



*Reflections on Advent with Saint John Henry Newman*

DIOCESE OF CLEVELAND NEWMAN CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY



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NOVEMBER 29 - DECEMBER 5

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**A.J. Hoy**, Campus Minister at College of Wooster and  
Oberlin College and Conservatory

# SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29TH, 2020

## *First Sunday of Advent*

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### *Readings*

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FIRST READING: ISAIAH 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

SECOND READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-9

GOSPEL: MARK 13:33-37

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Surely this gracious warning should be ever in our thoughts, being so precise, so solemn, so earnest. He foretold His first coming, yet He took His Church by surprise when He came; much more will He come suddenly the second time, and overtake men, now that He has not measured out the interval before it, as then He did, but left our watchfulness to the keeping of faith and love. Parochial and Plain Sermons 22: “Watching”

Have you ever been left to your own devices in the absence of an authority figure? I can think of several instances from my own childhood when a teacher might leave our classroom unattended to run a copy or to use the restroom. Often times she would ask the teacher next door to “keep an eye” on us, but rarely did we see another teacher in her absence. Our teacher would always set us about doing some task (often times busy work) and then say something like, “Children, I’ll be right back. Keep working.”

The readings that we hear proclaimed this first week of Advent remind us that God is not so very different from that teacher or authority figure who, at times, leaves us unattended. It is no secret that we all experience times in our lives when God is seemingly absent. It wouldn’t surprise me if at some point in the past nine months each of us had felt God’s absence in one way or another. This week, we are reminded of the good news that Advent brings, God will not be absent for long. Jesus sums this up in one word in our Gospel reading, “Watch!” With such abrupt punctuation, it would be foolish of us not to heed his warning.

In his sermon titled “Watching”, St. John Henry Newman writes about the act of watching. What does watching involve? In reflecting on this gospel passage, Newman realizes the importance of Jesus’ warning: God surprised the world once; God is bound to surprise us again. Surely vigilance is the only way to be prepared for God’s second coming. But is it? There is great wisdom in the first reading that we hear proclaimed today. “Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways!” (Isaiah 64:4).

As Christians it is often tempting, in the perceived absence of God, to long for a day when we will recognize that God is with us once again. The Jewish people to whom Isaiah was sent to prophesy were no different. They longed to be in communion with God and for God to, quite literally, dwell among them in the Temple. However, we know that constantly watching for when God might come often proves to be an ineffective method in summoning God. Instead, of constantly looking to the sky or to some distant future, Isaiah refocuses God’s chosen people on what they are to do in the absence of God. His advice is simple and akin to what our teachers often told us, “Keep working.”

As we begin our journey through Advent, we are reminded of God’s first coming in the incarnation of Jesus. However, we must not also forget what followed Jesus’ first coming, namely the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In his short ministry, just before he left us for a while, Jesus gave the world and his church some work to do, and not just any old busy work. We are tasked, by Jesus, to help build the Kingdom of God. Yes, Jesus asks us to watch, but our vigilance must not be a constant gaze at the sky, or future, yet unknown. Our watching must be for opportunities to work to build the Kingdom of God, one brick at a time. Let us keep working, for we have plenty of work to do, so that when Jesus comes, he finds us doing right in his name.

*Find us ready Lord, not standing still.*

*Find us working, and loving, and doing your will.*

*Find us ready Lord, faithful in love,*

*Building the Kingdom that’s here and above,*

*Building the Kingdom of mercy and love.*

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30TH, 2020

*Feast of Saint Andrew, Apostle*

FIRST READING: ROMANS 10:9-18

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 19:8, 9, 10, 11

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 4:18-22

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Andrew, the first of the twelve Apostles. In our Gospel reading we hear Jesus' call of two fishermen who are also brothers, Peter and Andrew. Although Andrew is only scarcely referenced throughout the Gospel narratives, he is none-the-less an essential figure. He is the first to say "yes" to the call of Jesus. In his own simple way, Andrew becomes the model of discipleship. Today we hear proclaimed that famous line from this narrative, Jesus says, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." How odd this turn of phrase must have seemed to the simple fisherman on the shore. But something moved within them, and Andrew, followed by his brother Peter, turned to Christ and said "yes" to a life of discipleship, without knowing everything that "yes" entailed.

Today, let us remember Andrew's "yes" to a work and mission he did not yet understand. Much of the work we, as Christians, are called to continue in doing as we await the second coming of Jesus first requires a faithful "yes". Although God's callings to us are not often as clear as it was to Andrew and Peter, we can still commit ourselves to being disciples of Jesus today and everyday. Where can you say yes to God today? How can you work to become a better disciple of Jesus?



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1ST, 2020

*Tuesday of the First Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 11:1-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

GOSPEL: LUKE 10:21-24

Most of us spend our childhood wanting nothing but to grow up, so much so that we were often coached to be able to answer the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" from a very young age. Today's readings cause us to question this mindset. Both readings and the responsorial psalm tell us something about the Kingdom of God (that thing we're all supposed to be working for). Isaiah beautifully depicts what can only be understood to be the Kingdom of God. Here the lion rests with the lamb, all violence, harm, and fear are vanquished, and the leader of this world is a child. Jesus words in our gospel serve to double Isaiah's insistence that children know best when it comes to the Kingdom of God. It is no accident that this narrative sounds antithetical to our own world today.

