

# DECEMBER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

9 10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19

20 21 22 23 24

25 VIGIL

25 MIDNIGHT

25 DAY

26 27 28 29 30

31

Thursday, December 1, 2016

(Lec. 178)

1) Isaiah 26:1-6

2) Matthew 7:21, 24-27

Gospel related: **CCC** 443, 1821, 1970, 2611, 2826 **CSDC** 70

THURSDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: Build your foundation on the eternal rock of salvation.

In the aftermath of natural disasters, the news and social media are often flooded with images of houses washed away and giant buildings reduced to rubble. We like to think of our homes as safe, secure structures, yet torrential rain and damaging wind have the power to demolish them in seconds.

In today's Gospel, Jesus illustrates how the foundation of a structure determines its ability to withstand the forces of nature. The wise build their homes on rock, and delight to find them still standing after the storm. Fools build their homes on sand, only to find them eventually collapsed and ruined.

While there is truth to this message in a literal sense, Jesus goes beyond simply offering tips on home construction. He uses it as a metaphor to teach us how to live our lives – how to build a strong foundation for true discipleship and entry into the kingdom of heaven.

The song of Judah proclaimed in Isaiah says, *Trust in the Lord forever! For the Lord is an eternal Rock*. When Jesus says the wise build their homes on rock, he is talking about relying on the Lord and practicing his teachings in our daily lives. A foundation built on the eternal rock gives us strength to withstand inevitable temptations and sufferings that we all face in life. Those who build their foundations on wealth, luxury or some other temporary means can only endure these forces for so long before being devastated by them.

While thinking and deliberating are important steps in the planning stage, a foundation can only be built after we start doing the work – when we live our lives according to God's will. Prayer and charity are two tools that can help us accomplish this. Through prayer, we discern what our Lord's will is for our lives, and receive the grace and strength needed to carry it out. Charity is one of the primary ways we express our love and compassion for others through action. This can include giving donations or volunteering in the community, but it can also be expressed to family or neighbors by speaking uplifting words, visiting those who are lonely, or doing something nice without expecting anything in return.

This is what the Lord Jesus is asking of us – true discipleship. Let us be among the wise and build our foundation on the rock that is eternal.

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Friday, December 2, 2016

(Lec. 179)

1) Isaiah 29:17-24

2) Matthew 9:27-31

Gospel related: CCC 439, 2616

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FIRST WEEK

FOCUS: Bring your deepest desires to Jesus in prayer.

Today's account of Jesus and the two blind men is typical of the many healing stories found in the Gospels. The afflicted come to him; he does not seek them out. He does not go into the towns and villages, or scour the countryside, looking for the lame, the blind, the lepers or the possessed. Instead, they follow him. They hear Jesus' voice, and somehow they know he has the power to heal them.

The two men are blind, but they can see more clearly than the many others who were not blind and saw Jesus working miracles right before them but failed to believe. Through the eyes of faith, it seems they were able to see who Jesus really is. They address him as *Son of David* and *Lord*. They beg him to have pity on them, and Jesus probes their faith: *Do you believe that I can do this?* They reply, *Yes, Lord*. He then touches their eyes and they are opened. Their faith has brought them into a personal, intimate encounter with the Lord, and as a result they are transformed. We, too, are called to encounter Jesus and allow him to transform us.

Many people came to Jesus for healing, and he never refused any of them. But there must have been many more who did not come to him. Why? Were they lacking in faith? Did they consider such healing impossible? Perhaps they felt that, for some reason, they "deserved" their fate, or that they suffered because it was "God's will." What about us? Do we truly come to the Lord in confidence, sharing with him our heart's deepest desires – not our superficial "wants," but the desires he has placed in our heart?

As we begin the season of Advent – which directs our attention to the truth that Christ has come, that he will one day come again, and that he continues to be present to us at all times by the power of the Holy Spirit – let us beg him to come into our own lives. Let us bring our deepest desires to him in prayer, knowing that he has placed these desires in our heart. When Jesus asks us, "Do you believe that I can do this for you?" we should be prepared to answer him with a simple, confident faith: "Yes, Lord."

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Saturday, December 3, 2016

(Lec. 180)

1) Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26

2) Matthew 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6-8

SATURDAY

OF ADVENT

- FIRST WEEK

(OBL MEM

Saint Francis Xavier,

Priest)

Gospel related: **CCC** 543, 1509, 2121, 2443, 2611 **CSDC** 184, 259

FOCUS: God's healing love offers comfort and hope to a hurting world.

Isaiah offered hope and comfort when the Israelites were suffering at the hands of their enemies. The Israelites were experiencing the natural consequences of relying on neighboring nations instead of relying on God or listening to his prophetic warnings. Nevertheless, God continued to love his people. Isaiah promised them that a time would come when God himself would teach them the way they should go and heal their wounds.

We see this promise fulfilled in today's Gospel reading. Jesus traveled through towns and villages teaching about God's kingdom. And we hear earlier in Matthew, and in Mark's Gospel, that the crowds were amazed because, unlike the Jewish teachers before him, Jesus taught with *authority* (Mt 7:28-29; Mk 1:22). Jesus' authority wasn't revealed through his words alone, but through his actions and the power of his healing miracles.

Jesus was moved by compassion for the hurting people he encountered. He expressed the need for more workers to welcome troubled hearts and souls into God's kingdom of love. He commissioned the Twelve Apostles to lead his Church in carrying on his saving mission. He equipped them with the authority to proclaim the Gospel, to cure the sick, and to drive out demons, to name but a few.

Now along these lines, as members of Christ's body – the Church – we share in its mission. At the end of every Mass, we're sent out to share the Good News with others. How do we do this? We can start by recognizing how we've experienced the healing power of God's love in our own lives. We can explore the wounds we've suffered and how God has empowered us to cope and even grow through our challenges. We can use our own experience to reassure others going through challenging times.

Maybe we can't cure physical ailments, but what about those blinded by denial? We can speak the truth in love. What about those crippled by anxiety or depression? We can offer patience, understanding and encouragement. Maybe we know someone who is suffering the pain of isolation. We can provide some relief from loneliness with a simple smile, phone call or "thinking of you" card.

What if we're the ones hurting? We can take comfort knowing that God hears our cries, and will bind up our wounds when we turn to him and accept the help he provides. During these Advent days, let's remember our darkness will turn to light as we prepare to welcome the Light of the World.

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## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2016

(Lec. 4)

- 1) Isaiah 11:1-10
- 2) Romans 15:4-9
- 3) Matthew 3:1-12

Gospel related: **CCC** 523, 535, 678

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FOCUS: From ashes come new life. A waiting people anticipate the Messiah's arrival.

Several years ago, I was in a national park that had just completed what is referred to as a controlled burn. This is when they purposely burn off overgrowth in certain areas of the parks where there are paths and where hikers explore. As we walked through the area, some of the remnants were still smoldering. It was an eerie and desolate feeling.

A year or so later I was in the same park, and as I walked through the same area, little shoots had begun to sprout up from the rubble. It brought to mind Isaiah's words we just heard today: *A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.* Out of the ashes of my life, our lives, comes this amazing shoot of Jesse we call Savior and Lord.

Doesn't our Messiah have *a spirit of wisdom and of understanding; a spirit of counsel and of strength; a spirit of knowledge?* He does not judge by appearance or by hearsay, but he judges the poor *with justice.*

This holy season of Advent is an opportunity to ponder the great prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is an opportunity to try and grasp what the people of Jesus' time were thinking, as the faithful ones of Israel began to wonder if the Messiah was truly in their midst.

There had been false starts before – others who had come along trying to convince the people they were the Messiah. Some were so eager for the Messiah to come they began to put their hopes in John the Baptist. But John quickly told them that soon one would be in their midst who would be baptizing them with the Spirit and with fire.

My friends, we have the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures and we have the Gospels, the Epistle letters, the Acts of the Apostles, the Book of Revelation and all the testimonies of generation after generation of believers that testify to the fact that Jesus is the real deal. Let us take this all in, and prepare joyful hearts to celebrate once again the Incarnation of God – the Word becoming Flesh – the Son walking among us as one like ourselves.

Yes the tree has to go up; the decorations have to be just right; presents have to be wrapped and there are parties to attend. None of that has purpose, however, if not for the Lord.

Let us commit ourselves to taking the time we need to ponder the prophecies of old and the witness testimonies of every generation – that Jesus is our Messiah. He is the one who has come to set us free. Let us rejoice and be glad.

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Monday, December 5, 2016

(Lec. 181)

1) Isaiah 35:1-10

2) Luke 5:17-26

Gospel related: **CCC** 1116

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK

FOCUS: Our faith in Jesus gives us the strength to withstand difficult times and keeps us focused on building the kingdom of God.

The men we hear about in today's Gospel reading who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus surely had a path in mind as they carried him to the Lord.

They would have needed a good amount of space on their route, and so might have tried to take less crowded byways so they could be sure to reach Jesus. Their desire for healing for their friend made them determined.

Finally, they got to the house where Jesus was, but they found it so crowded with listeners that their pathway seemed hopelessly blocked. But they didn't lose hope. Rather, their determination seemed to give them ingenuity and daring.

