

# ADVENT

HOPE / PREPARATION / JOY / LOVE



with  
Fr. Michael Coutts



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Dear Friends

Pope Francis shared the following thoughts on Advent in General Audiences a few years ago:

***Advent is the time we are given to welcome the Lord who comes to encounter us, and to verify our longing for God, to look forward and prepare ourselves for Christ's return.... Advent is thus a favorable time to pray with greater intensity, to reserve to the spiritual life the important place it deserves."***

Pope Francis, Angelus, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10th December 2017

This year the National Catholic Broadcasting Council for the first time is providing a reflection for each day of advent. Fr. Michael Coutts, a regular celebrant of the Daily TV Mass will be our retreat leader.

The reflections are available on the Daily TV Mass website, YouTube Channel, APP and on podcast.

We realize that not all members of our community have access to the internet, so we are please to provide this preliminary copy of the reflections for their use during Advent.

Please feel free to contact us at 1-888-383-6277 for more information and we wish you a blessed Advent season.

God Bless

Deacon Mike Walsh



### **Sunday – First Week – Candle of Hope.**

The Prophet Isaiah is the main protagonist during the season of Advent. Like every other prophet without exception, Isaiah has a message of hope. This message of hope was present from the initial call of Abraham through Israel's long and turbulent history.

- Abraham hopes that his descendants will number as many as the grains of sand.
- The Israelites in Egypt were there for 400 years. Their status had deteriorated to that of slaves. Yet they had hope.
- All through the forty years in the Sinai desert, they complained but they eventually placed their trust in God.
- Finally, as exiles in Babylon, they hung their harps on the willow trees as we read in Psalm 137. But they still had hope – their hope of returning to Judah and of rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem.

Hope comes in various areas and circumstances in our lives.

1. **In desperation, we have hope.** A child is lost in the mall; a person is diagnosed with stage four cancer; there are signs that a marriage is falling apart. In each of these scenarios we have hope, where logic might dictate that we should give up.
2. **In the area of dreams, we have hope.** A person might dream of being selected to represent their country in the Olympics; another might dream of winning a scholarship to a prestigious school or university; a third might dream of being cast in the star role in a Broadway show.
3. **In the success of others, we have hope.** Parents wish to live in a neighbourhood safe for their children; they wish for the absence of gangs and drugs. This description is hope in its purest sense. It is directed towards others and to their well-being.

God has made it possible for us to have such hopes, such dreams and such wishes come true. God has sent the Spirit with the gifts of wisdom and understanding, the gift of courage to dream the impossible dream and go where the brave dare not go.

God made this hope possible when Mary said “Yes” to the angel Gabriel’s message. Jesus Christ gave us hope with his life, passion, death, and resurrection. Now Jesus wants us to carry on with this hope each day.

You are invited to join us this week as we explore the following themes:

Monday: Hope in Sickness

Tuesday: Hope in Difficult Times

Wednesday: Hope and Hunger

Thursday: Hope and Answered Prayer

Friday: Hope and Healing

Saturday: Hope and the Right Connection

Welcome to the first week of Advent as we light the Candle of Hope and await the coming of the Lord.

### **Monday-First Week of Advent-Hope in Sickness**

#### **A Story of Hope in Sickness**

Rose was dying of cancer in the hospital. A famous oncologist came into her room with three interns. “This patient,” the doctor began before continuing with his diagnosis. Having finished his talk, the doctor started to leave the room, when Rose said, “May I have a word please.” “Yes, my dear,” the doctor replied.

“My name is Rose, not a patient without a name. I am dying of cancer, but I am at peace without bitterness. If I had lived 2000 years ago, I would have gone to Jesus and asked for a cure. But today we have research, doctors, and pharmaceuticals. I trust in their skills. But we are human and will not live forever. It is my faith that keeps me going. I do not feel isolated or lonely. I enjoy the peace and quiet – and I wish you doctors-to-be all the success in your endeavours. God bless you all.” Rose winked at them and closed her eyes.

#### **Reflection**

On this Monday in the First Week of Advent, we ponder on the virtue of hope in time of sickness and perhaps even in death. The Gospel story is that of the centurion who comes to Jesus with the hope that Jesus will cure his servant. His hope is fulfilled.

Rose’s hope was based on two things. First, she had a deep faith in Jesus Christ. That hope gave her courage and even peace on days when she was in severe pain, on days when the inevitability of death would cause another to be fearful.

The second reason for her hope was her self-awareness that she was a unique, “one-of-a-kind” image of the living God. It made her bold enough

to assert that she was not a patient with no name, lying on the bed to be probed and prodded by doctors and interns. She was Rose. She was loved by God. This deep conviction upheld her as evening came bringing its darkness. There were no relatives or friends to be with her through the night.