Imagine living in a world led by children. This classic motif has been explored in books like *Lord of the Flies* and even on TV shows like *Star Trek*. In all cases, once children are left to their own devices, chaos ensues. The enduring message is simple, Adults, like God, bring order and security. Perhaps this is exactly what Isaiah and Jesus are getting at when they speak of a child's role in the Kingdom of God. In other parts of scripture we frequently hear God say something like, "My ways are different from your ways". The Kingdom of God will not be the order that we adults and young adults expect. In fact it will be just the opposite of what we ordinarily consider to be ordered. As we work for the Kingdom of God, let us not impose our own senses of order, but turn to the least among us for leadership and guidance.



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2020

*Wednesday of the First Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 25:6-10A

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 15:29-37

Today's readings contain within them a promise that should be rather comforting for all of us. God heals and satisfies. Our first reading once again mentions the coming of our long-expected savior. Watching. Waiting. Anticipating. But how are we to know after all of the watching and waiting that our God is dwelling among us? Isaiah tells us that God will provide, "A feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines" (Isaiah 25:6b). After this feast is provided and all are satisfied, God will then heal the world, literally ending divisions. What is interesting about this, is how Jesus reimagines this scene from Isaiah.

In the scene that Matthew depicts from our gospel reading today, Jesus is able to check all of the boxes from Isaiah's list, but he does it in his own way. Whereas Isaiah depicts the celebrations following a military victory, where there would be a great feast and all division would cease, Jesus takes to a mountain with thousands of people and first heals, then feeds. Who Jesus heals is important. He transforms those who are differently abled. The least are taken care of first. Then, once Jesus has healed, he feeds, but once again he reimagines Isaiah's prophesy. Jesus feeds by multiplying simple foods, bread and fish. This meal is a far cry from Isaiah's great banquet. Indeed, we can see that Jesus' ways are simple and tender, caring and generous. Although reimagined, it is clear that Jesus is the long-anticipated savior because he heals, and he satisfies. May we too reimagine our lives towards simplicity and tenderness, care and generosity seeking to be healed and satisfied in our God.



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2020

*Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, Priest*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 26:1-6

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 118:1 AND 8-9, 19-21, 25-27A

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 7:21, 24-27

Today's readings tell us that God's word and instruction is foundational. In the Gospel, Jesus tells us that those who listen to his words, and act upon them are like a person who builds a house on stone, but those who do not listen are like a "fool" who builds a house on sand. If you've ever built something like a wall, you may be aware that before bricks are laid, you must prepare the area on which the wall will sit. At the very least, you must construct a footing which will be strong enough to support the bricks, level, and durable enough to last for years to come. Weathering and water are your primary enemies. If you don't make these preparations, yes, the wall goes up much faster and may look great, but it will not remain that way. Eventually, wind and water will erode the earth beneath your wall, and it will begin to deteriorate. Our faith in God isn't much different from that wall.

Today the church celebrates the memorial of St. Francis Xavier, S.J., a champion of the spiritual life and the first Jesuit missionary to Japan. As a co-founder of the Jesuit order, Xavier was heavily involved in the development of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. These exercises for all Christians are still practiced today and take as their aim continued spiritual self-awareness. Indeed, the Spiritual Exercises serve as a strong foundation for many faithful people who seek to build the house of their faith. May we too seek out a strong foundation as we develop in faith and understanding.



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2020

*Friday of the First Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 29:17-24

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 27:1, 4, 13-14

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 9:27-31

Here again, we encounter a set of readings about healing. Although our gospel reading is easy to mistake as just another narrative of Jesus healing differently abled strangers who have great faith in him, once again, Isaiah frames this narrative with context. Namely, Isaiah reminds us that the coming of the Kingdom of God will be marked by mass healing. The prophet makes sure to cite the healing of the blind and the deaf. However, let us not read this in an ableist interpretation. God's healing goes far beyond disability. Isaiah tells us that God's healing is aimed at reordering our world and restoring relationality. It is hard to read Isaiah's prophecy as anything other than a radical reordering of the social structures with which we are so familiar. He writes, "The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD, and the poor rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the tyrant will be no more and the arrogant will have gone..." (Isaiah 29:19-20).

Here we see that God heals and reorders in such a way as to prefer the lowly, the poor, and the disabled. These are the people who are most forgotten by our social order, and it is God's intention to restore them their inherent dignity in the Kingdom of God. As people who work for the Kingdom of God, this restoration also becomes our task. Where do we forget the lowly, the poor, or the disabled? Who is missing from our gatherings? What can we do to not only include those who are typically ignored or forgotten, but also to restore and build relationships with them? As we begin to answer these questions and act upon our answers, let us not forget the work to which all Christians are called, to build the Kingdom of God here and now.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2020

*Saturday of the First Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 30:19-21, 23-26

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 9:35 – 10:1, 5A, 6-8

What moves us? What inspires us to do something? Certainly, you could answer in the Thomistic (following the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas) fashion and cite the reason and the will which both act within an individual to move that individual towards certain goods. You wouldn't be wrong, but you also wouldn't have completely answered the questions. Today's gospel offers us a look at what moved Jesus and can help us to evaluate what moves each of us.

