healing love to others. Amen

**Tuesday 30 November**  
**Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle**

**Scripture**

*Matthew 4:18-22*

**Reflection**

Today we celebrate the feast day of St. Andrew, one of the first apostles to heed the call of Jesus. Andrew was a brother to Simon Peter and was a disciple of John the Baptist before coming to know the Lord. “Immediately” and “at once” are the words used repeatedly in the Gospel to describe the response of the first four disciples of Jesus. According to Matthew’s account, Jesus invited the first four disciples to follow him, and they left everything to follow Jesus.

We should remember that these four fishermen, including Andrew, had families. They depended on fishing to feed their families. Leaving their nets and boats to follow Jesus meant that they were totally dependent on him since fishing was their livelihood. Surprisingly, their response was immediate and firm, and they trusted Jesus even though they did not know where he was taking them. What they saw in Jesus convinced them to make a decisive decision to leave everything and follow him. This must have been an extremely attractive and powerful call.

Jesus has never stopped calling people like you and I to follow him. Today he still extends his call of discipleship which includes a special mission. St. Andrew and the other disciples in today’s Gospel made a conscious and free decision to say ‘yes’ to Jesus and from that moment they journeyed together to accomplish their mission. They took the risk to answer this call - unconditionally.

As we have begun the season of Advent, we are called to a thorough preparation to welcome Jesus Christ into our lives so that when the Word is made flesh, He can find a home in us. Then we will be able to serve Him through our communities.

**Practical Suggestion**

What is God’s call to you? Are you ready to respond to his call? Think of just one way in which you can respond to God’s call during Advent. Is there some sacrifice, big or small, which you can make in response to God’s call?

**Prayer**

Father, strengthen my response with whole-hearted devotion to allow the Word to be made Flesh in my heart and life. May I be ready for his birth at Christmas just as Andrew was ready when Jesus called him. Amen.



## Wednesday 1 December

**Scripture:** *Isaiah 25: 6 - 10a*

### **Reflection**

How do we find HOPE in times of desperation? A light of HOPE is available to all of us who have faith in Jesus, the Word made Flesh. "Look, this is our God, in Him we put our hope that he could save us," (Is 25:9)

Isaiah's hymn of thanksgiving and message of hope comes within his lament of Yahweh's judgement of the Jewish people due to their turning their backs on God. The messages from the Prophets often found their origin in the social, political and religious crises of the day. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been swept away by the Assyrians and Judah and Jerusalem were under threat. The people of Jerusalem were in a place of devastation, discouragement, loss, hopelessness, and fear.

Doesn't this remind you of the crises we face in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century world? So many people are currently in a state of anxiety, depression, and distress. Just as people are given a glimpse of joy and hope when invited to a friend's home to share a meal, so we all should be able to spark our hope by accepting His invitation to receive Him at His Divine Banquet, Holy Mass.

What is the relevance of Yahweh preparing a banquet for all peoples on a mountain"?

- We are reminded of the time of the Exodus and the Covenant meal on Mt Sinai when the Jews transitioned from Death to Life – From slavery to freedom. (Ex 24:9-11)
- We look forward to the Apocalypse – the End-Time – when evil will be defeated, and all the saved will eat of the feast.
- We renew our faith in the coming of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The banquet on the mountain becomes real in Jesus feeding of the multitudes.

Isaiah brings us hope through his prophecy, fulfilled by Jesus' incarnation, passion, death and resurrection. "He has destroyed the veil which used to veil all peoples... he has destroyed death for ever."

**Practical Suggestion:** Bring HOPE into your lives and the lives of your families by attending Mass, bringing your family to Mass and receiving the Eucharist – the Word made Flesh – at least twice a week.

**Prayer:** Loving Father, we rejoice in our salvation and the blessed hope of Christ's return. Thank You for the faithful promises that You have made to us. Renew our hope and faith in the Word made flesh. We bless and praise You, Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be all praise and glory forever. Amen

## Thursday 2 December

### **Scripture:** *Matthew 7: 21, 24 – 27*

*"...everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock"*

### **Reflection:**

There is a programme which airs on TV called 'Massive Engineering Mistakes', which explores the dramatic collapse of bridges, buildings and other structures – seemingly without cause. I'm sure that many of you also have imprinted on your memories the image of the Twin Towers collapsing into a pile of rubble on 9/11! It all leaves one with the question, "Were the foundations of these structures fatally flawed?"

Jesus, in today's gospel, implies that what is essential in construction is not necessarily visible to the naked eye. If the foundation is not rock-solid, the structure will not stand.