So they clambered up to the roof of the house, and worked hard to bring their paralyzed friend carefully up to the roof. Then they worked to open up a hole in the roof big enough for their friend to be let down, and cautiously let him down before the Lord Jesus. Jesus affirmed their faith and not only healed their paralyzed friend, but did something even better – he forgave him of his sins.

So what lesson might we draw from this? The path to Jesus the men had plotted out had been blocked. But their perseverance in faith led them along an unexpected way which allowed them to reach their ultimate goal: healing for their friend. Similarly, even though we will encounter obstacles and difficulties on our pilgrimage of faith, if we trust and rely upon God, we will receive the grace and strength needed to persevere in faith, and overcome the obstacles before us.

In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah describes with joy how the people of Israel, living long in exile in Babylon, would eventually be enabled by the Lord to return to the Promised Land. And when that great day would come, the barren desert they would cross to get there would instead seem to be overflowing with new life.

Isaiah's words are also prophetic in a broader sense, for they describe the pilgrim journey all of us take through this life, and this world, to heaven. It is, as Isaiah described it, *the holy way*, a path for those on a journey, and *there the redeemed shall walk*.

Many of us on our pilgrim way will be forced by circumstances out of our control, but still within the sphere of God's providence, to take many turns we did not expect. But in spite of unexpected twists and turns, the faith God plants in our hearts can surely lead us to the heavenly home he has prepared for us.

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Tuesday, December 6, 2016

(Lec. 182)

1) Isaiah 40:1-11

2) Matthew 18:12-14

TUESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Nicholas, Bishop)

Gospel related: **CCC** 605, 2822

FOCUS: No matter how we get lost, or how we stray, God will always seek us out and bring us home

“These things we do that others may live.”

This eight-word phrase represents duty, sacrifice and a consideration of the Other as more important than the Self. It sums up the motto of the search and rescue community, who will search for and provide aid to people who are in distress or danger. Missions range from capsized boats to frost-bitten mountain climbers; from lost or injured hikers to overdue aircraft.

Their motto is a promise that no matter *how* you got into trouble, whether by accident, circumstance or even by being irresponsible, search and rescue personnel will seek you out, and bring you home – placing duties before their personal desires and comforts.

If human beings will do this for one another, how much more beautiful is it that we belong to a God who embodies this very same promise: our God who originally sought out and rescued us continually finds us when we go astray and brings us home.

Our first reading today foretells our greatest rescue. Isaiah shares God’s words of comfort to us – just as any rescuer today would – telling us that our time of trouble is over, and help is here. But God is not only present at our side, he has made our pathway out of danger a smooth and easy one; he has come with power and nourishment, and he will lead us home. This pathway, of course, is Jesus Christ – whose sacrifice on our behalf gives us life; whose body and blood nourish us in the Eucharist; and whose rising from the dead opens the door to us for eternity with God.

In today’s reading from Matthew’s Gospel, God’s saving grace is explained in the parable of the single lost sheep. In a flock of 100 sheep, 99 of them are safe, but one has strayed. Alone and without the safety of the flock and the shepherd, the missing sheep is most likely in distress, and imminent danger. So Jesus asks his disciples: Would the shepherd not go in search of the stray? And would he not rejoice to the fullest when he found it and brought it home? The answers to both questions are the same: Yes!

We are those sheep, of course. And each one of us strays at one time or another. What Jesus tells us is that God will search for us, and rescue us when we need it. No matter *how* we get lost, or how we stray – whether by accident or by sin – God will always seek us out, and bring us home, provided we welcome his loving embrace.

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Wednesday, December 7, 2016

(Lec. 183)

- 1) Isaiah 40:25-31
- 2) Matthew 11:28-30

WEDNESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Ambrose,  
Bishop and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 459, 1615, 1658

FOCUS: Let the Lord Jesus refresh you during this Advent season.

During this Advent season, we strive to grow closer to the Lord, but it's not always easy. We may have an opportunity to go to confession, but depending on circumstances, this could be a source of stress. Or it may be difficult for us to focus on this most important task of growing closer to the Lord because there are so many things occurring – parties, shopping, concerts, family gatherings.

Both readings today offer hope that we can grow closer to the Lord this Advent. But how do we do this? First, by taking to heart the message spoken of in today's reading from the prophet Isaiah. This reading gives us the assurance of God's promise to give us strength and renew us if we place our hope in him. So let us trust that our loving Father in heaven knows when we need respite from the busy-ness of life, and will unreservedly strengthen and renew us so we may, *run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.*

Similarly, we hear Jesus in today's Gospel invite those who are labored and burdened to come to him so they may find rest. In thinking of being freed of the things that weigh us down so we may find rest and peace in the Lord, it is important to remember that there is nothing God cannot forgive if we but ask. We must come into the Lord's presence with a repentant heart, perhaps through the sacrament of reconciliation, and we will find the peace that only he can give – the peace that strengthens and replenishes us.

So let's make it our goal today, that during this Advent season, with the celebration of Christmas around the corner, we will give ourselves a much-needed break from all that the world offers, and reflect on the Lord's mercy – and his words of invitation to rest in him and find strength. This will no doubt be the best invitation you will receive this season.

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Thursday, December 8, 2016  
(Lec. 689)

- 1) Genesis 3:9-15, 20
- 2) Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12
- 3) Luke 1:26-38

**THE IMMACULATE  
CONCEPTION OF THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
(Patronal Feast Day  
of the  
United States of America)  
- SOLEMNITY  
(Holy Day of Obligation)**

Gospel related: **CCC** 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 497, 505, 510, 559, 697, 706, 709, 723, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 **CSDC** 59

**FOCUS:** God chose Mary – one like us – and kept her free from sin that we might experience healing and grace through her Son.

Today's solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin celebrates the unique grace given to Mary, proclaimed by the angel Gabriel in our Gospel, and her role in the drama of our salvation. The dogma of faith that Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, preserved immune from all stain of original sin was officially proclaimed in 1854 by Pope Pius IX, with the following words:

“We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and therefore should firmly and constantly be believed by all the faithful.”  
[Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854]

But let us not think that this dogma has no scriptural roots, or is a later addition to the faith. From the very beginning, the Church has venerated Mary and her role in our salvation. As the mother of Jesus, she occupies a central and essential role in our salvation. Her yes to God's plan, freely given, allowed that great drama to unfold in time. Yet while the external focus might seem to be on Mary, the real focus is always on Christ.

Like all Marian feasts, we can never celebrate her without reference to her Son. That's why Pius IX emphasized that the dogma comes about through the “merits of Jesus Christ.” It is Christ who redeems, but in the mystery of the Incarnation God has chosen to preserve Mary from original sin as a fitting mother for his Son.

As Catholics, we see Mary as the perfect example of God's redeeming grace, but believe that Mary was only able to receive the fullness of this grace because Christ would later redeem all humanity through his death and resurrection. Saint John Paul II would describe it this way in 2003:

“Chosen in advance to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word, Mary is at the same time the first-fruits of his redeeming action. The grace of Christ the Redeemer acted in her in anticipation, preserving her from original sin and from any contagion of guilt.”

Predestined to be Christ's mother, the Immaculate Conception answers the human quandary that for God to come among us in the Incarnation, he needed to be born of one who was untouched by human brokenness and original sin. Surely, it would be unthinkable that the Son of God be born of flesh that is tarnished by sin, even for a moment. In other words, we need Mary to be sinless so she can give birth in the flesh to the Savior.

As we celebrate our Liturgy today, we are invited to reflect on the meaning this dogma has for us. As Christ's disciples, we are now invited to be part of the ongoing drama of redemption. Just as Mary was blessed both as mother of Jesus and for her faithful life of discipleship, we, too, are invited to strive to be faithful in our life of discipleship.

Friday, December 9, 2016

(Lec. 185)

1) Isaiah 48:17-19

2) Matthew 11:16-19

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK  
(Opt. Mem.)

Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin)

**FOCUS:** In listening attentively to sacred Scripture, Christians learn to speak and think in different ways – God’s ways.

According to the foundational narrative of the Old Testament, God would address human dysfunction by forming a people after his own heart. A united and spiritually vibrant Israel would draw the rest of humanity to God by the attractiveness of the way its life was lived. The tragedy was that Israel was often unfaithful to its calling. It failed to listen to God and act accordingly. While a scattered and divided Israel never lived up to its vocation, the prophets continued to hope.

In the first reading, Isaiah states what the destiny of Israel would have been if it had remained faithful to the Lord. They would have had a free flowing abundant life similar to a river and the waves of the sea. Therefore, if Israel had been true to the Lord, it would have enjoyed the promises made long ago by Yahweh. Such a statement recalls the prophecies made to Abraham in Genesis, *I will bless you and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore* (Gen. 22:17). Such a promise continues throughout the Bible.

In the Gospel, the theme of listening to the word of God is also emphasized. Jesus says that the problem with many of the people of his time is that they do not listen to either John the Baptist or Jesus. John’s very austere lifestyle caused people to accuse him of being possessed by a demon. Jesus earned a bad reputation when he ate and drank and kept company with sinners and tax collectors. Therefore, the people found reason to take offense at both John and Jesus. They evaded the call of both. They became like children who could not decide which game to play. They ended up not playing.