In our gospel today, depending on the translation you are reading, we are told that Jesus, in going about Israel "curing every disease and illness", is moved with "pity" or "compassion". The Greek here is *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (*splagchnizomai*) which literally means "moved in your guts". Odd as it may seem, the word is used frequently throughout the Gospels. But what does it mean? Admittedly, "pity" is a poor translation. A more accurate translation might be "moved with a compassionate love". In his love and understanding of a people who yearned for a spiritual leader, Jesus was moved. He knew what the people were longing for because he knew them. Often times many of us can have trouble being moved to help others. So many people need help. But, we can almost always be moved to help the people we know. Why? We have encountered them. We know them. We know their needs and desires. As we continue in this Advent journey may we seek to encounter others who need the gifts we have and be moved with a compassionate love to help them.



*second week of advent*

DECEMBER 6 - DECEMBER 12

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**Sarah Rose**, Campus Minister at Cleveland State University

# SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6TH, 2020

## *Second Sunday of Advent*

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### *Readings*

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FIRST READING: ISAIAH 40:1-5, 9-11

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14

SECOND READING: SECOND PETER 3:8-14

GOSPEL: MARK 1:1-8

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I hate cleaning.

Don't get me wrong, I like things to be clean. I keep my house fairly tidy and in a state where I can easily shuffle things so there isn't much clutter, but the more routine chores like sweeping, mopping, and dusting (my least favorite), aren't a regular part of my to-do list – until I hear company is coming. Then it's all systems go and what would maybe have taken me 20 minutes to straighten up, turns into hours of work.

And while I'm sure friends and family wouldn't care, or even notice, the small bit of dust on a random picture frame, but there is a healthy sense of pride in thoughtfully preparing your home for someone. Though, it does beg the question of whether or not my last minute cleaning hustle is genuinely preparing for a guest, or trying to make myself look more put together as a host – or a person in general.

And I am ashamed to admit it, but that “just do what you need to get by” attitude has even made its appearance in my prayer life once or twice. Rather than intentionally setting aside time with and for God, in order to build a strong foundation, I may lean into one-off things like a random daily Mass or a rosary or service project and sort of hop in and out of the relationship.

But when there is something I really want, maybe even actually need, my relationship with God can go from zero to sixty in the blink of an eye only to fizzle out shortly after said prayer has been answered, or I'm distracted by something else.

As we are reminded in today's Gospel, Jesus is coming, and we need to prepare. Not in the “just shove everything in the closet because there's no time!” way, but in long, thought out, intentional ways that mirror the paradox of this Season of Advent: we are preparing for the Love that has already come. And lucky for us, it is never too late to begin those preparations.

In his sermon for the second week of Advent, “Reverence, a Belief in God's Presence Seasons,” Saint John Henry Newman articulates that no one is perfectly prepared for the coming of Christ. He mentions multiple cases of reasons one is not ready, and without God's grace can never be ready - especially if the magnitude of Incarnation is not understood. And while the tone of his writing might seem pessimistic, I find comfort knowing that no one has faith all figured out and there is always room to better prepare for God.

Maybe your preparation is planned and organized like Martha's. You have sandwiches ready and music playing in the background perfectly suited for the occasion.

Or perhaps your preparation is just inviting God in for the first time in a long time, ignoring the chores that are “supposed” to be done, and simply sitting in that Presence like Mary.

Jesus doesn't care if your home is spotless and can pass the white glove test or if there textbooks and notepads scattered everywhere because you were just cramming for an exam. He just wants to be invited into the mess and to help clear away the dust and the cobwebs that are particularly out of reach.

Our preparations are never over, friends. But even so, we have the promise of Emmanuel, a God who is with us and accompanies us as we journey toward Heaven.

Are there spaces in my life I try to hide from our tender Creator? How can I better invited God to enter into my heart this Advent?



**MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2020**

*Memorial of Saint. Ambrose, Bishop & Doctor of the Church*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 35:1-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 85:9AB & 10, 11-12, 13-14

GOSPEL: LUKE 5:17-26

Those Pharisees? Am I right?

Too often in Scripture, I hear stories about these men and turn up my nose at their actions with a “well, I would never do that,” mentality. Or worse, point to people in the world today and assume that they are the twenty-first century hypocrites who simply won’t listen to Jesus in the Gospels - or rather won’t listen to the voices and ideologies that parallel my own interpretation of His words.

But hypocrisy and sin aren’t always as easy to spot as we would like to think. And sometimes everyday miracles and gifts from God can be clear to some, while undetectable to others, like myself.

As we journey through Advent toward the God who vulnerably humbled Himself in the Incarnation, might we pray for the same humility and openness to everyday miracles in our midst – a conversion of heart in someone surprising, a profound insight to the Divine from someone who doesn’t believe, or maybe just trusting that God sees and loves me exactly as I am.

What miracles might I have missed because my eyes were clouded with judgement? In what ways have I resembled a Pharisee and been skeptical of God’s unconditional mercy and goodness?



**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2020**

*Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 40:25-31

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 103:1-2, 3-4, 8 & 10

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 11:28-30

I don’t think we give Mary enough credit for her fiat, or “yes” to God. Too often she’s portrayed passively in the story of the Incarnation, a quiet young girl who goes along with what the angel tells her and nine months later casually gives birth under a star with people and animals coming to see her sweet baby and shower them with presents.

