

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our Scripture readings of the first Sunday of Advent called us to “be attentive and watchful,” to live “loving and blameless” lives, to live “joyful lives” and to “Pray constantly for strength” as we take care of our daily chores, and responsibilities. On this second Sunday of Advent, our Scripture readings call us to be faithful to our spiritual traditions, to let our love mature and become fruitful, and to strive for the ongoing change and transformation of our life in Christ.

In our first reading, we hear Baruch (Baruch 5:1-9) encouraging Jews living outside Palestine to remain faithful to their sacred heritage and tradition and nurture the hope of Jerusalem being restored to its former greatness. Baruch assured the dispersed Jews that God would transform them and restore them to their true dignity as God’s people “by the light of his glory and with his mercy and justice for company.”

Psalms 126 (today’s responsorial Psalm) reflects on the joy of a transformed, rehabilitated, and restored people. Cyrus the Persian king liberated them from Babylon (538 BC). God has worked a miracle for his people. God anointed a pagan king to liberate them and bring them home. Who would want to touch a pagan and get defiled?!!! God touched a pagan king and anointed him to liberate his people. Amazing, all-embracing love of God for his people made it happen! This is reason to rejoice and be grateful. “We are glad” because God was with his people when they were being swallowed up by the monster Babylon. What else can anyone do except sing joyful songs – it was like a dream, “our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with rejoicing. Says the Psalmist!!

In the second reading, we hear St. Paul encouraging the Philippians to let their love mature, “ripen”. He prayed for them, “that your love may increase ever more..... that you may be pure and blameless.... filled with the fruits of righteousness.....” (Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11). He also shared his confidence that God who began a good work in them would bring it to completion. This is the kind of confidence that the Psalmist sings about in Psalm 138:8, “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.” What an amazing confidence!!!

In the Gospel reading of today, we hear John the Baptist calling his people to fill what needed to be filled, level what needed to be leveled, make straight what was crooked and make smooth what was rough in their lives (Luke 3:1-5). About six hundred years before John, Isaiah

had a similar vision of what God would do for the salvation of exiled Israel (Isaiah 40:1-11). He described his vision of a voice crying out, “comfort, comfort my people... speak tenderly to Jerusalem...with glad tidings.....valleys shall be filled and mountains shall be leveled, rough land shall be made plain.....all mankind, together shall see the glory of God”. Neither Isaiah nor John was dreaming of a geographic transformation of landscape, but a transformation of a people who will experience salvation of God. They called their people to be confident and stand strong and look forward to the day when God will gather his people again and bring them home. In the meantime, they encouraged their people to fill what needed to be filled, level what needed to be leveled, make straight what was crooked and make smooth what was rough in their lives. Today, we are challenged to change what need to be changed in our lives and relationships and bring about a transformation of our life in Christ.

There has been much emphasis on the “Saving Act” of Jesus Christ and accepting Him as our “personal savior.” There needs to be more emphasis on living that commitment to Christ as our savior...live Jesus! This calls forth our recognition that we stand in need of ongoing conversion, change, growth, and transformation in Christ. If genuine conversion and transformation in Christ has to happen, we must identify the good as wells as the bad in us, in others and in the world around us. The good must be identified, named and nurtured and the bad must also be identified, named and eliminated.

We must name the good and cultivate all that is decent, good, noble, and virtuous - all that is of God and from God. This must be done in “TRUTH” – not mere sentimentality, which leads to flattery. We must name the bad, the vices and all that is evil in us and around us and overcome them. This must also be done in “TRUTH” – not mere sentimentality which sometimes leads us to exaggerations and condemnations of ourselves and others and sometimes to making excuses for sinful behaviors.

Advent is a season of conversion, transformation, renewal and restoration. All our Scripture readings today call us to a transformation of our life in Christ. We are also reminded that such transformation must be grounded in being faithful and loyal to the ideals, morals and values of our faith and tradition. Baruch saw transformation of his people by the “light of God’s glory” accompanied by His “mercy and justice,” the Psalmist saw it by the all-embracing love of God, Paul saw it by his confidence in God completing the work He began, and John the Baptist saw the transformation by changing what needs change in the lives of people.