Jesus counters their refusal to believe by saying, *But wisdom is vindicated by her works*. His own deeds emphasize that he embodies and reveals the wisdom of God. He is the one who ushers in the kingdom of God. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He is the Son of God.

These readings call us to listen intently to the message of sacred Scripture and the way it has been lived out through the centuries. We must believe that we are also immersed in the great story offered to us. Therefore, we need to realize that we are connected to our brothers and sisters, and that we must bear each other’s burdens in love.

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Saturday, December 10, 2016

(Lec. 186)

1) Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11

2) Matthew 17:9a, 10-13

Gospel related: **CCC** 718

SATURDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- SECOND WEEK

FOCUS: Advent invites us to let the fire of our devotion to God shine brightly.

It is a quiet Saturday in Advent. In fact, we are right in the middle of Advent. Thus, this day gives us the chance to assess just how well we have used this liturgical season. Have we responded to Advent's invitation to renew our souls by spending time in prayer with God?

Advent comes from the Latin word that means "to come near." Thus, during Advent, even as the outer world wants us to speed up and get ready for Christmas, Advent suggests the opposite: slow down and come near to the One who is both our Source and our Destiny.

So how have you been doing? Have you taken additional time just to be with God in quiet prayer? Have you inventoried your heart and seen where you need God's healing grace? Has your quiet revealed to you how God might be tugging on your life and asking you to reach out in a new way to those who need your care and love?

Both of today's readings refer to the Old Testament figure Elijah. He is known as a fiery character who confronted those in his day who refused to bring their worship and allegiance to God. With his eccentric and intense nature, many have pointed to similarities in the message of John the Baptist in Jesus' time. Indeed, Jesus makes this very comparison in today's Gospel.

Advent gives us an opportunity to nurture our souls and ignite that same fire of devotion to God. But we must respond to Advent's invitation.

Like I suggested, this starts with prayer. Can we purposely set aside activities, take a break from our worries, and allow Advent quiet to help us center into our souls? If so, then we are ready for God to come near. We wait, we listen and open our hearts to how God might speak to us.

If you do this, you will notice that something else happens – the more you do this, the more you will seek it. Like the ancient prophet Elijah and Jesus himself, you will grow on fire with the very presence of God. Yes, it is unlikely you will trade in your car for Elijah's fiery chariot, or speak of God with the knowledge and authority of Jesus, but Advent quiet and prayer changes all who enter this stillness and seek God.

Is the fire of your devotion to God burning brightly?

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## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2016

(Lec. 7)

1) Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

2) James 5:7-10

3) Matthew 11:2-11

Gospel related: CCC 548, 549, 2443 CSDC 183

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FOCUS: *Rejoice with joyful song ... Here is your God ... he comes to save you.*

Advent is a season of preparation. It's not uncommon to hear the word "preparation" and think of the decorations, parties and presents. Advent can be a whirlwind of "to-do lists" and events to attend. We may have passing thoughts of the Incarnation – the birth of Christ. But taking time to really reflect on the implications of Advent demand that we be intentional about making time for this. We must be attentive to what the Holy Spirit is revealing in our hearts and minds about a God who loves us so deeply that he humbled himself to be become one of us born as a baby in Bethlehem.

Today is one of those intentional days. Today we celebrate Gaudete Sunday – Rejoice Sunday. The pink candle on our Advent wreath, signifying joy, burns bright as we fill this sacred space in joyful song because our God draws near.

Both the first reading and the Gospel provide us with the reason for our rejoicing – God is coming to save us. When Jesus comes, as he said in the Gospel, *the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.* These acts are miraculous not only in their physical healing, but in their ability to be a healing balm in our deepest need.

Even if we do not have any of the physical manifestations Jesus mentions, we are blind, lame, deaf, impoverished and in need of cleansing in our heart and spirit. These words of sacred Scripture are talking about our liberation. They are speaking to each of us – life in Christ is a life lived in liberation from that which is hindering us from being fully alive – fully aware of God's grace, mercy and gift of life offered to each of us every day.

Obviously, our deepest needs are not the perfect present or the details of the office Christmas party, but rather can be summed up in the four candles we light as we progress through Advent: hope, love, joy and peace.

These needs are attended to as we gather as a community of believers – as we offer our songs, our prayers and our gifts. These needs are soothed and satisfied as we come forward to receive holy Communion, and are nourished and strengthened by Jesus himself. After being nourished and strengthened by the Eucharist, we are charged to leave Mass to "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." Ultimately, these needs are fulfilled when we place our trust, first and foremost, in Christ. In doing so, we seek guidance and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, not in our capacity to buy things that we think will make others happy.

We give presents and celebrate parties because we care about those in our lives. So consider this year to give gifts that really speak to the deepest needs of those whom you care about. Offer the gifts of hope, love, joy or peace in the form of a visit, a call or a helping hand. And let this Advent season be a time of dedication and attentiveness. As Saint Paul reminds us, *make your hearts firm, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

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Monday, December 12, 2016

(Lec. 690A)

- 1) Zechariah 2:14-17 or  
Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
- 2) Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:39-47

**NOTE:** Or any readings from the *Lectionary for Ritual Masses* (vol. IV), the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, nos. 707-712.

Gospel related: **CCC** 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 448, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 495, 497, 505, 510, 523, 559, 697, 706, 709, 717, 722, 723, 2097, 2571, 2617, 2619, 2675, 2676, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 **CSDC** 59

**FOCUS:** The Blessed Mother directs us to Christ.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, commemorating the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to Saint Juan Diego. The year is 1531, the location is Tepeyac Hill – the site of a former Aztec temple – and Juan Diego is a simple farmer and laborer who grew up under Aztec rule but converted to Catholicism.

Tradition holds that an unfamiliar music surrounded Juan Diego as he made his way through the open countryside on his way to Mass. Searching for the source, he then came face to face with the radiant apparition of Mary. Many astonishing things would take place in the next three days – and even more would follow as scores of Aztec and other natives converted to Christianity.

But before any of those things happen, Mary says this to Juan Diego:

"My dear little son, I love you. I desire you to know who I am. I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the true God who gives life and maintains its existence. He created all things. He is in all places. He is Lord of heaven and earth. I desire a church in this place where your people may experience my compassion."

There is much more to the story, of course, and devotion to our Lady of Guadalupe celebrates many things, but today we focus just on those words of Mary.

As with all things regarding Mary, her pronouncement to Juan Diego is selfless: her words focus attention not on herself, but point us in the direction of Jesus Christ. While it is important that Juan Diego know who she is, it is more important for him to know who she is because of who Christ is. As a woman, wife and mother, Mary not only demonstrates to us the fullness of joyful assent to God's call, she serves as a guiding light to the Word made flesh. Everything she is and does directs us to Christ.

From her emphatic "yes" to the angel Gabriel in the annunciation, to her song of praise and thanksgiving at the visitation, to her words and mission to Juan Diego, we encounter Mary as God-bearer whose very existence draws us to the holy mystery of a God who chose to dwell among us.

So it is no surprise that we should celebrate this feast. For Mary, who never draws attention to herself for her own sake, in speaking to Juan Diego first gives praise and honor to God, and then makes a simple request: build a church here. And just as she said "yes" to the angel Gabriel, so Juan Diego says "yes" to her.

And look what has happened since. The modern Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe is visited by millions of people each year, and can hold up to ten thousand worshippers.

**OUR LADY  
OF GUADALUPE  
- FEAST**

Tuesday, December 13, 2016  
(Lec. 188)

- 1) Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13
- 2) Matthew 21:28-32

Gospel related: **CCC** 535, 546

TUESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK  
(OBL MEM  
Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr)

FOCUS: In order to be true to the Lord, we must be sincere in our actions as well as our words.

In today's Gospel, Christ provides both a warning and a message of mercy. Jesus warns his listeners that we will not be judged on our empty promises to do the Father's will, but rather on whether we act and how we act. In the parable of the two sons, the first son originally disobeyed the father, but then had a change of mind and did what the father asked of him. He did his father's will – not the second son who said yes, but did nothing.

This is really good news if we admit that we are striving to do God's will, but have a ways to go. If we admit that we are like the tax collectors and the sinners Christ mentions, we have made the first step toward our recovery. Like those sinners, we have the opportunity to change our heart, to repent and to believe. It is never too late to become a believer and live in the Father's will if we choose to change. It is only too late if we think that lip service to God's will suffice or if we believe we do not need to change.

Zephaniah provides a checklist of behaviors and types of people which will cause harsh judgment, for example: bragging, lying and corruption, and those who profane what is holy. Those who are humble and truthful will have nothing to fear and need not be discouraged. That is the reason Scripture stresses the need for humility. It is not that we are called to be mousy or shrinking violets. The humble are those who can admit they have made a mistake. They can admit they need to discern what God is calling them to, and then follow the Lord.

The parable of the two sons in the Gospel reminds us of the truth that living as a faithful disciple of Jesus and doing God's will are not about words, they are about action. If we are to be truthful – and true to the Lord – it is not what we say, it is what we do, and how we do it.