And while there is something to be said about a blind trust in the goodness of God, Mary’s fiat was so much more.

She was active. She was thoughtful. And she was brave.

When Gabriel explains God’s plan to her, she listens and she asks for more details. She knew the laws of the time, particularly in regards to being an unwed mother. And what’s more, being a devout Jew, she also would have known that the future of her child would be painful and end in his death.

But still, she said yes.

Her active participation in Salvation History is demonstrated in her giving birth in a stable, in prompting her son to keep the party going at the wedding at Cana, and in standing at the foot of the Cross while her baby boy is wrongfully and viciously put to death.

More “modern” examples demonstrate the Blessed Mother’s love of the seemingly weak and often overlooked among us. Our Lady of Guadalupe pushes St. Juan Diego, a non-Catholic indigenous man, to confront the local bishop. Both Our Lady of Fatima and Our Lady of Lourdes speak to young ones whose voices are disregarded as childish until their persistence brings proof.

Her active “yes” echoed throughout Jesus’ life and continues to echo through ours.

Has there been a time where I’ve hesitated to answer God’s call because I knew it would involve heartache? In what ways is God inviting me to actively live out the Gospel this Advent? How can I say, “yes”?

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2020**

*Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 35:1-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 85:9AB & 10, 11-12, 13-14

GOSPEL: LUKE 5:17-26

Resting is not something that comes natural to me. I'm a doer. I have a list of a million tasks and before I even get to the bottom of that list, I like to add on some more. You know, just for fun.

On the rare occasion that I have nothing to do, I'm like a deer caught in headlights, paralyzed by possibility and uncomfortable with stillness.

But the other day, a friend shared a quote with me that hit me square between the eyes and forced me to take a step back.

"To rest is an act of faith. It means we honestly believe that our existence is not dependent on our activity." – Elizabeth Foss

Woof.

I felt seen and attacked all at the same time. My usual thoughts of "but if I don't get it done, who will?" were crushed with a hard truth that I frustratingly keep having to learn and relearn over and over again.

I am not, and will never be, in control.

For me, this truth is simultaneously frightening and comforting. It's hard to let go of that need to control. But we are given a beautiful promise from our Savior in today's Gospel. "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest," (Matthew 11:28).

No strings attached, no hidden clause in the contract.

We just have to turn to Jesus and trust in the merciful, unconditional love of God.

In what areas of my life is Jesus inviting me to loosen my grip on control? Jesus is inviting me to rest in His arms. Am I able to do so? And if not, what barriers are in place keeping me from His merciful love?

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2020**

*Thursday of the Second Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 41:13-20

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 145:1 & 9, 10-11, 12-13AB

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 11:11-15

When I was a junior in college, I learned something about a friend that, in a way, impacted my whole world view.

You see, I had placed this friend on a pedestal. Their hard work and devout faith were something I greatly admired and in a way, I expected them to be perfect. So, when I learned they were \*gasp\* human, just like the rest of us, I had to reexamine the eyes through which I saw them and, in reality, everyone else in the world.

We cannot canonize someone before they're a saint.

By that, I mean, if to be a saint means to be in Heaven with God, there are no saints on earth, no matter how amazing they may seem. And when we fail to see the humanity in all of us, even the seemingly best among us, we create idols and, in a way, separate ourselves from the Communion of Saints already in Heaven tirelessly interceding on our behalf.

As Jesus tells us in today's Gospel, "there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he," (Matthew 11:11).

We are called to become saints. But we do not and cannot know who will (or will not) do so prior to their death – and more often than not, years and years after.

May we find comfort in this mystery and inspiration to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and continue journeying together toward Heaven.

Is there anyone that I hold on an unhealthy pedestal because of their faith? How is Jesus inviting me to see the beauty of their humanity in a way that does not prematurely sanctify their holiness? How might the Communion of Saints accompany me during Advent this year?

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2020**

*Friday of the Second Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 48:17-19

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 1:1-2, 3, 4 & 6

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 11:16-19

The more I learn about God, the more I realize just how much there is to learn.

And as the mystery of the Divine grows, my attitudes of arrogance and being a know-it-all is (thankfully) beginning to be refined into a more humble faith that is confident in the goodness of God and the Truth of Jesus, but less rooted in my own ability to say who or what is in or out in regards to God's favor.

Our humanity likes to categorize and make assumptions. Clouded by our judgement, we often fail to see Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially if they do not think or act how we think they should. Our ignorance can blind us to the ways in which the Holy Spirit is working in each and every one of us, which is truly tragic.

As we journey together toward the Incarnation, let us not forget to recognize the goodness of God already present along the way.

How might we open our arms and hearts to others the Advent? Who is Jesus reminding me to remember and include in preparing for Christ's birth?



**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2020**

*Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

FIRST READING: ZECHARIAH 2:14-17

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: JUDITH 13:18BCDE, 19

GOSPEL: LUKE 1:39-47

God's decision to be revealed in unexpected and even unthinkable ways never ceases to amaze me. In a world where power and strength are glorified and admired, Love enters our midst by way of the weak and vulnerable. The Incarnation illustrates gentle characteristics of our Creator, who is willing to be vulnerable with humanity for no other reason than an ineffable, infinite, Love.