Let us take a few quiet moments each day of this week to be still and to reflect on how our day has been and to be faithful to our spiritual traditions, to let our love mature and become fruitful, and to strive for the ongoing change and transformation of our life in Christ.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Scroll down to read the reflections on the Scripture readings of today’s mass....

Second Sunday of Advent

December 8, 2024

**In this season of Advent, we are called to expand the horizons of our hearts,
to be amazed by the life which presents itself each day with newness.
In order to do this, we must learn to not depend on our own certainties,
on our own established strategies, because the Lord comes at a time that we do not imagine.
He comes to bring us into a more beautiful and grand dimension.
(Pope Francis)**

Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.
Who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

**Forbearance is patience under testing and trying circumstances,
which contributes to building strength of character.**

Baruch 5:1-9

The book of Baruch has been traditionally attributed to the secretary of the prophet Jeremiah. Many scholars today suggest that it may have been written by more than one author and put into its present form as late as 200 B.C. and was intended for Jews who lived outside Palestine. Chapter 5 from which the present excerpt is taken describes the feelings of many Jews who lived far from Jerusalem and remained faithful to the law, loyal to the ideal of temple worship and hopeful that Jerusalem would one day be restored to its former greatness.

Reflect on being faithful and loyal to the ideals and values of “temple worship” and being restored to true dignity and greatness.

The author encourages his readers to remain faithful to their sacred heritage and tradition. In his eyes Jerusalem represented the ideal city where all dispersed Jews would find their true home. Their homecoming will happen by God’s command.....God will make it happen for them “by the light of his glory and with his mercy and justice for company”.

Be men and women of Hope! Speak words of hope to others!

Psalm 126

**When the Lord brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.**

Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11

Paul was a good pastor. He recognized, acknowledged, and thanked his converts for their growth in faith. In this excerpt, he praises them for their faith and affirms his confidence that God who began a good work in them would bring it to completion. He encouraged them to let their love mature, “ripen”. He prayed for them, “that your love may increase ever more..... that you may be pure and blameless....filled with the fruits of righteousness....”

Pray for each other: May your love increase ever more...

Pray for each other: May you live blameless lives and be filled with fruits of justice and peace....

Luke 3:1-6

Luke describes John the Baptist as heralding the coming of Jesus. John shared his vision of what Jesus was sent to do. He described that vision in beautiful poetic language, “valleys being filled and mountains being leveled, winding roads being made straight, rough roads being made smooth....”

John’s vision was not about a geographic transformation of landscape, but transformation of a people who will experience salvation in Jesus. He called his people to fill what needed to be

filled, level what needed to be leveled, make straight what was crooked and make smooth what was rough in their lives.

Today, we are challenged to change what need to be changed and bring about a transformation of our life in Christ.

Fill what needs to be filled, level what needs to be leveled, make straight what is crooked and make smooth what is rough in your life.

May you experience a transformation of your life during this season of advent!

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the Day, December 8 - Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and 5 other saints are remembered this day.

In 1854, Pope Pius IX solemnly proclaimed: "The most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin."

It took a long time for this doctrine to develop. While many Fathers and Doctors of the Church considered Mary the greatest and holiest of the saints, they often had difficulty in seeing Mary as sinless, either at her conception or throughout her life. This is one of the Church teachings that arose more from the piety of the faithful than from the insights of brilliant theologians. Even such champions of Mary as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas could not see

theological justification for this teaching. Two Franciscans, William of Ware and Blessed John Duns Scotus, helped develop the theology. They pointed out that Mary's Immaculate Conception enhances Jesus' redemptive work. Other members of the human race are cleansed from original sin after birth. In Mary, Jesus' work was so powerful as to prevent original sin at the outset.

Today, we gratefully remember the special grace Mary had received from the moment of her conception, which prepared her to be the mother of God. We believe that God had kept Mary free from sin from the moment of her conception. Let us be grateful to Mary for living a simple and pure life to which God had called her and making herself totally available to God. Let us also draw inspiration and strength from her and follow her example of total dedication to the will of God.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**The Lord is coming, always coming.
When you have ears to hear and eyes to see,
you will recognize him at any moment of your life.
Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.
(Henri Nouwen)**



*I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
Make straight the way of the Lord.
(Luke 3:4)*