

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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December 2, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Yesterday, the first Sunday of Advent called us to “be attentive and watchful,” “Pray constantly for strength,” and live “loving and blameless” lives. Today, the first Monday of Advent, calls us to be people of hope and let our hope carry us onward through these difficult and troublesome days. In the first Scripture reading of today’s mass, Isaiah shares his beautiful vision of the Lord’s house being established as the highest of all mountains, raised above all hills, to which all nations would come. On this mountain, a sense of brotherhood, harmony and peace would come. He dreams of the time when all instruments of destruction will be transformed into creative and life-giving instruments, “sword into plowshares” and “spears into pruning hooks.” Isaiah calls us today to move in hope, unafraid and “walk in the light of the Lord.”

The season of Advent is a season of hope. As deformed by sin, violence and war, the shape of this world will pass away. We are offered the hope that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice and peace will meet, and the blessedness that comes from this transformed world will surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart.

Our hope is rooted in the unconditional love of God for each human being. God never gives up on anyone. God's love is enduring, steadfast, unconditional, unconquerable, and all-embracing. Our hope is not a passive waiting for things to happen. It calls forth continual conversion if we are to hasten our journey into the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love, and peace. We are constantly challenged to “be people of hope.”

Let us share Isaiah’s vision of a transformed world where justice and peace become the norm and strive to be people of hope who walk in the light of the Lord! Let us meditate on Isaiah’s vision of turning “swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks.” Let us pray that all destructive instruments will be turned into creative, life-giving instruments – Weapons of war into weapons of peace; Anger into Gentleness; Violence into Peace; Hatred into Love.....

I encourage you to take a few moments each day of this week to reflect on how your day has been, on how you walked in the light of the Lord and on what contribution you have made to the creation of the transformed world as Isaiah envisioned.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

First Week of Advent

December 2-7, 2024

“During Advent we do not just live in anticipation of Christmas; we are also called to rekindle the anticipation of the glorious return of Christ, when he will return at the end of time , preparing ourselves, with consistent and courageous choices, for the final encounter with him.

We remember Christmas, we await the glorious return of Christ, and also our personal encounter: the day in which the Lord will call.”

(Pope Francis)

December 2 – Monday, First Week of Advent

Forbearance is gentle persuasion and encouraging positive results.

Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah has a beautiful vision of the Lord’s house being established as the highest of all mountains, raised above all hills, to which all nations would come. On this mountain, a sense of brotherhood, harmony and peace would come... all instruments of destruction would be turned into creative instruments, “sword into plowshares...spears into pruning hooks...” From this vision came the call of Isaiah to “walk in the light of the Lord”.

Be people of hope! Work for peace and harmony! Walk in the light of the Lord!

Psalm 122

**I rejoiced when I heard them say:
let us go to the house of the Lord.
And now we have set our foot
within your gates, O Jerusalem.**

Matthew 8:5-11

Centurions were the finest men in the Roman army. The centurion mentioned in this excerpt was a man of honor. Even his attitude toward his servant was extraordinary - he was grieved

that his servant was ill, and he was determined to do everything to save him. This was the reverse of the normal attitude of Master to his slave. How different people are! And how easy it becomes for us to judge and put everyone into one square box.

This calls us to overcome our prejudices and learn to go beyond common perceptions to discovering truth.

This centurion was also a man of extraordinary faith. He wanted Jesus to heal his slave. But he had a problem - he was a Gentile and Jesus was a Jew and Jews didn't enter the house of Gentiles. He was a noble man, and his faith was great. So, he could say, "you don't need to come - just say the word". This was the voice of faith. And so, Jesus declared faith as the "door" to the feast in the kingdom of God. The Jews had to learn that access to God's presence was not a matter of membership in any nation, but faith.

Faith has the power to break down barriers. Let your faith break down fears, doubts, prejudices.....

Saint of the Day, December 2 - St. Bibiana and 7 other saints are remembered this day.