And the humbling Self-giving does not end at the Incarnation. We learn more about Who God is when Elizabeth's baby, John the Baptist, still snug in her womb, reveals to her the presence of Christ through joyful leaping.

We learn more still, when Our Lady of Guadalupe (whose feast is celebrated today), chooses Juan Diego, a poor, indigenous, non-Christian man in Mexico, to answer her call to build a shrine so that love and compassion could be shared.

The supposed insignificance of these emissaries of God is significant. Elizabeth was an elderly woman in a society that did not value her and her baby was perhaps even more vulnerable. Juan Diego was certainly no great warrior, and even tried to escape Mary's call multiple times. Yet he is a beloved member of the Communion of Saints.

The ways in which and through whom God chooses to be revealed is intentional and important in our understanding of the Divine Mystery. And as we end this Second Week of Advent and continue on our journey toward Emmanuel, God with us, I encourage you to keep your heart open to the ways in which Jesus reveals Himself to you and those around you.

How might we keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open to God's revelation – particularly through the unexpected? How am I being invited to more deeply enter into Advent as we enter into the season's third week?

*third week of advent*

DECEMBER 13 - DECEMBER 19

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**Steve Perry**, Campus Minister at Case Western Reserve University

# SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020

## *Third Sunday of Advent*

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### *Readings*

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FIRST READING: ISAIAH 61:1-2A

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: LUKE 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54

SECOND READING: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

GOSPEL: JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

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If we were to read the Gospels simply as works of literature, it would seem to us that John the Baptist is a minor character. He is known for just three scenes – leaping in his mother’s womb, baptizing Jesus, and his execution – and he never seems to make it out of the first few chapters of the story. One reading the Gospels in this way could be forgiven for thinking that John had little significance of his own, that he was simply a plot device in a story about another man.

But John was somebody.

In a time when fame could only come from word of mouth, John the Baptist was famous. In a time when the Temple – destroyed centuries before – was being rebuilt, people were making pilgrimage to John to be baptized. And in a time when the hope for the Christ was reaching a fever pitch, as today’s Gospel tells us, people believed it was him. In that light, the weight of John’s response to the question of whether he was the Christ becomes clearer: “You think I am the Messiah? No, I wouldn’t be worthy to touch his shoes.”

Someone is coming, John tells them, and he’s going to exceed your imagination.

The Jewish leaders of the time were expecting the Messiah to be a great figure, but one who fit in to categories they understood – a king, a ruler, a conqueror – all concepts that they could fit into their imagination. They expected the Messiah to be one that would not so much call them to change, but to bring them all that they most desired precisely as who they were. They had what you might call a

domesticated image of the promised Messiah. So John, as the voice in the desert, was calling on them to think bigger. To borrow some words from T.S. Eliot, it is as though John is saying to them:

*Let me tell you, that to approach the Stranger*

*Is to invite the unexpected, release a new force,*

*Or let the genie out of the bottle.*

*It is to start a train of events*

*Beyond your control...*

Friends, how abundantly we would benefit from hearing this call of John the Baptist with new ears! Though we now know the Messiah by name, do we not also often fall into the temptation to domesticate him? Is the Jesus we imagine not smaller and less intrusive than the Jesus of whom John speaks? Have we not at times forgotten that truly encountering the Christ is meant not only to comfort us, but to transform us?

In this season of Advent, as we enjoy frequent smiles from strangers and tranquil nativity scenes, let us not in so doing forget what the great John the Baptist said of this innocent and beautiful boy we await: “I wouldn’t be worthy to touch his shoes.” Let us not forget that, as the snow may be beginning to fall, this boy we are preparing to welcome is a blazing fire, a sign of contradiction (Luke 2:34), the welcome for sinners who calls on them to sin no more. Let us heed John’s call to think bigger, to realize that to truly welcome the Lord is to release a new force in our lives beyond our control. And let us not be afraid of this transforming fire, but hunger for it.

Someone is coming, and he is going to exceed our imagination.

Let us approach him still.



**MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2020**

*Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church*

FIRST READING: NEHEMIAH 24:2-7, 15-17A

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 25:4-5AB, 6, 7BC-9

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 21:23-27

The author of our Psalm today writes as he is surrounded by enemies who wield a violent hatred for him; yet, he asks first not for the strength to overpower them or for the Lord to sap their strength. Instead, he simply asks the Lord “teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth.” In a word, he asks his God for the grace of repentance.

In English, the word repentance carries a heavily moralized connotation, as if when Jesus tells us “repent, and believe in the Gospel,” what he means is, “feel badly and believe in the Gospel.” But its meaning, so wholly captured by the Psalmist here, is much richer. The command repent comes to us from the Greek *metanoieite*, which is a sort of compound word built from two roots: *meta* meaning “beyond” or “transcending,” and *nous* meaning “mind.” So, when the Psalmist, he is ultimately saying “take me beyond my mind – my way of seeing things – and give me yours.”

This is what the Psalmist sees as the first step in addressing his very authentic and pressing worldly concerns: to gain more fully the mind of God. So, he opens himself up to the Lord, embracing the risk that doing so might profoundly change him.

This Advent, as we prepare to welcome the child Jesus, may we all take courage and embrace that risk ourselves.