So let us remember that making a commitment to lead our lives in accordance with God's will is not a one-time course correction, where we go from sin to perfection in the blink of an eye. For most of us, there will be two steps forward and one step back. And this is why we are so grateful for God's loving forgiveness and mercy.

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Wednesday, December 14, 2016

(Lec. 189)

1) Isaiah 45:6b-8, 18, 21b-25

2) Luke 7:18b-23

WEDNESDAY

OF ADVENT

- THIRD WEEK

(OBL MEM

Saint John of the Cross,

Priest and Doctor of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 453, 544, 547

FOCUS: *I form the light, and create the darkness.*

Sometimes, God's work in our lives seems obvious. You might be out for a walk and bump into an old friend. The sun might shine on your wedding day. Perhaps as a child you had a teacher who recognized certain natural gifts in you and steered you into a fruitful career path. You might go to the doctor about an ache or pain and find a way to prevent a more serious illness.

Today's readings describe how God reveals himself as Lord. In the prophet Isaiah, we read about how God formed the light and created the darkness as the designer and maker of the earth. God did not simply make the beauty of the earth – he also set forth the rule of justice.

In the Gospel of Luke, the disciples of John the Baptist are sent to discover whether Jesus is *the one who is to come*, the Messiah expected by the Jewish people. Jesus responds by pointing to his works. The blind have regained their sight, the lame walk and lepers are cleansed.

When God's works are obvious, it may be easy to remain a faithful Christian. Today is the feast of Saint John of the Cross, an important reformer and mystic of sixteenth-century Spanish Catholicism. Although John lived in poverty in his youth, he was able to receive a Christian education and found his vocation to the priesthood as a Carmelite. Despite the limitations of his family's poverty, God guided his path.

After further education, John felt called to enter a more austere religious order. Before he left the Carmelites, he met Saint Teresa of Ávila and became her partner in reforming the community to a more strict observance of their rule of life. God again guided his path and helped connect the desires of his heart to opportunity in his own religious community.

Once the reforms of the Carmelites got under way, however, John's path did not seem so clear. Some of the Carmelites rebelled against the reforms and imprisoned him in a filthy cell. How could God allow such darkness in John's life?

Despite this darkness, John survived imprisonment, escaped, and wrote some of his greatest poetry about the soul's union with God. He returned to his work of reforming the Carmelites and founded many new monasteries. Saint John of the Cross was named a Doctor of the Church for his poetic teachings about mystical union with God.

When we ponder God's revelation in our lives, we often look for obvious signs of his presence. But sometimes we are able to look back at our life's journey and see that the light shines brightest in the darkness. Today, let us take a moment and reflect on how God has been with us in good times and in bad, in well-being and in woe, and thank him for his steadfast love.

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Thursday, December 15, 2016

(Lec. 190)

1) Isaiah 54:1-10

2) Luke 7:24-30

Gospel related: **CCC** 523, 719

THURSDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

**FOCUS:** Prayer and acts of penance help prepare our minds and hearts to celebrate anew the birth of Jesus.

As we do every year, we begin our liturgical year in the season of Advent. The liturgical color is purple, seen in the vestments. Our music speaks of “waiting” and “longing.” The birth of Christ, his first coming, is near. Our liturgical readings from Isaiah are a review for our upcoming exam.

Today’s reading spells out all that God plans to provide for us – most importantly, a Savior to wipe away our sin and call us back to him. The prophet Isaiah, who figures prominently in Advent scriptural readings, tells us, *Your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, called God of all the earth* is calling us back to him. He promises mercy, love and forgiveness and promises his love *will never fall away* from us.

John the Baptist, we know, has a special role in God’s plan of salvation, and today’s reading from the Gospel of Luke touches on that. This is readily apparent as Jesus speaks to a gathered crowd about John. He tells them John the Baptist is the one spoken of in Scripture – the one who was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the promised Messiah and Savior of the world.

As we draw closer to Christmas, the pages of the story are reversed and we again meet Mary, who agrees to be the mother of God, and her cousin Elizabeth, whose baby leaps in the womb at the sound of Mary’s voice. Even before he was born, John the Baptist knew he had been chosen to prepare the way for Jesus.

These remaining days of Advent provide us with the grace- filled opportunity, through prayer and penitence, to prepare our hearts so they truly may be a more welcome home for Jesus. Then, when we celebrate his birth anew throughout the coming Christmas season, we might go forward to share his light and love more fully with all those whom we encounter. When we do this, more and more people may have the opportunity to come to know the joy, peace and salvation we have found in Jesus.

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Friday, December 16, 2016

(Lec. 191)

1) Isaiah 56:1-3a, 6-8

2) John 5:33-36

Gospel related: CCC 548, 582, 719

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: God focuses on our hearts and our actions – not human classifications.

People in our world today – and throughout human history – tend to label others according to categories: the nation where they're born, their skin color or religion, their social and economic class. But in our first reading today, we learn from Isaiah that God does not judge according to these human categories. God, our Creator, loves all of us and longs to gather us all together as his family – if we do what is right and accept him as our God.

God's words are specific: *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.* These words can be a challenge to us in a couple of ways. First, are we ourselves living in the way that God calls us – observing what is right and doing what is just? Do we truly serve God and hold the Sabbath and the things of God sacred? And, in our own struggles, do we recognize as brothers and sisters all of those who strive to do what is right, even when they are different from us in more superficial ways? Can others who attempt to join us for Mass say to themselves, *The Lord will surely exclude me from his people?*

If we turn this around, we can see that, in acting in the ways of God, we might attract other people to God's service – people who are different from us in other ways, but who seek to love and serve the Lord as we do. Jesus himself noted in today's Gospel that the greatest witness of his role as the son sent by the Father is his own works. Of course, we can't be expected to change water into wine, instantly stop a storm at sea, heal others of their disabilities or illnesses, or raise the dead. God asks only that we seek to serve him, that we treat others with justice and mercy, that we do what is right according to his law – and that we welcome others into our midst.

As we go about our day, let us remember that in this season, we celebrate Jesus' coming to us as a human being – one of us. He came to show us how to be human beings who love and serve God and reach out to one another. Jesus came to gather all of us into the family of God. So, let us testify to Jesus as the son of God by our good deeds and our loving, open hearts – and rejoice as God gathers us all together into his House of Prayer.

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Saturday, December 17, 2016

(Lec. 193)

1) Genesis 49:2, 8-10

2) Matthew 1:1-17

Gospel related: **CCC 437 CSDC 378**

SATURDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- THIRD WEEK

FOCUS: The human origins of Jesus are a mixture of good and bad.

To come to Mass eight days before Christmas each year and to hear this long list of mostly strange-sounding names – a challenge to any priest or deacon reading them – is discouraging, to say the least. And to learn – when we get to the end – that Jesus' ancestry has been traced not to Mary but to Joseph, his legal but not his biological father, this can be jarring. What can we say about all this?

The list contains both saints and grave sinners. They symbolize all of us, with our strengths and weaknesses, who need the saving power of God. Jesus came, humanly speaking, from some great and talented people, but equally from the poor and insignificant. God, this list tells us, writes straight with crooked lines. He does that in the lives of each one of us.

Especially interesting are the women in the list. The first mentioned is Tamar, a Gentile outside God's chosen people, who seduced her father-in-law, Judah, so that she could have a child. The next woman is another Gentile outsider, a prostitute named Hagar. She is honored by the Jews despite her sinful way of life because she hid, and thus saved from execution, the Jewish men sent out by Moses' successor Joshua to spy out the future home of God's people. Then there is Ruth, another outsider, though not a grave sinner. Bathsheba, also a Gentile, is not even mentioned by name. She is identified simply as the one who *had been the wife of Uriah*. She was the one who committed adultery with David – whose advances she could hardly refuse, however, given the absolute power of a king in those days. And at the end of her life, she would scheme to make sure that one of her own offspring would inherit David's throne.

The late American biblical scholar, Father Raymond Brown, writes: "The God who wrote the beginnings on crooked lines also writes the sequence with crooked lines, and some of those lines are our own lives and witness." (*Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year*, 2008)

Christianity is not just for the talented, the good, the humble and honest. No one is so bad, so insignificant, so devoid of talent that he or she is outside the circle of Jesus Christ. And that includes all of us here today.

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## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2016

(Lec. 10)

- 1) Isaiah 7:10-14
- 2) Romans 1:1-7
- 3) Matthew 1:18-24

Gospel related: CCC 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FOCUS: Jesus being born among us means we no longer have to be afraid – either to live or to die, for he truly is “God with us.”

Isaiah is the great prophet of the Advent season. It was he who was chosen by God to announce that *a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel*. The hope that one day prayers would be answered and prophecy fulfilled would sustain the faith of God’s children through many a crisis as the centuries ticked by. It is hope that sustains us during our darkest times. Isaiah was entrusted with the message, but not the time for its fulfillment. Little could his audience or their descendants know they would be waiting, hoping and praying for more than 700 years before these events came to pass.