This same principle applies when it comes to our spiritual lives. If we want, spiritually speaking, to be strong enough to withstand the storms that life hurls at us – one after the other – we need to ensure that our foundations are rock-solid. Faith, which itself is not visible, is built upon the pillars of love, hope and communion. Love is the cornerstone. It is the first emotion that we experience, and it mirrors the love of God for each of us. Hope is what keeps us going. It carries us into the future, and keeps us from giving up. And communion with God through prayer, the Eucharist and His Word are what nourishes us and keeps us strong!

These weeks of Advent are an opportune time to check out our spiritual foundations. Are they strong enough?

### **Practical suggestion**

Reflect today on the pillars of your faith. Are all equally strong? If one is weaker than the others, resolve to do what is needed to strengthen it.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, fill me with Your Holy Spirit so that I may build a faith that will withstand any storm in the course of my life. Amen.



## Friday 3 December

### Scripture

*Matthew 9: 27 - 31*

### Reflection

Isaiah had prophesized that “the eyes of the blind shall be opened.” (35:5) This would be a sign of the presence of the Promised One, the Messiah, among his people. Jesus himself proclaimed this at the very beginning of his ministry when he quoted another passage from Isaiah “He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight.” (61: 1 - 2)

The healing of the two blind men is a powerful sign and demonstration that God’s promise has been fulfilled. The God of love, mercy and compassion is indeed among his people. At that time many did not recognise God’s presence – even though they saw with their own eyes!

Spiritual blindness is like a plague in our time. Many have turned away from God and from following any faith. Even many who were brought up in the Christian faith have abandoned the faith to live a secular life.

Some of this is due to the misperception of God that many have. They see him as a sort of Santa Claus who punishes those who are naughty and rewards those who are nice. In this magical image they want God to fix all that is wrong, cure those who are sick and prevent everybody from dying. How often have we not heard people say in a rime of hardship, pain and disaster “Where is your God now?” The eyes of faith help us to see that God is in the midst of our hardship, suffering and struggles. This is precisely why, in the fulness of time, he came among us, to share in every circumstance of life that we experience. He is truly Emmanuel – God is with us!

Advent calls us to recognise once again our God who is with us. During this sacred time we remove the veil that covers our eyes, causing us to doubt, to lose hope and to miss the true joy of life. The light of faith helps us to be a people of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Then we are able to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in the great fraternity of mankind, in Communion with our God and one another, engaged and Participating in the Mission of the Church, bringing the light of the Good News of Jesus to our world.

### Practical Suggestion

Share these Advent reflections with someone you know who has stopped practising their faith. If possible, invite them to join you at Mass during this Advent season

**Prayer:** Father, thank you for sending us your Son Jesus whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. Strengthen our faith so that we will always know that you are a God who is with us in every circumstance of our lives. Amen.

## Saturday 4 December

### Scripture

*Matthew 9: 35*

### Reflection

Jesus goes about proclaiming the Good News of the *kingdom*. We pray in the Our Father “Thy *kingdom* come.” A few weeks ago we heard Christ say “My *kingdom* is not of this world.” (John 18:36 ) What is this *kingdom* and why is He King?

His is a kingdom where the sacrifice of love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness are paramount. This conflicts with the earthly kingdoms where power and authority rule supreme. These seldom bring hope, peace, joy, and love.

All that Our Lord proclaimed and stood for and experienced was not of this world. His birth in “Royal David’s City,” Bethlehem, was anything but what one would expect coming from a royal heritage. His definition of neighbour shocked the Jews and shocks us. His insistence of loving enemies goes against the human grain. His beatitudes went against the worldly idea of happiness.

From this we discern that His kingdom, the one He wants us to establish here, is very different to that which exists. The values differ radically and painfully.

Jesus was enthroned as King not in a festive occasion and not on a throne and not with a bejewelled crown. It was on a Cross on Good Friday with a crown of thorns and the very man who condemned Him to die, refused to take down the inscription above His head: “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.” He is now our King and that inscription about His Kingship must be placed in our hearts.

### Practical Suggestion

During Advent, take one of the values of His Kingdom of justice, peace and love, and do whatever you can to make His Kingdom come to earth through your Christian efforts.

### Prayer

Holy Spirit of God fill me with the fire of your love so that I may be recreated as a person wanting to establish the values of His Kingdom here, while I live. Amen



**These Daily Reflections for Advent 2021 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Veronica Donnelly, Fr. Wandile Cagwe, Mike Montocchio, Irene Helsdon and George Cominos. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Advent.**