**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2020**

*Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ZEPHANIAH 3:1-2, 9-13

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19, 23

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 21:28-32

In the Gospel today, Jesus draws a contrast between two sons who receive a command from their father: one says no to the command but does it anyway, while the other says yes does not follow through. The Lord then affirms that it was the first son who did his father’s will. Hearing this, our immediate instinct is likely to read ourselves into the parable and discern which of the two sons we more resemble. This is a worthwhile exercise, but bearing in mind that this reading comes to us during the Advent season orients us toward a deeper understanding of this parable: namely, it is a message of hope to us all.

Who among us has never said no to the will of our Father? Have you ever rejected an invitation to consider a future, maybe a vocation, that may be different than what you imagine? Do you have a strained relationship that could be mended with a simple offer of forgiveness? Is there a particular pattern of sin in your life that, willingly or unwillingly, you continue to choose over the way of the Lord? Whatever the particulars may be, one thing is true: we have, all of us, said no to our Father’s invitation to life with him. To each of us, then, the message of this parable is clear: we can still be the child who does the will of the Father.

Friends, Advent is a privileged time to “reset.” It is the beginning of a new Church year, a season set aside for prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and a season which concludes with the celebration of a birth that marked the beginning of a New Covenant. In whatever way you have said no to the Father’s invitation in the past, is now the time to turn and say yes?

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2020**

*Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 45:6C-8, 18, 21C-25

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 85:9AB & 10, 11-12, 13-14

GOSPEL: LUKE 7:18B-23

“Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth,” the Lord says in our first reading today, “for I am God; there is no other.”

Having lived the whole of our lives under the leadership and rule of flawed humanity, our knee-jerk reaction to a claim like this may be to bristle at it. After all, how many times in the last six months did we hear two men vying for power each saying “you won’t be safe in candidate X’s America”? How is God’s claim different?

When it comes to candidates for political office, at best their true intentions include the betterment of the people they will lead; yet, even if this is among their foremost intentions, there is always a dimension self-interest involved. Give me the power, and I will do good for you. To God, however, this principle does not pertain. From all eternity, our triune God lacked nothing. If I give my life in service to God, he gains no good from me that he did not already have perfectly in himself. If the whole human race were to say to God, “All power is yours,” the Lord would gain nothing by it, for all power is his regardless. Humanity can give nothing to God that he does not already have.

What, then, motivates the Lord to call on us to “turn to [him] and be safe” if it brings about no new good for him? If he gains nothing by our turning to him, why call on us to do it?

The answer, my friends, is simple: it is for our good, and we gain everything by it. We were created to share life with him, and only in sharing life with him will we find eternal satisfaction. It is for that end, for our ultimate and everlasting good – and out of his generosity and superabundant love – that the Lord calls us to turn to him and be safe.

How will you respond?

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020**

*Thursday of the Third Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: GENESIS 49:2, 8-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 72:1-2, 3-4AB, 7-8, 17

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 1:1-17

Today’s readings combine to remind us of the Davidic Kingship of Christ - that his royalty lies not only in his divinity but in his humanity as well. But if we bear in mind that today’s first reading is a prefiguring of Christ, we are likely to find ourselves shocked by the violent language therein. Jesus was meek and humble of heart, right? We rightly can’t imagine him with his hand on the neck of Caesar!

Many, noting the contrast between the way the Messiah was prophesied in the Old Testament and who the Gospel tells us Jesus was, will simply say Jesus was not the Messiah that Israel was expecting. They were expecting a warrior-king but instead got the son of a carpenter. I, myself, made note of that contrast in my reflection on last Sunday’s Gospel! Yet that claim in itself may be misleading – it may lead us to see Christ as God’s milquetoast response to a deeply fallen world – when the reality could not be further from that claim.

In reality, Jesus Christ was every bit and more the warrior-king that Israel anticipated, but it was not Israel’s political enemies that he marched against, but instead the enemies of all humanity: the Devil and his angels. The Lord does not mince words when it comes to that enemy’s chances of victory before his march: the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Without our King, we were helpless before our enemy, as Israel was helpless before Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. But the moment our Messiah, God himself, was born in a manger, any hopes our enemy had at victory were extinguished. He is precisely the Messiah who was prophesied, we simply underestimated his battlefield.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020

*Friday of the Third Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 23:5-8

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 72:1-2, 12-13, 18-19

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 1:18-25

In his sermon on the Third Sunday of Advent, St. John Henry Newman forwards that among the duties of a person of faith is to make “ventures for eternal life without the absolute certainty of success,” to trust and follow the direction of the Lord though you do not know for certain where it leads. I can think of few Biblical figures who model this duty more acutely than St. Joseph in our Gospel today.

We are introduced to St. Joseph as he is likely preparing a house to receive his new wife into. One might expect that in the preceding weeks he had begun to imagine a simple and peaceful life in the home he was building with Mary, where his sons and daughters would eat, sleep, and pray. Then he learns that his wife is pregnant – and not by him – and although an angel assures him she was not unfaithful, the information he is given about his future is starkly different than the humble and quiet life he had likely imagined. But Joseph trusted without hesitation. “When [he] awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home” (Mt 1:24).

If the Lord guides us toward a future that may be different than the one we imagined, different than the one we have prepared for, let us look to Joseph as a model and intercessor, that we may show the same unflinching courage he did here.