Perhaps they waited too long, for by the time Jesus was born in the flesh, many of God’s people had forgotten he was coming. They had stopped looking for the day of his arrival – had ceased to prepare for the coming of the kingdom of God. That might explain why Jesus was rejected by so many. They were expecting someone far grander – of noble blood born of wealthy parents in the finest of circumstances. Joseph and Mary and the little town of Bethlehem hardly impress when the expectations are this high.

What if Joseph had not obeyed Gabriel, who spoke to him in his dreams? Even today, an unwed pregnancy raises eyebrows. In a small town like Nazareth, where everyone knew everyone, such a scandal represented the kiss of death. How could Joseph be with her if she had already been with someone else? Mary said nothing in her defense and allowed Joseph to draw his own conclusions. His doubts are still expressed in love, as he wishes to keep the whole affair quiet so as to prevent any harm coming to the mother or her unborn child. Had he made a stink, Mary and the baby would both have been stoned until death.

“Do not be afraid.” That’s all. With those four words – repeated again and again by the archangel Gabriel, our hope of heaven was born. Gabriel told Joseph to not give into these fears of what others might say, think or do. Previously, Gabriel had spoken these similar words of reassurance to Zechariah when he received news of his wife’s miraculous pregnancy. Gabriel would utter these words again, telling Mary, *Do not be afraid, for she has found favor with God*. After Jesus’ birth, these same words would be used to beckon the shepherds to come in from the fields, following the light of the star, to adore at the Christ child’s crib.

“Do not be afraid.” These were the words with which Saint John Paul II began his papacy when he emerged from the conclave, under the white smoke of the chimney from the Sistine Chapel. These same words are spoken to us each time we face life’s challenges, difficult decisions or even our own sinfulness. Jesus being born among us means we no longer have to be afraid – either to live or to die, for he truly is “God with us.” As we prepare for Christmas just one week away, and buy and wrap our last-minute gifts, let us recall that the greatest gift isn’t the one we will find under the tree. The greatest gift of Christmas would be wrapped in swaddling clothes not ribbons, and he would one day be found on the tree of the cross – born to die that we might live.

Monday, December 19, 2016  
(Lec. 195)

1) Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a

2) Luke 1:5-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 332, 523, 696, 716, 717, 724, 718, 1070, 2684

MONDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: We are called to imitate the example of the angels by striving to be instruments of God's peace.

Most of us probably don't think about angels very much. During this Advent season, angels may come to mind on occasion, more so than during other times of the year, but they tend to be de-emphasized in the faith lives of most Christians. Yet these heavenly beings, created by God, feature prominently in the history of salvation and in the Bible. Throughout Scripture, we see angels playing the role of protector, guide and, most of all, as messenger of God – a role that we, too, in whatever small way, are called to play.

In today's readings, we see an angel appear to announce that a son will be born – Samson in the first reading, and John the Baptist in the Gospel. The news that each angel bears is good in more ways than one. For starters, both women had no children and were seen as unable to conceive. In ancient Israel, an inability to conceive and bear children was considered a punishment for a married couple's own sins, or the sins of their ancestors. We no longer see infertility that way, but for the mothers of Samson and John the Baptist, not having children was deeply felt emotionally and spiritually. The news brought by these angelic visitors must have been overwhelmingly joyous.

The angels in today's readings were bearers of good news for another reason – each of these woman's sons would go on to do great things for the glory of God, and would play prominent roles in the Lord's plans for his people. Israel would be delivered from Philistine oppression by Samson, while John the Baptist would prepare the way for the coming of Christ. Both of these angelic announcements were precursors to the glorious Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel revealed to Mary that she would be the Mother of God – more good news, to put it mildly!

The angels have been God's heralds to people throughout the ages, just as in our own way we're called to play the same role. When we are kind, compassionate and charitable, we bring God and his love to others. When we pray for them, we are serving as God's instruments and serving his people with love. And when we attend Mass and receive Christ in the Eucharist, we join with all of God's people, both in this life and the next, and with the angels in heaven in giving God all honor and glory. We're not angels, of course, but striving to be like them is to truly be instruments and worshippers of the Lord.

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Tuesday, December 20, 2016

(Lec. 196)

1) Isaiah 7:10-14

2) Luke 1:26-38

Gospel related: **CCC** 64, 148, 269, 273, 276, 332, 430, 437, 484, 486, 488, 490, 491, 494, 497, 505, 510, 559, 697, 706, 709, 723, 2571, 2617, 2677, 2812, 2827, 2856 **CSDC** 59

TUESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: Mary trusted, even when she could not understand.

*Do not be afraid, Mary*, the angel said to the young teenaged girl in today's Gospel reading. Her angelic visitor came directly from God. The encounter with the divine is never casual or routine. Mary's response to the angel's message – that she was to be the mother of God's Son – shows her to be the model of trusting faith

Yet Mary's faith was not blind. She doubted and questioned. *How can this be?* Mary asked the angel who told her she would conceive her child without a human father. What Mary questioned, however, was not so much God, as her own ability to *understand* God and his plan for her life. Even in the midst of perplexity, Mary confessed that God knew best, even if she could not understand what he was about: *May it be done to me according to your word*, she told the angel.

Mary's assent to God's plan for her was not a one-time thing. It had to be constantly renewed, through many sufferings. The first was the humiliation of being an unmarried mother in a little village where everybody knew everyone else's business, and gossip was rife. Later, Simeon told Mary that her Son would be *a sign which will be opposed*, and that *a sword will pierce your very soul* (Lk 2:34-35).

Upon reaching manhood, Jesus left his mother, as he demanded that his followers should leave their parents. In the ultimate separation, at the cross, Simeon's prophecy, that a sword would pierce Mary's heart, was fulfilled. Yet Mary went on trusting even when – as long ago – she *did not understand* (Lk 2:50).

Can there be any doubt that it is precisely Mary's trusting faith which we need today? Which of us can fully explain or understand all that our world experiences? Today, more than ever, we need the kind of faith which Mary had, the faith she models for us: faith which continues to trust in God even amid experiences we do not understand and cannot explain.

And so I invite you to supply the conclusion to the homily, by responding to the age-old prayer based on the angel's words to Mary in today's Gospel:

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

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Wednesday, December 21, 2016  
(Lec. 197)

- 1) Song of Songs 2:8-14  
Or Zephaniah 3:14-18a
- 2) Luke 1:39-45

WEDNESDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Peter Canisius,  
Priest and Doctor  
of the Church)

Gospel related: **CCC** 148, 448, 495, 523, 717, 2676, 2677

FOCUS: Through our words and actions, we are called to give a joyful and faithful witness to the Lord.

Once a five-year-old girl solemnly told the Christmas story. She concluded, "Then the baby was born. And do you know who he was?" Her eyes grew as large as silver dollars. "The baby was God." And she jumped in the air, whirled around, dove into the sofa and buried her head under the cushion – which is the only response to the good news of the Incarnation (adapted from John Shea, *The Hour of the Unexpected*, p. 68).

Today's Gospel presents a similar reaction. John the Baptist, within his mother's womb, leaps for joy at the presence of God made flesh within Mary. Then John's mother, Elizabeth, bursts forth with praise for Mary and her baby. She proclaims, *Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb*. We echo Elizabeth's words every time we pray the Hail Mary. We know that Mary's purpose in visiting Elizabeth was to help her older relative, who was also pregnant. But she might have had another reason. Perhaps Mary was so overjoyed to be carrying the Messiah that she wanted to share the news. As the saying goes, "A joy shared is doubled." Elizabeth, another woman whose pregnancy was miraculous, was the perfect person to share Mary's joy.

Leaping for joy occurs other times in Scripture. After God saved the Hebrews from slavery, Moses' sister Miriam and other women dance for joy. Much later, when the Ark of the Covenant is brought into Jerusalem, King David dances in the street. This ark was where God was present among his people. Both of these events foreshadow in their own way the mother of the Savior. Through Mary, God rescues his people from the slavery of sin and death. And one of Mary's titles is Ark of the Covenant because she housed Jesus for nine months.

In these final days before Christmas, anticipation is in the air. Choirs are practicing, people are decorating houses and wrapping gifts, children are trying to be good, and priests are polishing their Christmas homilies! Amidst all of these preparations, let us try to maintain a quiet joy. Let us spend some extra time in prayer. Let us reflect on the great mystery of God's unfathomable love for us that moved God the Father to send his only begotten son, Jesus, to take on human flesh to save and redeem us. Then, when Christmas Day comes, even if we don't leap and dance for joy, surely we will be merry and laughing. And far more important, our hearts will be moved with love for our good God.

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Thursday, December 22, 2016

(Lec. 198)

1) 1 Samuel 1:24-28

2) Luke 1:46-56

Gospel related: **CCC** 148, 273, 422, 706, 722, 971, 2097, 2465, 2599, 2619, 2675, 2676, 2807, 2827  
**CSDC** 59

THURSDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: With joy, we await the love of God that dwells in our midst – Jesus, the son of God.