We know very little about St. Bibiana. Tradition tells us that, in the year 363, she suffered persecution under the then governor of Rome. She was the daughter of Christians, Flavian, a Roman knight, and Dafrosa, his wife. Flavian was tortured and sent into exile, where he died of his wounds. Dafrosa was beheaded, and their two daughters, Bibiana and Demetria, were stripped of their possessions and left to suffer poverty. However, they remained in their house, spending their time in fasting and prayer. Demetria, after confessing her Faith, fell dead at the feet of the governor Apronianus. St. Bibiana was placed in the hands of a wicked woman called Rufina, who in vain endeavored to seduce her. She used blows as well as persuasion, but Bibiana remained faithful. Enraged at the constancy of this saintly virgin, Apronianus ordered her to be tied to a pillar and beaten with scourges, laden with lead plummets, until she expired. The saint endured the torments with joy, and died under the blows inflicted by the hands of the executioner.

December 3 - Tuesday, First Week of Advent

Forbearance enables us to be kind, considerate, and forgiving.

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah describes the power and the virtue of the promised king in whom the promise of God would be fulfilled. The spirit of the Lord will bless and empower this chosen king to be a man of virtue beyond all ordinary human understanding. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him and empower him with gifts. The Church's tradition lists seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord, as described in this excerpt from Isaiah (Is. 11:1-2). Isaiah saw them as God's gifts to the king for the service of his people. We see them today as gifts for the common good - for the benefit of the community, and not for personal gain/profit.

The list of gifts, as seen above, does not imply that there are no other gifts from the Spirit of God. There are as many gifts as there are people. The list could be seen and understood as inclusive of all gifts that God gives to each of us. It is up to each of us to open ourselves, discern and discover our own gifts with which we are gifted. We are gifted persons, a gifted Community, and a gifted Church.

We are gifted with the Holy Spirit and spirited with His gifts. BE GRATEFUL. The Holy Spirit calls us to develop these gifts, share them with others and use them for the service of the Community.

Psalm 72

**O God, with your judgment endow the king,
And with your justice, the king's son;
He shall govern your people with justice
And your afflicted ones with judgment.**

Luke 10:21-24.

Jesus had sent the disciples out on their first mission. They returned and reported to him all that they had done...they preached good news, cast out evil spirits, etc. As he listened to them, he was moved to pray with gratitude for the wonderful gift of the Father to the simple people who answered his call. He invited the disciples to be grateful. God continues to reveal himself through simple and humble people.

Let us rejoice and be grateful for the ongoing revelation of God and God's ways through the many people, events, and situations in our own life.

Saint of the Day, December 3 - St. Francis Xavier and 11 other saints are remembered this day

Francis was born on April 7, 1506 in Xavier (Javier) Castle, near Sangüesa, Navarre, Spain. He was sent to study at the University of Paris where he roomed with his friend, Peter Favre. They were much influenced by Ignatius of Loyola, who encouraged Francis to become a priest.

He renounced his worldly life in response to the words he heard from St. Ignatius of Loyola, "What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?" On August 15, 1534, Francis Xavier along with Peter Favre, and several other friends, made vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The men planned to travel to the Holy Land to convert non-believers. Francis Xavier started his study of theology that same year and was ordained on June 24, 1537.

Francis was one of the first five who joined Ignatius when he founded the Society of Jesus or Jesuits as we know the order today. He left for India in 1541 and arrived in the region and colony of Goa, India on May 6, 1542. He became a great missionary in India, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Japan. He wanted to go to China and left India for the last time in April, 1552. His ship reached China in August, stopping at an island off the Chinese coast. While he was waiting for his boat to arrive, he became ill with a fever and died on December 3, 1552 before he could fulfill his dream of being a missionary in China. He was a man of courage, determination, patience and perseverance.

December 4 – Wednesday, First Week of Advent

Forbearance is withholding the exercise of power and control and using graceful and peaceful approaches to solving problems.

Isaiah 25:6-10

This excerpt describes Isaiah's vision of the whole creation moving toward a final day of unending celebration, to a joyful feast where people from all over the earth gather with God and his heavenly court. Rich food and choice wine symbolize fulfillment, complete satisfaction.

