

# Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Yesterday, the second Sunday of Advent called us to repentance, conversion, formation and transformation of our life in Christ. During this week, let us reflect a little more about this Advent call. It is not enough to light the advent candles, say a few extra prayers, give a few dollars in alms, or attend masses a few times more than fulfilling Sunday obligation although they are all good practices. We are called to make choices that would bring about a conversion and transformation of our lives, our attitudes and behavior patterns! If conversion and transformation have to happen, we must name the "Good and the Holy" and the "Sinful, the Unhealthy and the ugly" in our lives.

Let us take a few moments during this week to search through our lives and relationships and name the good, the healthy, the virtuous and the holy. Prayerfully discern where we need to grow, what needs improvement and begin the process of cultivating and nurturing the good, the noble and the holy in our lives. Pray as St. Paul prayed for the Philippians, "that your love may increase ever more...that you may live pure and blameless lives." (Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11).

Let us also take a few moments to name the sinful, unhealthy and unholy in our lives and relationships. Prayerfully discern what needs immediate and urgent attention. Yesterday, we heard 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). The prophet Isaiah had an amazing vision of all instruments of destruction, violence and war being transformed into creative and life-giving instruments." and "spears into pruning hooks" (Isaiah 2:15).

Let us respond to this call of John the Baptist and Isaiah and fill our emptiness with the good and the holy; smooth our rough ways and become gentle with ourselves and others; convert and transform our crooked or dishonest ways into honest and noble ways of working with all people; change our language of hatred into language of love and respect; convert our negative conversation into optimistic and positive ones; and break down our instruments of destruction, violence and war and transform them into instruments of love and peace.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

## **Second Week of Advent**

**December 9-14, 2024**

**God always answers - maybe today, tomorrow, but he always answers, in one way or another. He always answers. The Bible repeats it countless times.**

**God listens to the cry of those who invoke Him.**

**Even our reluctant questions, those that remain in the depths of our heart, that we are ashamed to express: the Father listens to them and wishes to give us the Holy Spirit, which inspires every prayer and transforms everything.**

**(Pope Francis)**

### **December 9 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

**Forbearance enables us to bear with the anger or the abuse that come our way.**

#### **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 excerpt 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,  
For he has done wondrous deeds;  
His right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm**

#### **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 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.

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## **December 10 - Tuesday, Second Week of Advent**

**The virtue of forbearance builds, forms, shapes  
and transforms our character as disciples of Jesus.**

### **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;  
Sing to the Lord, all you lands.  
Sing to the Lord; bless his name;  
Announce his salvation day after day.**

### **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 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.

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**December 11 – Wednesday, Second Week of Advent**

**Forbearance is patiently doing everything possible  
to correct an erring brother or sister.**

**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;  
and all my being, bless his holy name.  
Bless the lord, O my soul;  
and forget not all his benefits.**

### **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, 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.....as St. Augustine says, “our hearts are restless until they come to rest in you”.**

**Saint of the Day, December 11 – St. Damasus I and 15 other saints are remembered this day.**

Pope Damasus I was born in Rome around the year 305. Damasus' parents were Antonius, who became a priest at the Church of St. Lawrence (San Lorenzo) in Rome, and his wife Laurentia. Damasus began his ecclesiastical career as a deacon in his father's church, where he went on to serve as a priest. This Church later became the basilica of Saint Lawrence outside the Walls in Rome.

During Damasus' early years, Constantine I ruled the Western Roman Empire. As emperor, he issued the Edict of Milan (313), which granted religious freedom to Christians in all parts of the Roman Empire. When Pope Liberius was banished by Emperor Constantius II to Berea in 354, Damasus was archdeacon of the Roman church and followed Liberius into exile, though he immediately returned to Rome. During the period before Liberius' return, Damasus had a great share in the government of the church.

Following the death of Pope Liberius on September 24, 366, Damasus succeeded to the Papacy amidst factional violence. He faced accusations of murder and adultery with a married woman in his early years as Pope. He was active in defending the Catholic Church against the threat of schisms. In two Roman synods (368 and 369) he condemned Apollinarianism and Macedonianism and sent legates to the First Council of Constantinople that was convoked in 381 to address these heresies.

One of the important works of Pope Damasus was to preside in the Council of Rome of 382 that determined the canon or official list of Sacred Scripture. He appointed St Jerome as his confidential secretary. Jerome spent three years (382–385) in Rome in close interaction with Pope Damasus and the leading Christians. In order to put an end to the marked divergences in the western texts of that period, Damasus encouraged Jerome to revise the available Old Latin versions of the Bible into a more accurate Latin on the basis of the Greek New Testament and the Septuagint, resulting in the Vulgate.

Damasus also did much to encourage the veneration of the Christian martyrs restoring and creating access to their tombs in the Catacombs of Rome and elsewhere, and setting up tablets with verse inscriptions composed by himself. Damasus rebuilt or repaired his father's church, Saint Laurence, known as "St Lawrence outside the walls". His pontificate lasted eighteen years and two months.

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## **December 12 – Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe**

**Forbearance is perceived as “bearing with one another and forgiving one another” as a way of showing the “loving kindness” of our God.**

### **Zechariah 2:5-9, 14-15**

The prophet Zechariah around 520 B.C. spoke to the people who had returned from exile in Babylon about the need for kindness, compassion and social justice; Proclaimed hope for better



and peaceful days and promised that God would save his people by sending a “Messiah”. This excerpt calls people to rejoice because, he says, God will dwell among his people again.