Today's Scripture readings provide us with a valuable treasure trove of insight into God's unconditional love for us. As we open the readings, God's love will enrich our lives as we make the readings our own. Here, we can experience the fullness of Advent's joy as we draw so very close to the birth of our Savior and the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus. Like Hannah and Mary, we, too have been anticipating the fulfillment of the promise made to them and to us. So in faith we acknowledge our burdens, knowing that with God, nothing is impossible.

Our first reading recounts the story of Hannah dedicating her only son, Samuel, to a life of service to the temple in Shiloh to the priest Eli. What made her do such a thing as to give away her only child? The preceding verses recall for us the fact that Hannah was barren, and that in her desperation she made an oath to God that if she could conceive a son, he would be dedicated to a life of service to the Lord. God answered her plea and she conceived. She, in turn, honored her part of the promise once Samuel was weaned.

Hannah's words of praise of God follow in today's Responsorial Psalm. In spite of the fact that she had just given Samuel to the Lord and left him there, her heart bursts forth with words of joy, extolling all that God has done for her: *My heart exults ... I rejoice*, she says (1Sam 2:1). Hannah proclaims that God has turned the status quo upside down and done amazing things for her. In the verses that follow, we see that Samuel grew up in the service of the Lord. And that God favored Hannah with the birth of three more sons and two daughters. For with God, nothing is impossible.

Mary's song of praise is one of the most familiar songs in the Bible. It echoes Hannah's song, extolling the deep-seated joy that flows from Mary's heart when she realizes the magnitude of God's promise made flesh in the person of her cousin, Elizabeth. Mary is caught up in a litany of praise, naming every good thing that God has done – not only for her, but for all generations. Along with Elizabeth, her life is forever changed as she recalls the words of the angel: *For nothing will be impossible for God*. Similarly, may we trust each day that this promise can be fulfilled in our lives as well.

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Friday, December 23, 2016  
(Lec. 199)

- 1) Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24
- 2) Luke 1:57-66

FRIDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint John of Kanty,  
Priest)

FOCUS: God is faithful to his promises, and we must be open to his plan for our lives.

There are two important themes emphasized in today's readings: The fulfillment of God's promises, and accepting that God's will for our lives is not easy.

In the first reading, God promises to send a messenger to *prepare the way*. God is always faithful to his promises. He sends John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. John did this through his prophetic ministry in the desert, in which he proclaimed a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Despite the power of John's teaching and example, only a few of the many who went out into the desert to see and hear John recognized him as the promised messenger who was to prepare the way for the Messiah. How often do we fail to recognize God fulfilling his promises in our own lives?

Now in turning to today's Gospel, there is an important question for us to consider. How often do we, like Zechariah, doubt or flat out refuse to accept God's plan and will for our lives? When we pray, do we cling to our own expectations of how God should answer our prayers? Or hold firmly to a timeline of when he should answer them? When we do this, we close ourselves off to God's larger plan and purpose for our lives, which is always for our greatest good. Our difficulty in accepting God's plan can be a result of a lack of faith, or a fear of letting go and placing our lives in God's hands.

Continuing our reflection, one question which arises is why was Zechariah's tongue tied after he doubted the message he received from the angel Gabriel? Perhaps God was using Zechariah's silence as a refining fire – a powerful image spoken of in today's first reading. He purified Zechariah's heart, which predisposed him to witness God's action in his life. His time of silence allowed Zechariah to accept the truth of God's plan, which included the name that was to be given to his son. Only when Zechariah was ready to accept it fully did God free his tongue and open his mouth.

Not only is it important for us to ask God for help in resolving our troubles, we must also take time to be silent, to reflect and to be attentive to God's action in our lives. We must, at some point, let go and let God so that he may bring the good work he has begun in us to completion.

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Saturday, December 24, 2016

(Lec. 200)

Mass in the Morning:

1) 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

2) Luke 1:67-79

Gospel related: **CCC** 422, 523, 706, 717

SATURDAY  
OF ADVENT  
- FOURTH WEEK

FOCUS: John the Baptist will go before the Lord *to give his people knowledge of salvation*.

Zechariah was a good and holy priest who, in his old age, prayed for God's will to be done, not his own. His example provides us a simple prayer to start each day as we face the uncertainties of our daily lives. Like Zechariah, we need to pray in gratitude for God's love and his steadfast covenant to send us a Savior.

Today's Gospel is a canticle – a song. Those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours recite this Canticle of Zechariah, or *Benedictus*, every morning because it sings of the morning of a new salvation promised long ago by the Lord.

Approximately nine months before Zechariah sang this beautiful song, he had been visited by an angel and told that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, who would be the herald of the coming Messiah.

There must have been something in the tone of Zechariah's response that was unacceptable to the angel because Zechariah was struck dumb. Zechariah, a priest, cannot speak. How does he proclaim? How does he fulfill his priestly ministries?

We are told that Zechariah and Elizabeth were good people. Had they prayed for years for a child? Now, near the end of their life, they are told they would have a child. Who could blame Zechariah if he was frustrated at not being able to choose a name after waiting so long?

For nine months, he watched his wife, a woman beyond childbearing years, grow in holiness. Does she show that glow of an expectant mother? Did she act like a young girl? For nine months, Zechariah contemplated but did not speak about what all this meant. By the power of God's grace, Elizabeth was to conceive a child whose mission would be to prepare the way for Jesus – the promised Messiah and Divine Physician who would bring healing to the world.

Over nine months, John grew in his mother's womb and Zechariah's faith grew in his heart. The words of the Canticle of Zechariah are the first he spoke after he writes the name "John" on a tablet.

Zechariah's voice is healed, and his heart is healed. He joyfully proclaims that his son will be John the Baptist, the herald of the Messiah. Christ is coming. May our celebration of the birth of our Lord and savior, Jesus, tomorrow and throughout the Christmas season bring new life, joy and healing to our hearts.

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**Three Homilies are given for the Solemnity of Christmas: Vigil, Night, and Day ~ Holy Day of Obligation.**

**CHRISTMAS, 2016 - VIGIL**

(Lec. 13)

- 1) Isaiah 62:1-5
- 2) Acts 13:16-17, 22-25
- 3) Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 430, 437, 452, 486, 497, 744, 1507, 1846, 2666, 2812 **CSDC** 378

**THE NATIVITY  
OF THE LORD  
- SOLEMNITY  
(Vigil Mass)**

FOCUS: *Emmanuel, God with us.*

It is good to be here together this evening. Welcome to those of you from out of town visiting family, and welcome to those of you who may not otherwise spend time at Mass, but hold your family dear enough to do so this evening. We are delighted you are here with us.

The readings this evening speak of promise, hope, salvation and family.

Our mighty God humbled himself in becoming fully human for the sake of our salvation. He does so by being born of the Virgin Mary in a manger in Bethlehem. Being fully human means that he experiences everything we do, with the exception of committing sin. As a child, Jesus is dependent upon his family for food, care and nurturing. We know from sacred Scripture that in his humanity, Jesus wrestles with human emotion, including anger and temptation. Choosing to break into humanity in this manner, through the Incarnation, is a tremendous act of love. What trust in humanity God seems to demonstrate by taking the form of an infant! In doing so, God elevates the dignity and the role of the family.

Saint John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, says, "...the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity..." (FC 17).

Take a moment to look at those sitting next to you, those sitting behind you and those sitting on the other side of the aisle. What you see is the manifestation of the family of God; for we are all children of God created in God's image and likeness. What we celebrate this evening is not an event of history, but a living God; alive and present here in sign, symbol, sacrament and person. It's not a far stretch to say that this sacred space this evening is the manger, and we are those who come to adore and to hope.

When we imagine the manger scene, it can call to mind a simplicity that seems beyond our lived experience these days. We live in time that is technologically driven. Deadlines dictate our schedule, and cultural complexity seems to challenge us to the very limits of our moral consciousness. Our experiences are vastly different from those of previous generations, but our needs are the same. We need promise. We need hope. We need salvation. We need family.

This time, shared here in prayer and sacrament, offers us the panoramic view of that alone which will fulfill our deepest longings. "It" is a "who," and lays in a manger and hangs on a cross. Salvation history is laid out before us this evening. It is a living Word through which we come to value ourselves. It is a life-giving sacrament through which we come to be claimed for love, by love. Christ's love continues to well up more fully within us, and we are able to share his saving and healing love with others.

This love goes from cradle to cross, from empty tomb to new life. It is the love that we, as a family, both as a family of origin – those sitting with you and those not with you whom you hold dear in your hearts – and communally, as a community of faith, must guard, reveal and communicate. We are a living reflection of, and a real sharing in God's love for humanity.

This evening is all the more evidence we need. This evening is the fulfillment of our deepest longing; for God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son – our promise, our hope, our salvation.

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## CHRISTMAS, 2016 - NIGHT

(Lec. 14)

- 1) Isaiah 9:1-6
- 2) Titus 2:11-14
- 3) Luke 2:1-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 437, 448, 486, 515, 525, 559, 695, 725

## THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD - SOLEMNITY (Mass at Night)

FOCUS: The timeless story of a most humble event.

The music teacher was directing a group of children who were singing the carol: “While the Shepherds Watched Their Flock at Night” to a packed house at the school’s annual Christmas concert. To her horror, she realized one of the young children was proudly singing as loud as he could: “While the Shepherds washed their socks at night.” Kids do say, or in this case sing, the darndest things don’t they? How do those little minds work?

