CELEBRATE SABBATH

First Sunday of Advent

Trusting in the provident care of a loving God will enable us to meet the heartaches and challenges of our life with confidence, peace and serenity.

The season of Advent is a time of joyful, faith-filled waiting. We are invited to consider the weeks of preparation for Christmas as an opportunity for nurturing a spirituality of waiting in expectation - not a passive, inactive, idle and unimaginative presence in space and time - but a dynamic, active and positively imaginative waiting - a spiritual posture of waiting and longing for Christ, praying and preparing for his ultimate appearance among us - a spirituality of hope, simple and pure optimism about us and the world around us.

Each week we are encouraged to deepen our spirituality even further, personally and as a faith community. We are reminded again that our faith in God, our hope in His promises and our love for Him and each other are the greatest wealth that we possess; that we are a privileged people, a people blessed and graced by God's unconditional love revealed in Jesus; that God has not abandoned the world; that God breaks into our history with healing and transforming grace; that the presence of or even the height of evil must not discourage us. The apparent brokenness and disintegration of the world will be healed. God continues to bring about healing, integrity and wholeness. We are specially reminded that we must live blameless and loving lives as we wait for the Lord's Advent.

Be watchful – Be mindful - Be prayerful - Be vigilant – Be blameless!

Isaiah 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7

In this excerpt, our post-exilic prophet whom we know as Trito-Isaiah or third Isaiah expresses the urgent longings and hopes of his people who had just returned to their homeland from hard times in Exile. He also admits the sin and guilt of his people wandering aimlessly without God. In the midst of admission of guilt and expression of hope is a profound prayer calling on God as Father and as the "potter" who has fashioned human beings with tenderness and loving care. The Prophet prayed to God for his "loving kindness" which is "steadfast", enduring, everlasting and ever faithful. It was this "steadfast loving kindness" that redeemed them from their plight in Babylon. Our prophet prayed again to God to remember, return, redeem and renew his people.

Let this prayer of the prophet become ours during the season of Advent: Lord, remember, return, redeem and renew your people.

Psalm 80

This Psalm begins with "Joseph" praying to the shepherd of Israel. "Joseph" here refers to the northern tribes, taken into exile by the Assyrians, of which Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh are mentioned in the second verse of the Psalm. So it is a group of poor exiles from the north who are represented in prayer in this Psalm. Remember, exile began about 721 years before Christ. Psalm 80:1-3 is their prayer to God whom they knew as the "Shepherd of Israel", just as David did (Psalm 23).

These exiles are making a bold, but trusting and prayerful response to their experience. Moving and powerful words are used by the Psalmist – Stir up thy might; Restore us; let your face shine!! Then they tell their Shepherd God how heartbroken they are: how long are you going to treat us this way, giving us tears, the scorn of neighbors and the laughter of the enemies for food and drink?!!! Restore us God, they prayed.

We are using only the second part of the Psalm in the Liturgy today (80:8-19). This is the parable of the Vineyard. It is a theological interpretation of the exile, in parable. The parable also alludes to the fact that what is described has happened again and again in history. This part of the Psalm begins with the remembrance of God's redemptive acts at Exodus as the basis of all other acts of God in behalf of His people.

Great Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea had described God as the Vinedresser and Israel as his favorite vineyard. Jesus spoke of himself as the vine and His farther as the Vinedresser. The parable tells the story of the vine as it grew and developed. Then it describes the destruction of the vineyard by foreign armies (12-13) and prays for restoration.

This is a beautiful and inspiring Psalm, rich in meaning and carrying within it theology, salvation history and spirituality. Pray the whole Psalm when you have chance.

Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock;
you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might; come and save us.

I Corinthians 1:3-9

This excerpt is an expression of profound gratitude. Paul expresses gratitude to God for the gift of Grace which God had given to the Corinthians in Christ Jesus. The reason for this, Paul says, is that in Christ they have been "enriched" with every form of speech and

knowledge. This means that what Paul assured the Corinthians about what Christ would do for them has come true. The promise is fulfilled. The hope is realized. Therefore, Paul says, “there is no spiritual gift” lacking while waiting “for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”. This calls forth an added responsibility to live “blameless” lives relying on God who has called us to fellowship in Christ.

Be grateful for the spiritual gift that God has given you. Make an effort to live blameless lives during this season of Advent.

Mark 13:33-37

Be watchful! Be alert! Be vigilant like the gatekeeper awaiting the master’s return: “Watch!” Jesus taught the disciples to be watchful, alert and awake…to be prepared. He said to them that no one knew the day or the hour when God would break into their history. He added: “I say this to all”. This excerpt from the Gospel of Mark calls us, all of us, not just those who were listening to Jesus or the readers of Mark in his day. All believers are urged to wait patiently and vigilantly for the Lord’s coming, not knowing time or space or situation, but joyfully waiting with great expectation.

So be prepared. Be alert! Stay awake!

Waiting in expectation is not a passive, inactive, idle and unimaginative presence in time and space. It is dynamic, active and positively imaginative waiting. It is like the servants being placed “in charge, each with his own work” or like the gatekeeper being “on the watch”. As Paul says in the reading above (second reading) while waiting, we must live “blameless” lives relying on God who has called us to fellowship in Christ. And as Trito-Isaiah says (first reading), acknowledge the sin and guilt and turn to God whose “steadfast, loving kindness” is always available, ever present and always blessing. To be waiting means being faithful to who and what you are and to the responsibilities that come forth from your call.

Jesus called them to be faithful even in the master’s absence, even when no one is watching. Faithfulness is an enduring quality of a person and not just doing duties and fulfilling obligations.

Saint of the day, November 29 - Saint Saturnin of Toulouse and 389 other saints are remembered this day.

Saint Saturnin of Toulouse was one of the seven "Apostles to the Gauls" sent out, probably by Pope Fabian (236 – 250), after the persecutions under Emperor Decius. He was the first Bishop of Tolosa (Toulouse). Legends place Saturninus in the 1st century as one of the 72 disciples of Christ and placed him at the Last Supper. Legends also state that St. Peter consecrated him as a bishop.

One of the legends tells us that Saturninus had to pass before the capital of Toulouse, where there was an altar. The pagan priests ascribed the silence of their oracles to the frequent presence of Saturninus. One day they seized him and, on his refusal to sacrifice to the images, they condemned him to be tied by the feet to a bull which dragged him about the town and the limbs and blood were scattered on every side, till the rope broke. Two devout women laid the sacred remains on a bier, and hid them in a deep ditch, to secure them from any further insult, where they lay in "wooden coffin" till the reign of Constantine the Great. Then Hilary, bishop of Toulouse, built a small chapel over this site. The martyrdom of this saint probably happened during the reign of Valerian, in 257.

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