

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The first reading of today's mass offers us Isaiah's vision of extraordinary prosperity and peace for his people (Isaiah 35:1-10). He sees God delivering his people from bondage and restoring them to their original dignity and glory; God breaking in and ushering in new beginnings...the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the lame walking, and the dumb speaking. Great and wonderful things are going to happen because God is going to breaking in. So, he called his people to be strong and trust in God and wait in hope!

The prophet had this amazing dream which was a real, creative, and life-giving vision that gave him confidence to walk in faith and call all his readers to walk in faith. Just as Isaiah called his people, we are called to be confident in the steadfast and unfailing Love of God and trust that God will break into our history and transform our life in Christ. We are challenged to walk in faith and wait in hope and live blameless and virtuous lives as we wait.

We are living in troublesome times. Anxieties, doubts, fears, hostilities and other such realities surround us. In the midst of it all, we must stand our ground and be faithful to what we are called to be and fulfill our responsibilities. We must be confident in the providential care of our God and hope for better days to come, for good things to happen to us, our families, our country and our world!! We must hold good thoughts in our hearts, think and speak well of others and send positive energy into the world. We must nurture a blessing attitude and that is an urgent need of our day.

As you go through the day, attending to your daily chores, look around and see the many people trying to do their jobs and remain faithful to their calling. We have not met most of them and we may never meet any of them. They continue to bless us by faithfully doing their jobs. It is up to us to bless them by faithfully doing what we are called to do.

I encourage you to take a few moments each day of this second week of Advent to reflect on how your day has been, how faithful you have been to your commitments and responsibilities and to renew your desire to do your best and give your best to the world around you.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Second Week of Advent

December 5-10, 2022

December 5 – Monday, Second Week of Advent

**Simplicity is a virtue most worthy of love, because it leads us straight to the kingdom of God, and, at the same time, wins the affection of men.
(Saint Vincent de Paul)**

Isaiah 35:1-10

Isaiah shares his vision of extraordinary prosperity and peace. Yahweh will deliver his people from bondage and restore them to their original dignity and glory. God will break in and usher in new beginnings...the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk, the dumb will speak.... great and wonderful things will happen because God is breaking in. So, be strong and trust in God and wait in hope!

Psalm 85 - Kindness and truth shall meet...,

Luke 5:17-26

This excerpt is the story of the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof by his friends because there was no other way to bring him before Jesus. The paralyzed man was saved by his friends! The man was paralyzed, and his friends cared.

Reflect on various kinds of paralysis that need healing! Reflect on what caring friends can do to bring about healing! Reflect on what you can do to bring someone to Christ for healing, for forgiveness, for compassion, for a transformation of life!

Nothing stopped his friends from bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus! What stops you from bringing yourself or someone else to Christ? OR may be, just a little closer to Christ? Reflect on going up the roof and coming down through the roof in front of Jesus in the middle of the crowd! What does it mean to you?

Many of us are saved by the faith of those who love us. We owe much to the faith and love of those who really cared. BE GRATEFUL!

Prayerfully remember those precious influences in your own personal life that brought you to Christ, that brought you closer to Christ, that still calls you to come closer!

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 - Tuesday, First Week of Advent

**The office of simplicity is to make us go straight to God,
without regard to human respect or our own interests.**

(Saint Vincent de Paul)

Isaiah 40:1-11

Isaiah shared his vision of what God would do for the salvation of exiled Israel. He described his vision of a voice crying out, “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”.

Isaiah’s vision was not about a geographic transformation of landscape, but a transformation of a people who will experience salvation of God. He called his 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, he encouraged them 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.

Psalm 96 - Sing to the Lord a new song...

Mathew 18:12-14

Jesus was accused of being in the company of sinners. He told them the parable the lost sheep. Even one single sheep is precious. The loss of that single sheep is great. The joy of discovering the lost is even greater! So, will it be with the re-discovery of every person!

Great is the loss if you are lost! Greater is the joy of your re-discovery! Even the angels will rejoice!

You are not just “another” in tens or hundreds or thousands or millions - you just are! And as you are, you are precious in the eyes of God and precious in the eyes of those who love you!

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 – Saint Ambrose, Bishop, Doctor of the Church

**Simplicity leads us to tell things candidly,
and just as they exist in our hearts.**

(Saint Vincent de Paul)

Isaiah 40:25-31

Isaiah reminds his people that God, who is the author of everything and whose knowledge is beyond all understanding, is eternally present to them. God gives strength to the weak and renews the strength of those who hope in him. So stand strong and be faithful to God as God is ever faithful. Isaiah encouraged his people to live a life worthy of the covenant God had established with them.

Be strong and be a source of strength for the weak.

Psalm 103 - Bless the Lord O my soul...

Mathew 11:28-30

Jesus said, “come to me all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.....Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...I am meek and humble of heart...My yoke is easy and my burden is light...”

My yoke is easy - The word “easy” should be translated “well-fitting”. This simply means that the yoke is “tailor-made” to fit well.