Well those shepherds weren’t washing their socks. They were, in fact, as we just heard proclaimed in tonight’s Gospel, keeping the night watch in order to protect their sheep from marauders and wolves. Imagine a flock of angels singing to you in the middle of the night! I suppose any one of us might find that a little unsettling, too.

The birth of our Savior drew little attention the night it took place outside the city of Bethlehem. Had the shepherds nearby not been jolted by God’s messenger and a chorus of angels, Jesus’ birth might have gone totally unnoticed. Yet, here we gather over two thousand years later to praise a humble birth that turned out to shake the earth to its core. Here we gather to celebrate the great God-man event that would forever change the world.

As it turned out, this humble birth was not without controversy. Hundreds of innocent infants lost their lives because of Herod’s paranoia and greed. As it turns out, people to this day still lose their lives because of the humble birth of a child in a manger centuries ago.

I seriously doubt any of us gathered here this night will lose our lives because of this event. I pray, however, that all of us gathered here have surrendered our lives to this innocent life who grew up to become the Savior of the world.

It is God’s great desire that the birth of the Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace, take root in every heart. It is God’s great desire, as Saint Paul wrote to Titus, that we live *temperately, justly and devoutly in this age*.

More than at any other time of the year, there exists among most people a sense of joy, contentment and happiness at Christmas. Certainly the carols, the lights, the warm hearths and family gatherings reinforce this sense of love, harmony and tranquility among us.

The challenge for us as followers of the Innocent One of God is to harness this sense of joy and love and let it permeate our hearts and souls throughout the entire year. The world cannot afford for us – as faithful stewards of the almighty God dwelling within us – to put it all back in the attic of our lives like we do with all the lights, ornaments and decorations of the season.

We must be heralds of the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ to a world that is still dwelling too much in darkness. Let us bring the gift which is Jesus to all we meet.

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## CHRISTMAS, 2016 - DAY

(Lec. 16)

1) Isaiah 52:7-10

2) Hebrews 1:1-6

3) John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 241, 268, 291, 423, 445, 454, 461, 473, 496, 504, 505, 526, 530, 594, 612, 705, 706, 717, 719, 1216, 1692, 1996, 2466, 2780, 2787 **CSDC** 121, 262

## THE NATIVITY

OF THE LORD

- SOLEMNITY

(Mass During the Day)

FOCUS: The child Jesus, God Incarnate, is the best gift God can give us.

When we think of Christmas readings, we so often think of Luke's story of the birth of Jesus, the King of Kings born in a stable and accompanied by all of creation, from lowly farm animals to shepherds, kings, and even angels. Today's readings allow us to look even deeper into the meaning of the birth of this baby – Son of God and Son of Mary. Both the second reading and the Gospel show us the true identity of this special child born in lowly circumstances – and they give us much to reflect on as we consider the mystery of the Incarnation.

Today's reading from the Gospel of John reminds us that Jesus, the incarnate Second Person of the Trinity, was with God from the very beginning – *the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. Imagine the glories and the love this Second Person of the Trinity experienced from all eternity – from before even the creation of the world. Through this Second Person, God the Creator fashioned in mysterious ways myriad galaxies that make up our universe. And yet, out of love for us, this Divine Person *became flesh and made his dwelling among us*.

While today's Gospel presents pure, breathtaking mystery of the immensity, creativity and love of God, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews helps us to see more of the implications for us as human beings. This writer reminds us of the majesty of this Christ, this Second Person, who *accomplishes purification from sins* for us and returns to glory. This Word Incarnate, this human being, is *superior to the angels* and above all of creation.

What does this mean for us two thousand years after the Incarnation, the birth of Christ? We seem far removed from the glory of God that Jesus is experiencing now – we human beings who struggle in so many ways through much of our lives. Among us are human beings who have helped to bring about destruction of our planet, wars, violence, hunger, poverty and so many ills. So many of us suffer in terrible ways, and so many of us inflict suffering on others. And yet God, the Second Person, became one of us, not an angel and not an animal. He came to show us how to live as fragile and imperfect human beings. He came to show us God's love and concern for us, and God's desire to draw us to himself. Perhaps we can say that God became one of us because he saw how much we – above all other creatures – really need his help.

Today, as we celebrate the birth of our Brother and our Savior, Jesus Christ, let us ask him to show us, day by day throughout this coming year, how we can be more like him. Let us ask him to show us how to follow in his footsteps, in the way marked out for each of us individually, as we strive to live as God's beloved sons and daughters.

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Monday, December 26, 2016

(Lec. 696)

1) Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59

2) Matthew 10:17-22

Gospel related: CCC 161, 728, 1821

**SAINT STEPHEN,  
THE FIRST MARTYR  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Like Saint Stephen, we must testify to our faith and witness to the Gospel, even when it is not easy or popular.

It can be easy sometimes to sweep away the reality of life on mission. Jesus, in today's Gospel, makes it very clear that this is not a fun adventure. This journey is not for those who are seeking self-aggrandizement, glory or fame. Listen again to some of the phrases Jesus uses to those he is sending out: *beware of people, do not worry, brother will hand over brother to death, and you will be hated by all.* And then, finally, some good news: For those who endure all of this, they will be saved!

We need only to look to Saint Stephen, if the words of Christ are not warning enough for us. In the Acts of the Apostles we learn of Stephen's martyrdom. He had harsh – but honest – words for those who opposed the Holy Spirit. In the verses preceding today's passage, he calls them murderers and betrayers (7:52). They became so mad at him they *threw him out of the city, and began to stone him.* Stoning in the first century was definitely torture. It was, as it sounds, death by having stones thrown on a person, enough to cause their death.

It makes us wonder: Why would anyone choose to be a Christian after witnessing death by torture such as what Saint Stephen experienced? But the truth is, the witness of martyrdom actually drew people to Christianity because those who were willing to die for their beliefs gave a powerful witness. A willingness to die speaks very loudly and clearly about one's convictions. If Christians were willing to die for speaking the truth about Jesus, then there must be something to it.

Of course, we do not **seek** martyrdom. Some people are in a position where their defense of the faith, such as in the case of Stephen, requires the giving of their life. But what is interesting in the stoning of Stephen – which we see in other martyrs as well – is their attitude in the face of death. And not only their attitude of willingness and confidence in God, but the fact that God is with them in the trial they must go through.

We hear in the reading from Acts that Stephen had a vision of God at the time of his death. Scripture tells us that the heavens opened and Jesus was standing at the Father's right hand. This vision that Stephen experienced under the influence of the Holy Spirit surely must have brought him comfort and peace. We would do well today to trust in the great throng of witnesses who have gone before us like Saint Stephen and have testified to their faith under difficult circumstances.

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Tuesday, December 27, 2016

(Lec. 697)

1) 1 John 1:1-4

2) John 20:1a, 2-8

Gospel related: CCC 515, 640, 2174

**SAINT JOHN,  
APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST  
- FEAST**

**FOCUS:** By proclaiming the Good News to others, we share the joy that comes from living according to the teachings of Jesus.

How is it that immediately following Christmas and the birth of Jesus, we find ourselves contemplating the burial of Jesus and the empty tomb? To complicate matters, today's feast of John the Apostle and Evangelist is sandwiched between yesterday's martyrdom of Saint Stephen and tomorrow's slaughter of the Holy Innocents. What were the Church fathers thinking?

The fact is, they want to bring home the point that the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word of God made flesh in Jesus, the child in the manger, is connected to the totality of God's plan to bring salvation to a broken world. The totality of the mystery is present in all of its components, beginning with the Incarnation. The mystery of the birth, passion, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus are present at all times in the fullness of the Paschal Mystery. The Church may emphasize one aspect of the mystery in a particular liturgy, such as Christmas, but we must keep in mind that the entirety of the mystery is made present to us so that we can participate in it for our benefit. So, yes, this is why today we peer into the empty tomb while at the same time we peer into the manger at the Christ child.

In addition to being one of the Twelve Apostles, John is also believed to be the beloved disciple of Jesus. And John is one of the four Evangelists, and the author of the Gospel of John and the letters of John. In his letters and his Gospel, we know him as the theologian of love – a theme which permeates his writings. Today's reading from the First Letter of John recounts the testimony that he and the other disciples were witnesses to Jesus, the Word of Life. They heard, saw, looked upon and touched Jesus. He was invited by Jesus to many of the significant events in his life. John is proclaiming this passage to his readers so that all who hear and believe may have fellowship with the disciples, and in turn, fellowship with God.

Our Gospel passage finds us at the empty tomb of Jesus, peering in early on Easter morning with Mary of Magdala. John's Gospel views the passion and death of Jesus as a victory, and transforms the events of suffering and death into a moment of glory. The entire passage lays the framework for the moment of glory. The presence of Mary of Magdala, followed by Simon Peter and the *other disciple whom Jesus loved*, the entry into the empty tomb, and the burial garments rolled up all paint a picture of victory. Through this experience, the beloved disciple saw and believed. The verse that follows tells us *they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead*. As we contemplate the mystery of the Word made flesh in its fullness, may we continue to believe even though we do not yet fully understand.