St. Joseph, pray for us.



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020

*Saturday of the Third Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: JUDGES 13:2-7, 24-25A

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 71:3-4A, 5-6AB, 16-17

GOSPEL: LUKE 1:5-25

When I read the Psalms, I often have in my mind an image of King David praying before the Ark of the Covenant. Whether he is rejoicing, praising God, lamenting, or asking for aid, I picture him in that sacred space, before the sign of God’s presence among his people, speaking to the Lord through it.

Today’s Psalm, however, brings to mind a new image: David kneeling beside a crib, offering these words to the Lord Incarnate as an infant. I see in my mind’s eye an aging but strong king, kneeling before one who, to the eye, appears to be a helpless child, saying:

Be to me a rock of refuge,  
A strong fortress to save me,  
For you are my rock and my fortress...  
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;  
From my mother’s womb, you have been my strength.  
My praise is continually of you.

The image is jarring, but I think the incongruity which strikes me here is also the source of the hope we have in Advent. Small and harmless as this child may seem, he is in truth the Word by which the world was made, the hope of the prophets, kings, and people of Israel, the Author of the Covenants both Old and New, and the hope of salvation for us all.

This new image calls to mind for me an ancient Christian chant which in few words says much of what I have endeavored to say in many over the last week. With that said, let my final words to you this Advent season be the words of that hymn:

*O great mystery,  
and wonderful sacrament,  
that animals should see the newborn Lord,  
lying in a manger!  
Blessed is the virgin whose womb  
was worthy to bear  
the Lord, Jesus Christ. Alleluia!*

*O magnum mysterium  
et admirabile sacramentum  
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum,  
iacentem in praesepio!  
Beata Virgo, cujus viscera  
meruerunt portare  
Dominum Iesum Christum. Alleluia!*

# *fourth week of advent*

DECEMBER 20 - DECEMBER 24

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**Joann Rymarczyk-Piotrkowski**, Assistant Director of Newman  
Catholic Campus Ministry

# SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20TH, 2020

## *Fourth Sunday of Advent*

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### *Readings*

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FIRST READING: 2 SAMUEL 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

SECOND READING: ROMANS 15:25-27

GOSPEL: LUKE 1:26-38

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Here we are at the fourth Sunday of Advent. Next stop, Christmas! But our readings today take us back to the beginning of the story; and just in time. Our culture has been playing Christmas music non-stop since Thanksgiving. Our commercials bombard us with suggestions for the perfect gift for everyone. So this Sunday's readings come to remind us of the Gift we are really waiting on—the coming of Jesus!

Our first reading finds the prophet Nathan advising King David. Just when Nathan tells the King to, “Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you,” The Lord comes to Nathan with a new message for King David, “I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever.” In film, one would call this foreshadowing; the foretelling of the coming of Jesus.

Today's Gospel story fast-forwards from King David to the Annunciation. We've heard this story many times over the years. The angel appears to Mary and tells her she will conceive a son and that “the Lord God will give him the throne of David.” When Mary questions how this can be happening, the angel explains, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.”

Then Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” In this statement, Mary says yes and leaves the rest to God.

In his sermon for the fourth Sunday of Advent, St. John Henry Newman reminds us that in our prayers we pray for the coming of Jesus. Advent is the time we especially pray for the coming of the Lord; at Christmas and for His return to the world. Advent reminds us that we need also pray for ourselves to be ready for the coming of Jesus. Like Mary in this story, who tells the angel “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word,” Newman reminds us that, “Under all circumstances surely, we may calmly resign ourselves into God's hands. Let us do what He bids, and leave the rest to God.”

As Christmas draws near, what is it that you need to resign to God's hands? Give it to God and leave the rest to him.



**MONDAY, DECEMBER 21ST, 2020**

*Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: SONG OF SONGS 2:8-14 OR ZEPHANIAH 3:14-18

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-2

GOSPEL: LUKE 1:39-45

Yesterday, we heard the story of The Annunciation where Mary offered her ultimate “yes” to cooperate with God in bringing the Savior of the World. Today’s gospel tells the story of The Visitation and it begins with a journey. “Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste...”

This time of year, I think, many of us can appreciate the idea of Christmas vacation or Christmas break; coming home for the holidays or traveling to be with relatives to celebrate Christmas. But what Mary does here is hardly vacation. She just learned that she is to be the Mother of God, and rather than keeping the news to herself, or wondering how she will cope, she sets out on a journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Many of us tend to think of the Blessed Mother as a quiet woman of few words, blessed with tremendous faith and boundless trust. While this is true, today try to think of her a little differently. Think of her as a woman of action. She is a woman on a continual journey. Often by necessity she is on the move.

Throughout the gospel, after her visit to Elizabeth, Mary is often on the move. After giving birth, she and her small family flee to Egypt to escape death. Later we hear the story of her traveling to Jerusalem where her son goes missing; and we follow her as she goes back to search for Him. Finding him, she continues bringing him home to Nazareth.

Some say Mary is the first disciple. She was the first missionary, a woman who traveled to carry Christ to the world. In today’s gospel we see her literally bringing Jesus to another as she carries him in her womb.