The discipline, the way, the life that Jesus offers is made to fit us well, “tailor-made” for us - it won’t hurt us, it won’t burden us.

Jesus came proclaiming good news - love, forgiveness, healing, peace - not as an avenging ruler, but proclaiming the triumph of compassion. Jesus came meek and humble, inviting all to turn to him with their burdens.....

To rest in Jesus is to dwell in him, to drink fully of his spirit, to be refreshed and renewed for life and ministry. St. Augustine says, “our hearts are restless until they come to rest in you”.

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.

December 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

God speaks to the simple. Simplicity is the spirit of Jesus.
(St. Vincent de Paul)

Genesis 3:9-15, 20

In the garden, man enjoyed an intimacy with God which was destroyed by disobedience. Ashamed and afraid man and woman hid themselves from God.

This reading tells us that through disobedience sin entered the world, and as a result, man and woman experienced separation, suffering, and ultimately death. Man and woman failed to be faithful to what God made them to be. Sin is a violation of what God made us to be.

Be faithful to what God made you to be.

Psalm 98 - Sing to the Lord a new song...

Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

Paul tells the Ephesians: God chose us before the world began to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love...God has given us wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ.....to bring all things into one in Christ!

Luke 1:26-38

This excerpt tells us about the visit of angel Gabriel to Mary with the great news of the birth of Jesus: "You have found favor with God and you shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus...." Gabriel assured her that it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child and that "nothing is impossible with God". Mary surrendered and said to Gabriel, "I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say". Mary was called to surrender to God's word and that's our call today!

Be still! Listen! Be discerning! Pray for God's wisdom to know and the courage to fulfill and surrender to his plan for you.

Mary trusted and surrendered to God's word and God's word became flesh in her. God's word comes to us today through the Scriptures, through lived experiences of many people, through our own personal experiences and through many events and situations. We are called to be sensitive, docile, available, and attentive to God's word and let God's word become flesh in our life.

May God's Word of "Love" continue to become flesh, real, tangible, in all of us!

It was in simple faith that Mary accepted the angel's message. She accepted it without full knowledge and with troubled heart and fearful spirit. Luke tells us that Mary did not understand, but she pondered and wondered. Mary has become a model for all believers.

Like Mary, we must wonder and ponder and doubt and believe and trust our way through life's many challenges, troubles, fears, anxieties, and uncertainties.

We may be tired and weary of our duties, responsibilities and daily chores....full of life and energy or tired and weary, we must CHOOSE TO BE FAITHFUL.

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

In 1854, 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.

December 9 - Friday, Second Week of Advent

**Simplicity leads us to act simply,
without admixture of hypocrisy and artifice.**
(Saint Vincent de Paul)

Isaiah 48:17-19

Isaiah continued to empower his people with confidence. Those who listen to God and His way will live in God's presence - "their name will never be blotted out from my presence". Because God will teach them what is good for them and show them the way they should walk.

Listen! Be still and know that I am God!

Psalm 1 - Happy the man, who follows not the counsel of the wicked...

Mathew 11:16-19

Jesus challenged his listeners on their attitude. No matter what was suggested, they did not respond and no matter what was offered, they found fault with it. They had an attitude problem!

Reflect on your attitude! Reflect on the need to remain open, welcoming, listening....

John's asceticism was called "madness" and Jesus' sociability was named "laxness of morals". They found ground for criticism either way. When people do not want to listen to truth, they will easily find excuse for not listening. They remain stubbornly unresponsive no matter what is offered. Grown men and women can become like "spoiled children" who refuse to play no matter what the game is, refuse to dance or sing no matter what the occasion is.

Reflect on your own quality of presence! Your responsiveness! Your openness!

Jesus says, "Wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds" (last verse of today's Gospel). The Jews criticized John for his ascetical life, for his isolation in the desert, but he moved men's hearts to God as they had never been moved for centuries. They criticized Jesus for mixing too much in the ordinary and with the ordinary folks, but in him people found a new life, a new goodness, a new truth, a new power to live, a new spirit to love and a new access to God.

Reflect on how wonderful it would be if we could stop judging people and communities with our own prejudices and welcome people as they are, even when their ways are different from ours!

Saint of the Day, December 9 - St. Juan Diego and 36 other saints are remembered this day

Saint Juan Diego was born in 1474 as Cuauhtlatoatzin, a native to Mexico. He became the first Roman Catholic indigenous saint from the Americas. Following the early death of his father, Juan Diego was taken to live with his uncle. When a group of 12 Franciscan missionaries arrived in Mexico in 1524, he and his wife, Maria Lucia, converted to Catholicism and were among the first to be baptized in the region. Juan Diego was very committed to his new life and would walk long distances to receive religious instruction at the Franciscan mission station.

On December 9, 1531, Juan Diego was in a hurry to make it to Mass and celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. However, he was stopped by the beautiful sight of a radiant woman who introduced herself, in his native tongue the "ever-perfect holy Mary." Mary told Juan Diego that she was the mother of all those who lived in his land and asked him to request

the local bishop to build a chapel in her honor on Tepeyac Hill, which was the site of a former pagan temple.