A loving and benevolent and gracious God will provide for all people.

Psalm 23

**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me;
He refreshes my soul.....**

Mathew 15:29-37

Mathew tells us how gracious, kind, and compassionate Jesus was. While his primary concern was to proclaim the kingdom, he became sensitive to the most basic needs of people, their hunger and thirst and their need for rest and he did something about it, responded to their basic needs....he gave them not only the bread of God's word, but bread for the body.

Be sensitive to the basic needs of people! Be mindful of the hunger and thirst of the less fortunate in your community!

This excerpt describes to us how God's power and compassion met and reached out to the many needs of people and to the different situations of people.

May your power and your compassion meet.... may justice and peace embrace....and may you reach out to all in need of compassion and love.

Jesus did not burden people with lectures, with doctrines, with ideals.... he fed them, healed them and strengthened them for their ongoing journey.

May you find strength and comfort in listening to the word of Jesus. And may you be an instrument of strength for others on their journey.

Saint of the Day, December 4 - St. John Damascene and 19 other saints are remembered this day.

John was a Byzantine monk and priest, born and raised in Damascus around the year 675 or 676. He received a classical and theological education and followed his father in a government position under the Arabs. After a few years, he resigned and went to the Monastery of Saint Sabas near Jerusalem and spent most of his life in this Monastery.

Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions and Eastern Catholic traditions have been particularly shaped by his insights. Among Eastern Christians, St. John is best known for his defense of Christian sacred art, particularly in the form of icons. While the churches of Rome and Constantinople were still united during St. John's life, the Byzantine Emperor Leo III broke

radically from the ancient tradition of the church, charging that the veneration of Christian icons was a form of idolatry.

St. John began publicly opposing the emperor's command against sacred images in a series of writings. His argument was that Christians did not actually worship images, but rather, through them they worshiped God, and honored the memory of the saints and that by taking an incarnate physical form, Christ had given warrant to the Church's depiction of him in images.

He is famous for his treatise, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, a summary of the Greek Fathers, of which he became the last. He is known as a poet, one of the two greatest of the Eastern Church, the other being Romanus the Melodist. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and his sermons on her feasts are well known. He died at his monastery, Mar Saba, near Jerusalem on December 4, 749.

December 5 – Thursday, First Week of Advent

**Forbearance is a determined, resolute and tenacious approach
to achieving goals, fulfilling purpose, solving problems
and not pressurizing immediate results.**

Isaiah 26:1-6

Isaiah sings the song of the newly formed nation out of the survivors of great devastation. This new nation will be a nation of firm purpose, a nation that keeps faith, a nation that is just, a nation that trust the Lord. It is such a nation that the Lord keeps in peace.

**God's peace, shalom is grounded in firm purpose, faithfulness, justice and trust in the Lord.
Reflect on the urgency of developing these virtues.**

**Let us pray for a new world order.... a world where justice and peace prevail, a world that is
re-established and renewed in faith.**

Psalm 118

**Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
For his mercy endures forever.
It is better to take refuge in the Lord, than to trust in man.**

Mathew 7:21, 24-27

All are called to the Kingdom of God. However, crying out, "Lord...Lord..." will not give anyone access to the Kingdom. Jesus calls for sincerity of purpose. Sincerity of purpose is shown in practice, in the way we live out our purpose.

Fine words are never substitutes for fine deeds. Be sincere in your efforts to live out your faith.

There is only one proof of love and that proof is obedience (surrender).

It is not difficult to recite a creed, but to live the Christian life is demanding and challenging and often difficult.

Faith without practice is dead. Love without obedience (surrender) is impossible.

Saint of the Day, December 5 - St. Sabas and 16 other saints are remembered this day.