Upon hearing Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s own infant leapt in her womb. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth shouts “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb... Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

In these final days before Christmas, where are you journeying? How are you bringing Christ to your little corner of the world? What would you ask from the Blessed Mother as she accompanies you on your journey?

**TUESDAY, DEC. 22ND, 2020**

*Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: 1 SAMUEL 1:24-28

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: 1 SAMUEL 2:1, 4-8

GOSPEL: LUKE 1:46-56

Yesterday we heard the first part of The Visitation, with Elizabeth greeting Mary as the “Mother of the Lord.” Today we continue with Mary’s visit to Elizabeth and we hear her response to Elizabeth’s proclamation. Mary responds with words that any missionary might proclaim; words that are at the heart of proclaiming The Good News; words that proclaim the beginning of all belief: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.”

What follows is the Magnificat. It is Mary’s gift to scripture and one of our most beautiful prayers. It is prayed every evening in the Liturgy of the Hours by millions around the world. Mary’s great acclamation becomes the Church’s.

Yesterday I asked you to view Mary as a woman of action. We, like Mary, are called to be people of action. Sometimes we know where the journey is headed and other times, like Mary, we rely on our faith to see where God is taking us. The key, for us, is taking action! Take that first step to where God is leading you. We are not on the journey alone. We have friends, parents, teachers, and mentors here on earth. We also have the Communion of Saints and Mary to call upon to help guide our way.

Sometimes the road will be long, like getting through four years of college. Sometimes the journey will be hard as we navigate the change from student to job searcher or the loss of loved ones or those moments of indecision. Through it all we remember Mary and the trust she had in God to travel whatever road was set before her.

As we continue on this journey toward Christmas, when our God took human form, we ask Mary to join us as we pray for the courage to continue our journey on earth. We also pray that at our journey’s end we meet Mary where she waits for us with a mother’s love just as she waited with love to meet Jesus on the day of His birth.

In what way are you being called to be a person of action? Who has supported you in your journey thus far? As Christmas approaches how will you acknowledge those people as gifts in your life? What are the gifts you need to pray for in order to continue on your journey?

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23RD, 2020

*Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent*

FIRST READING: MALACHI 3:1-4, 23-24

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 25:4-5, 8-10, 14

GOSPEL: LUKE 1:57-66

In today's first reading we have another foreshadowing. The prophet Malachi foretells the coming of John the Baptist: "Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me. And suddenly there will come to the LORD, whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire."

In today's gospel we fast forward from this prophesy to the birth of John, and his circumcision and naming ceremony. His father, Zechariah, had lost his voice in the time leading up to the birth and naming of John. In the moment he agreed to name the baby John, Zechariah regained his voice. Both John's birth and his naming were sources of miracles.

Scripture scholars agree that both the birth of John and the birth of Jesus are miraculous. John was born of his aged parents and Jesus from a virgin. The coming of both births were announced by the angel. John's mission was to be the forerunner of the Messiah and Jesus' mission was to be the saving Messiah. In this gospel, Luke highlights the greatness of Jesus and the subsidiary position of John as the precursor of the Messiah and the herald of God's coming kingdom.

Just as Mary is our example of a woman of action, John is a man of action. In his adult life his mission was clear; to "prepare the way of the Lord." A man of humility, not wanting attention on himself, John directed people to Jesus. When people began to speculate that he might be the Messiah, John reassured them that he was not. He declared that his ministry was preparing for the coming of the Messiah, "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." When Jesus came to John asking for baptism, John recognized Jesus at once and said, "Look, there is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

John was a man with the courage of his convictions as he heralded the coming of Christ. What is the courage of your convictions? In what ways are you a herald of Christ?

In your words? In your actions? What gifts do you pray for to assist you in being a herald of Christ?

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24TH, 2020

*Christmas Eve*

FIRST READING: 2 SAMUEL 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 89:2-5, 27, 29

GOSPEL: LUKE 1:67-79

On this eve of the coming of Jesus in the celebration of Christmas, the gospel of the day continues with the events of John the Baptist's naming ceremony. Having regained his voice, John's father, Zechariah proclaims his own prophecy about his son. And just as Mary's Magnificat is her gift to scripture and is prayed every evening, Zechariah's prophecy is his gift to scripture. Known in the church as the Canticle of Zechariah, it is prayed during the Liturgy of the Hours each morning.

Finally realizing that "nothing is impossible for God," Zechariah affirms that "John is his name." With this silent act of faith and obedience, Zechariah's speech is returned to him. Just as Mary had broken out in praise in the Magnificat, Zechariah breaks out in his praise. "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he has come to his people and set them free...He has raised up for us a mighty Savior...He has set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear all the days of our life."

In these words we hear that the Lord has come to set us free from our cynicism, our unbelief, our own darkness, our sin. Just as John prepared the people of his time for the coming of Jesus, he is calling us to prepare as well for the coming of the Lord who will free us from our darkness and sin; our pride, meanness and violence. He calls us instead to accept the presence of God in our lives.

Included in the Canticle of Zechariah is one of the most beautiful lines of scripture and the summary of the Christmas Good News: "In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet in the way of peace." What are you holding on to that keeps you from accepting the presence of God in your life? On this Christmas Eve, what gifts will you ask for that will guide your feet in the way of peace and to understand the meaning and purpose God has for you? Wisdom? Understanding? Courage?













Catholic Diocese  
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