**Pray for peaceful days to come for all people and nations!**

### **Judith 13:18-19**

**Blessed are you daughter, by the most high God,  
Above all women on earth;  
and blessed be the Lord God,  
The creator of heaven and earth.**

### **Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6 & 10**

John had an amazing vision like a tableau in the sky....the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon as her footstool and she has a crown of twelve stars. This woman is in labor to bear a child who is undoubtedly the Messiah, Christ, destined to rule the world with a rod of iron. The woman is the mother of the Messiah.

### **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 12 - Our Lady of Guadalupe and 14 other saints are remembered this day.**

On December 9, The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego, a poor and humble Catholic Aztec who was on his way to Mass that morning. She appeared to him on Tepayac Hill, a place where the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice to appease the fearsome mother god Tonantzin. Our Lady sent Juan Diego to the bishop to relay a request that he build a Church for her son Jesus on that exact spot. On December 12, 1531, after the bishop failed to believe him outright and wanted a sign, Blessed Mary imprinted her image as a pregnant Aztec princess on the inside of Juan Diego's tilma. The bishop and those with him immediately believed and built a church on the spot.

The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe is located in present day Mexico City. Mary's image on the tilma sent a message to the natives that instead of human sacrifice to the false God Tonantzin, Jesus sacrificed himself out of love for them. She became their mother, a mother of love, compassion, and healing. Because of this miracle, within seven years, eight million native Mexicans converted to Catholicism. Let us not forget also that on the same day, December 12, while Juan Diego was completing his mission with the bishop, Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego's uncle, Juan Bernadino, healed him of grave illness, and revealed her name to him, "the ever-Virgin Saint Mary of Guadalupe." Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patron saint of the Americas.

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**December 13 – Friday, Second Week of Advent**

**“We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves; let each of us please our neighbor for the good, for building up.”**

**(Romans 15:1-2)**

## **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,  
Nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent,  
But delights in the Law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night.**

## **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 13 - St. Lucy and 5 other saints are remembered this day.**

The oldest record of Lucy's life and martyrdom comes from the fifth-century Acts of the Martyrs. The single fact upon which various accounts agree is that a disappointed suitor accused Lucy of being a Christian, and she was executed in Syracuse, Sicily, in the year 304

during the Diocletian Persecution. Her veneration spread to Rome, and by the 6th century to the whole Church. The oldest archaeological evidence comes from the Greek inscriptions from the catacombs of St. John in Syracuse. In medieval accounts, Saint Lucy's eyes are gouged out prior to her execution.

According to the traditional story, Lucy was born of rich and noble parents about the year 283. Her father was of Roman origin. He died when she was five years old, leaving Lucy and her mother without a protective guardian. Like many of the early martyrs, Lucy had consecrated her virginity to God, and she hoped to distribute her dowry to the poor. However, Eutychia, her mother, not knowing of Lucy's promise, and suffering from a bleeding disorder, feared for Lucy's future. She arranged Lucy's marriage to a young man of a wealthy pagan family.

Saint Agatha's shrine at Catania, less than 50 miles from Syracuse, attracted a number of pilgrims; many miracles were reported to have happened through her intercession. Eutychia made a pilgrimage to Catania, in hopes of a cure. While there, St. Agatha came to Lucy in a dream and told her that because of her faith her mother would be cured and that Lucy would be the glory of Syracuse, as she (Agatha) was of Catania. With her mother cured, Lucy took the opportunity to persuade her mother to allow her to distribute a great part of her wealth among the poor.

Eutychia suggested that the sums would make a good bequest, but Lucy decided in favor of the poor. News that the patrimony and jewels were being distributed to the poor came to Lucy's betrothed, who denounced her to Paschasius, the Governor of Syracuse. Paschasius ordered her to burn a sacrifice to the emperor's image. When she refused, Paschasius sentenced her to be defiled in a brothel. Tradition states that when the guards came to take her away, they could not move her even when they hitched her to a team of oxen. Bundles of wood were then heaped about her and set on fire, but would not burn. Finally, she met her death by the sword thrust into her throat. There are other traditions and legends about Lucy's life and martyrdom.

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## **December 14 – Saturday, Second Week of Advent**

**Our own imperfections should teach us to have a kind consideration of the faults of others and that is what forbearance means.**

### **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,  
From your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.  
Rouse your power,  
and come to save us.

## **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 14 - St. John of the Cross and 15 other saints are remembered this day.**

St. John of the Cross was born in Avila, Spain, in 1542. Ordained a Carmelite priest in 1567 at age 25, John met Teresa of Jesus and, like her, vowed himself to the primitive Rule of the Carmelites. As partner with Teresa and in his own right, John engaged in the work of reform, and came to experience the price of reform: increasing opposition, misunderstanding, persecution, imprisonment. He came to know the cross acutely and personally as he sat month

after month in his dark, damp, narrow cell with only his God! Through his suffering, he experienced the light of Christ and wrote about his mystical experiences in prose and poems.

After nine months, John escaped from confinement and spent the next six weeks in the hospital recovering from his ordeal. In 1580, Pope Gregory formally authorized the split between the Discalced Carmelites and the other Carmelites, ending the rift within the order. During the last years of his life, John traveled and established new houses across Spain. John became ill and died at the age of 49 on December 14, 1591. He was canonized by Pope Benedict XIII in 1726.

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)**