Sabas was born at Mutalaska, Cappadocia, near Caesarea in 439. He was the son of an army officer, who left him in the care of an uncle. Mistreated by his uncle's wife, Sabas ran away to another uncle, though he was only eight. When the two uncles became involved in a lawsuit over his estate, he again ran away, this time to a monastery near Mutalaska. In 456, he went to Jerusalem and there entered a monastery under St. Theoctistus. When he was thirty, he became a hermit under the guidance of St. Euthymius, and after Euthymius' death, spent four years alone in the desert near Jericho.

Despite his desire for solitude, he attracted many disciples. When his one hundred fifty monks asked for a priest and despite his opposition to monks being ordained, he was obliged to accept ordination by Patriarch Sallust of Jerusalem in 491. He attracted disciples from Egypt and Armenia, allowed them a liturgy in their own tongue, and built several hospitals and another monastery near Jericho.

While functioning as abbot among a large community of monks, he felt ever called to live the life of a hermit. Each year, in Lent, he left his monks for long periods of time. A group of 60 men left the monastery, settling at a nearby ruined facility. When Sabas learned of the difficulties they were facing, he generously gave them supplies and assisted in the repair of their church.

Over the years, Sabas traveled throughout Palestine, preaching the true faith and successfully bringing back many to the Church. At the age of 91, in response to a plea from the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sabas undertook a journey to Constantinople in conjunction with the Samaritan revolt and its violent repression. He fell ill and soon after his return, died at the monastery at

Mar Saba on December 5, 532. Today the monastery is still inhabited by monks of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Saint Sabas is regarded as one of the most noteworthy figures of early monasticism.

December 6 – Friday, First Week of Advent

Forbearance is a great virtue that covers the imperfections, shortfalls and weaknesses of others.

Isaiah 29:17-24

Isaiah describes his vision of the messianic times. In the messianic time, the deaf will hear, the blind will see out of gloom and darkness, the humble will rejoice, the tyrant and the arrogant will be gone....a new world order will be established, where people will live in justice and peace.

Pray for a new world order, a world of justice and peace for all.

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Whom shall I fear?

The Lord is my life's refuge.

Of whom should I be afraid?

Mathew 9:27-31

The blind men cried out their need and Jesus heard their cry! **Reflect on crying out your own need and hearing the cry of others in need.**

The blind men met Jesus in the house. **Reflect on meeting Jesus in the house, where you are.**

Jesus asked: Do you believe that I am able to do this? Yes Lord, was the answer. **Reflect on being challenged on your faith: do you believe? And how do you respond?**

Jesus touched their eyes and said: Be opened! **Reflect on the healing and opening touch of the Lord! Reflect on your own need to be touched and to touch others. Let your touch be healing, loving, compassionate.**

Jesus asked them not to publicize what happened. But they spread the story about him all over the country. **Reflect on maintaining confidence.**

Think about what happens in sharing things that bring conflict, tension, harm to others.....Be trustworthy! And be a channel of peace.....

Saint of the Day, December 6 - St. Nicholas and 7 other saints are remembered this day.

Tradition tells us that Nicholas was born on March 15, 270 in Myra, Asia Minor (now Turkey), and died on December 6, 343. Very little is known about the historical Saint Nicholas. The earliest accounts of his life were written centuries after his death and contain many legendary elaborations.

According to a legend, when Nicholas was a baby and his parents brought him to Church to be baptized, he jumped eagerly into the water. A story is told about a man who was so poor that he could no longer buy food for his family. He was going to sell his daughters into slavery so they wouldn't starve. Bishop Nicholas found out about this. So, at night he tossed three bags of gold into their house through a window. Other early stories tell of him calming a storm at sea, saving three innocent soldiers from wrongful execution, and chopping down a tree possessed by a demon. In his youth, he is said to have made a pilgrimage to Egypt and the Palestine area. Shortly after his return, he became Bishop of Myra. He was later cast into prison during the persecution of Diocletian but was released after the accession of Constantine.

Although we know very little about the historical Nicholas, the legends speak of his generosity as well as eagerness to follow the way of Jesus. He challenges us to reflect on how eager we are today to plunge into the waters of Baptism and follow the way of Jesus and how generous we are with the many blessings we have received from the Lord.