Bishop Juan de Zumarraga was skeptical of the story of Juan Diego and needed time to reflect on the request. Later, on the same day, Juan Diego encountered the Virgin Mary a second time. He tried to explain to her that he was not an important person, and so not the right person for the task, but she insisted that he was the man she wanted. Juan Diego returned to the Bishop the next day and repeated his request, but now the Bishop asked for proof or a sign that the apparition was real.

Juan Diego went straight to Tepeyac and, once again, encountered the Virgin Mary. After explaining to her what the Bishop asked, she agreed and told him she'd provide him with proof on the next day, December 11. However, on the next day, Juan Diego's uncle became very sick and he was obligated to stay and care for him. Juan Diego set out to find a priest for his uncle.

The Virgin Mary intercepted Juan Diego. He explained his situation and promised to return after finding a priest for his uncle. Mary assured him that his uncle would be cured. She then asked him to collect the flowers growing on the hill. He obeyed and found many flowers blooming in December on the rocky land. He filled his tilma (cloak) with flowers and returned to Mary. The Virgin Mary arranged the flowers within his cloak and told him that he should present this as the sign to the bishop. When Juan Diego found the bishop, he opened his cloak, and the bishop was presented with a miraculous imprinted image of the Virgin Mary on the flower-filled cloak.

The next day, Juan Diego found his uncle fully healed from his illness. His uncle explained he, too, saw the Virgin Mary. She also instructed him on her desires to have a church built on Tepeyac Hill. she also told him that she wanted to be known with the title of Guadalupe. News of Juan Diego's miracle quickly spread, and he became very well-known. However, Juan Diego always remained a humble man. The bishop first kept Juan Diego's imprinted cloak in his private chapel, but then placed it on public display in the church built on Tepeyac Hill the next year. Juan Diego moved into a little hermitage on Tepeyac Hill and lived a solidarity life of prayer and work. He remained there until his death on December 9, 1548, 17 years after the first apparition.

December 10 – Saturday, Second Week of Advent

**Simplicity keeps us at a distance
from every kind of deceit and double-dealing.**

(Saint Vincent de Paul)

Sirach 48:1-4; 9-11

Sirach remembers the heroes of Jewish faith and tradition. Elijah, the prophet is remembered as a fiery, spirited person with words of power which could have come only from God himself. The Jews expected that Elijah would come again. It is Elijah's return that many were waiting for. Just as he was taken up into heaven in a chariot, he would return and usher in the messianic age in which all will see the re-establishment of Israel.

Psalm 80 - O Shepherd of Israel, hearken...

Mathew 17:9-13

We have seen (above) how the Jews expected Elijah to return before the Messiah came and usher in the messianic age. He would return to be the herald and the forerunner of the messiah, "Behold, I will send you Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes...he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children..." (Malachi 4:5-6). Elijah would come and restore everything before the Messiah arrived and make the world fit for the Messiah to enter into. Elijah would be the reformer!

The season of Advent calls us to reform....to renew....to change...to make ourselves and our world fit for the Messiah King to enter!

They expected Elijah to come with fire and cleanse and restore everything. They expected the coming of an avenging herald and a conquering Messiah. Jesus tried to change their concept of the Messiah. He told them that the herald and the messiah had to suffer. It was through sacrificial love that the kingdom was going to be established not through conquering armies.

Let the season of Advent remind us of the sacrificial love of Jesus for us. Let it call us to give ourselves to others in love and in sacrifice.

Saint of the day, December 10 - St. Pope Gregory III and 22 other saints are remembered this day.

Gregory was the son of a Syrian named John. He was elected pope by popular acclamation on February 11, 731 and his pontificate lasted till his death on November 28, 741. His pontificate, like that of his predecessor, was disturbed by Byzantine iconoclasm and the advance of the Lombards. He was the fifth Syrian pope and the last pope born outside of Europe for 1,272 years, until the election of Pope Francis in 2013.

After he was proclaimed Pope Gregory III, Emperor Leo III attacked the veneration of holy images. Because Leo III thought the honor paid to Jesus, Mary, and the saints by keeping statues and icons was idolatry, he condemned them and wanted them destroyed. Gregory III sent a letter to Leo III. He couldn't get the letter through because the priest-messenger was afraid to deliver it. So instead, Gregory called a synod that approved strong measures against anyone who would try to destroy images of Jesus, Mary, or the saints.

Gregory took his stand and Leo III apparently thought the only way to move him was through physical force. So, Leo sent ships to kidnap Gregory and bring him to Constantinople. Once again God intervened. A storm destroyed Leo's ships. The only thing Leo could do was capture some of the papal lands. So, Leo got a few acres of land and we kept our wonderful reminders of the love of God, the protection of Jesus, the prayers of Mary, and the examples of the saints. All because Gregory knew when to take a stand and when to stand there and let God work.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories
of goodness and thus to open doors of hope.
(Pope Benedict XVI)**