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Wednesday, December 28, 2016

(Lec. 698)

1) 1 John 1:5–2:2

2) Matthew 2:13-18

Gospel related: CCC 333, 530

**THE HOLY  
INNOCENTS,  
MARTYRS  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: Fear can be a powerful thing, but it holds no power in the designs of God.

Fear can be a powerful thing. At times, it seemingly has the power to render us incapacitated. It can feel as if fear takes over our lives and dominates our thoughts. It can be the catalyst from which we make rash or harmful decisions. We need only to look at Herod's decision to kill the Holy Innocents out of fear of losing his power and kingship. His fear drove him to commit mass murder – not only of his own people, but some of the most vulnerable among them. Decisions made out of fear are rarely decisions made in freedom.

In many situations we face in life, the irony is that which we fear does not exist. There is a saying that says FEAR is **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal. Herod seems to have played into this kind of fear. It was his own imagination and interpretation of the prophecy that limited his understanding of the power of the Incarnation.

The truth of the matter is that only God has the bird's-eye view of the big picture. The designs God has for our lives are far greater than our mortal imaginations can conjure. God's vision for our lives is beyond our wildest dreams and expectations.

The Feast of the Holy Innocents calls to mind that holy innocents are still victims of fear today.

The decision to terminate a pregnancy is rarely one that is made in freedom. Studies indicate the decision is driven in the most part by fear – fear that a partner will leave, fear of being shamed by family and/or church community, fear that a child will change life too much, fear that a parent does not have the resources to raise the child. Fear overcomes the capacity to see the gift of life as it is being given to the parents. Fear creates a vacuum in which the decision to terminate is done so in isolation, and the pain from having made such a decision is suffered in silence. Although the suffering may be done in silence, however, the pain and shame carried throughout a person's life screams volumes in their hearts and minds, impacting their lives and families.

Today, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, it's time to "flip the script." Fear holds no power over those who trust in God's love, grace and mercy. Fear is powerless in the designs of God. As the first reading reminds us, *God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.* It goes on to tell us, *But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.* Let us cast out fear and live in the light of God's love, grace and mercy.

Healing ministries are available in the Church for those who have been touched by the termination of a pregnancy, and can be powerful experiences of seeking and finding God's grace, love, mercy and healing.

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Thursday, December 29, 2016

(Lec. 202)

1) 1 John 2:3-11

2) Luke 2:22-35

THE FIFTH DAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF THE NATIVITY  
OF THE LORD  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Thomas Becket,  
Bishop and Martyr)

Gospel related: **CCC** 149, 529, 575, 583, 587, 618, 695, 711, 713

FOCUS: Better to walk in the light than to stumble and fall in the darkness.

If you have never had the opportunity to see the movie *Becket*, do yourself a favor and watch it. Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole do a masterful job of showing us the problem that arises when human ways get in the way of God's will.

The last thing Saint. Thomas Becket wanted to be in 1162 was Archbishop of Canterbury. King Henry II thought his good friend's appointment placed Saint Thomas in his back pocket. Instead, his appointment caused a great conversion in Thomas' heart and spelled trouble for the king.

As the king grew more and more angry over Thomas' refusal to go along with his wishes, he mused out loud one day that he would be better off if the archbishop were out of his way. Some of his supporters took this to mean the king wanted him gone, so they went into the cathedral and murdered the king's good friend, Thomas Becket.

Saint John tells us today: *The darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light, yet hates his brother, is still in the darkness.*

King Henry, in his thirst for power, was plunged into darkness because of his growing resentment toward his longtime friend. This darkness had blinded the king from the truth – from the light of Jesus. We see this hunger for power, wealth and influence all around us. Perhaps we ourselves have gotten caught up in this great folly.

In the end, King Henry publicly repented. Hopefully, he did so for the right reasons and not just because the archbishop was very popular among the people, especially the poor, and the king did not want an open rebellion.

We cannot say we love our neighbor as ourselves and then turn a blind eye to those around us in need. Sometimes it is a family member in crisis. It could be a neighbor going through a difficult loss of a spouse. It could be the shelter or soup kitchen needs more volunteers. To look the other way with the excuse "I am too busy," or "I don't want to get involved" states quite clearly, "I prefer the darkness of inaction to the light of Jesus."

Remember Saint John's words today: *Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him to cause a fall.* Let us together walk in the light of Jesus, lest we stumble and fall in the darkness.

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Friday, December 30, 2016

(Lec. 17)

1) Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

or Colossians 3:12-21

or Colossians 3:12-17

2) Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Gospel related: **CCC** 333, 530

**THE HOLY FAMILY  
OF JESUS, MARY  
AND JOSEPH  
- FEAST**

FOCUS: The path to holiness, for an individual and for a family, is the path of Christian virtues, as modeled by Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Each of us has our own image of what we believe to be the ideal family. We may have gotten our image from a movie, a television show, or a family whom we know. But we know that families are made of real human beings who have virtues and vices.

Today, we hold up the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as a model for family life. Through the Gospels, we know that things weren't always perfect for the Holy Family. Despite heartaches and misunderstandings, the Holy Family remained firm because they remained strong in faith and virtue. A family is on the path to holiness when the members of the family are steadily choosing to embody virtues which are essential to all relationships.

Our Scripture readings today guide us into the virtues of family life. Sirach speaks of the virtues of respect and support between parents and children. The Gospel shows the virtues of Saint Joseph in his care of Mary and Jesus. Our reading from Colossians gives us a list of virtues for Christian life and then calls husbands and wives to live out their lives in the virtues of mutual love and respect.

There are a number of Christian virtues. Let's take a look at some which must be a part of family life.

- Love: Family members must choose to love one another through the good times and the bad.
- Commitment: One must choose to commit his/her life to be an active part of the family.
- Understanding: One must be open to listen and to comprehend what family members have to say.
- Trust: One must build and reinforce trust through honesty and fidelity.
- Compassion: One must have care and concern for other family members.
- Mercy: One must be able to forgive, modeling his/her life on the mercy of Jesus.
- Sacrifice: One must be willing to give of him/herself for the good of other family members.
- Gratitude: One must see what each other does as gift and express thanks to each other.
- Holiness: Each must strive to be a holy individual. The holiness of each brings holiness to the family.
- Openness to God: One must be open to follow the guidance of God, which comes in many ways.

These Christian virtues do not come automatically. We must choose to embrace them, teach them and model them. The Feast of the Holy Family gives us not only an opportunity to assess these virtues in our lives, it gives us a model of family life in Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

We must know that it is not only our desire to have a good and holy family – it is God's desire. It is not as easy as it looks in the theatre, on television or down the street. It demands that each of us strive daily to be virtuous people. Embodying virtues not only puts us on the road to living in a holy family, it puts us on the road to heaven.

Saturday, December 31, 2016

(Lec. 204)

1) 1 John 2:18-21

2) John 1:1-18

THE SEVENTH DAY  
WITHIN THE OCTAVE  
OF THE NATIVITY  
OF THE LORD  
(Opt. Mem.  
Saint Sylvester I,  
Pope)

Gospel related: **CCC** 151, 241, 268, 291, 423, 445, 454, 461, 473, 496, 504, 505, 526, 530, 594, 612, 705, 706, 717, 719, 1216, 1692, 1996, 2466, 2780, 2787 **CSDC** 262, 121

FOCUS: Jesus reveals the love of God the Father to us.

The passage from the Gospel of John today can at first seem quite intimidating, and perhaps difficult to understand. It looks to be a bit of a puzzle, with some complicated philosophy and theology necessary to solve it. For people who study Scripture for a living, that might be true. But for the rest of us, in moments like this, it does not have to be complicated at all. In fact, John's lengthy message to us can be stated in nine words: Jesus is the one who reveals God to us.

To see how simple this really is, we have only to form the right image in our mind about it. When John says that Jesus reveals God to us, he doesn't mean that Jesus was some random human being, standing on a stage and pulling back a huge curtain to show us God – as if they were on the latest version of "American Idol."

No. The truth John is painting with his words gives us this picture: by Jesus' very presence and existence among us, God is revealed. And in this revelation we come to know not just "what" God is, but "who" God is.

For example, we, quite literally, see God. We see God in the form of a man: Jesus – a man who is fully human and fully divine. And in this, Jesus reveals something else about God, about who God is: God loved us enough to become one of us.

By becoming one of us in the person of Jesus, God shows his desire to unite us to himself in a profound relationship of love – the love that the Father and Son themselves share. In knowing and loving Jesus, we necessarily come to know and love God. God is thus revealed to those who embrace Jesus.

And this is why, even though John's Gospel is full of history and imagery, the passage is not as complicated as it first appears. John is simply giving us the background to the message: that from the beginning, God has desired to be in relationship with us, and that Jesus has been part of the plan to make it happen. Through him all things came to be, as we say in the Creed, and that includes our knowledge and understanding of God. Let us strive to know Jesus, so that we come to know and love God more completely, and experience God's blessings of peace and joy more fully in our lives and hearts.

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