December 7 – Saturday, First Week of Advent

**Forbearance helps us to overlook the failings of others,
cover their weakness and forgive their offences in silence.**

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26

Isaiah shared with his people his vision of a time of favor from the Lord: The Lord will make his people prosperous again; he will be gracious to the people who cry out to him; he will provide for the needs of his people; he will show the way that can be trusted; he will heal the wounds of his people....He will not hide from his people. So, be happy, rejoice...you will have no reason to weep!

Share the vision of Isaiah for a new world order and pray for the establishment of a world of peace, justice, and prosperity for all.

Psalm 147

**Praise the Lord, for he is good;
Sing praise to our God, for he is gracious;
It is fitting to praise him.
The Lord builds Jerusalem;
The dispersed of Israel, he gathers.....**

Mathew 9:35 – 10:1, 6-8

This excerpt begins with a summary of what Jesus has been doing: proclaimed good news, taught the values of the kingdom and healed the sick. Jesus looked at the crowd with compassion. He saw a rich harvest and the need for laborers to gather in the harvest. The spiritual leaders, at the time of Jesus, saw sinners to be condemned, Gentiles who do not follow the law, tax gatherers who were traitors to the nation, etc. But Jesus saw a rich harvest.....people to be gathered in and not kept out or destroyed.

Look beyond what you see! Be positive, optimistic about you and the world around you! See the goodness of God everywhere and in all people!

Jesus sent out his disciples, an extraordinary mixture of very ordinary men with the most profound message: "The Kingdom of God is at hand". They were sent to bring good news, heal the sick.... share the gift they had received freely and joyfully.

Bring the good news of Jesus to someone today.....share your gifts with others.

Saint of the Day, December 7 - St. Ambrose and 290 saints are remembered this day.

Ambrose was born around 340 A.D. in a Roman Christian family. After Ambrose's father passed

away, he was educated in Rome, where he studied law, literature and rhetoric. Ambrose received a place on the council, like his father, and was made consular prefect, or the Governor, of Liguria and Emilia around the year 372. Ambrose's headquarters were in Milan, the then second capital of Italy. He remained Governor until 374 when he became the Bishop of Milan. After the former Bishop of Milan died, Ambrose attended the election to prevent any uproars between the Nicene Church and the Arians. While giving an address, the assembly began calling for him to become the next bishop.

Ambrose was known for his Nicene beliefs, but Arians also favored him because he had previously shown charity in theological matters. However, being neither baptized or trained in theology, Ambrose refused to become the next bishop. He ran and attempted to hide, but his colleague gave him up. Within a week's time, Ambrose was baptized, ordained and duly consecrated bishop of Milan on December 7, 374. As bishop, he donated all of his land and gave his money to the poor. This made him widely popular and often times more politically powerful than even the emperor. Ambrose died on April 4, 397.

Ambrose's knowledge and abilities impressed Augustine of Hippo, who previously thought poorly of Christian preachers. After meeting Ambrose, Augustine reevaluated himself and was forever changed. In 387, Ambrose baptized Augustine. St. Monica, Augustine's mother, loved Ambrose "as an angel of God who uprooted her son from his former ways and led him to his convictions of Christ."

Ambrose was a great defender of the Church against Arianism in Milan. He often attempted to theologially dispute their propositions. Ambrose was generous to the poor. To him, giving to the poor was just a repayment of God's resources, which were intended for everyone equally. He introduced reforms in the order and manner of public worship. He was known for his "liturgical flexibility that kept in mind that liturgy was a tool to serve people in worshipping God and ought not to become a rigid entity that is invariable from place to place."

Ambrose authored many of the Church's important writings and hymns. He is credited with composing the repertory Ambrosian chant, also known as the Antiphonal Chant. He is also credited with composing the hymn "Te Deum," which is believed to have been written when he baptized Augustine of Hippo. He is one of the four original doctors of the Church.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**Advent is the spiritual season of hope par excellence,
and in this season, the whole Church is called to be hope,
for itself and for the world.
(Pope Benedict XVI)**