In chapter 4 Isaiah declares that “the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious.” Rose and the rest of us are branches on the vine that is Christ.

### **Question to ponder**

In our story Rose shared with the doctor that it was her faith that kept her going during her time of suffering. She shared that she did not feel isolated or lonely but enjoyed peace and quiet.

Reflect on a time when you faced sickness or loss (your own or that of a loved one). What role did your faith play in how you dealt with these difficult times?

What if anything can be learned from the way Rose approached her doctor as she lay in her sick bed?

## **Tuesday- First Week of Advent-Hope in Difficult Times**

### **A Story of Hope in Difficult Times**

Seventy-year-old Mrs. MacTavish was driving home at around 11:00 p.m. “Drat,” she said as she felt a flat tire. To her delight, a tow-truck was driving home as well. Robert stopped and helped change the tire. But he would not accept any money. Give it to the next person who might need it.

Mrs. MacTavish stopped at a diner – Linda was pregnant and tired as she had spent all evening on her feet. She was just about to close, but seeing the elderly lady, she opened the door and said, “All I can offer you is some coffee ma’am and perhaps a toasted slice of bread.” “That will do.” said

Mrs. MacTavish with relief as she noticed the rather heavily pregnant barmaid. When she had finished eating, she said to Linda, “You will not imagine how good that cup of coffee tasted. I have left something for you – not a tip, but for the baby.”

Linda was flabbergasted! The elderly lady had left three \$100 bills. When she got home, she said to her husband, Robert, who was waiting for her after his long day driving his tow-truck, “You will never guess what an elderly lady left as a tip! We have enough to buy new clothes and perhaps even a pram for our baby.”

### **Reflection**

Our newspapers and TV sets blare out stories of war, violence, and bloodshed every day. In January, Canadians were concerned when the Freedom Convoy seemed to paralyze the capital. But that story soon became history when Russia invaded the Ukraine.

Isaiah tells us in our reading that the Saviour will come to bring peace. It will seem to be like the Garden of Eden again; the predator and prey will live in harmony: the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the calf, the lion and the fatling. However, we continue to live outside Paradise. We eat our bread which we have earned with the sweat of hard labour.

The good that we do always returns in a way we do not imagine. It bears good fruit, far beyond our expectations. In the Gospel, Jesus thanks the Father for revealing these treasures to ordinary people. These are the people we rub shoulders with when we are in the supermarket, post office, parks and at school.

### **Question to Ponder**

Recall today a story of joy you felt when in your generosity you reached out to help others. What was it like when you opened your arms and perhaps your wallet to those in need?

## **Wednesday-First Week of Advent- Hope and Hunger**

### **A Story of Hope and Hunger**

An elderly woman who had great faith lived in a poor apartment. A neighbour who was a man of no faith or religion lived next door. He would make fun of the old lady's faith. One day he could hear the old lady telling the Lord that there was no food in the house. She hoped that God would provide.

The man decided to play a trick on the lady. He left a loaf of bread at her door, pounded on her door, and quickly darted into his own apartment. Next thing he heard was her loud cry of praise. "Lord, I thank you. You have answered what I had hoped for." With a devilish grin, the man came back, knocked on the door and said, "You silly woman. God did not answer your prayer. I put that loaf at the door." With a smile, she cried out: "Praise the Lord! My prayer has been granted even using a devil to do God's work."

### **Reflection**

Our readings today from Isaiah and Matthew remind me of the musical Oliver. The young lad who is hungry sings: "Food glorious food! Hot sausage and mustard!" Isaiah paints the picture of the banquet table in heaven. The Gospel is the story of Jesus feeding the multitude.

We live in challenging times of fuel shortages and rising food prices. Many an elderly person with a fixed income must choose between food and rent, between nourishment of the body or a place to rest that hungry body. Time and time again, we have heard stories of how God has answered the prayer of the poor, of so many starving people in our cities and towns.

One man said, "How can there be a God, when there are so many dying of hunger?" He heard a voice within saying: "That is why I created you with health, with a job, with talents to earn a living and then some! You are there to share your extra with those who have none."



## **Questions to Ponder**

Can you think of a time when God answered your prayer by using another person? How did you feel? Also, when did God use you to answer someone else's prayer? How did that make you feel?

## **Thursday-First Week of Advent- Hope and Answered Prayer**

### **A Story of Hope and Answered Prayer**

Six-year-old Johnny said to his friend Billy, also six years old, "I am going to become an atheist. I do not believe in God. God does not answer my prayers or anyone else's prayers." Billy, the "mini-theologian", was stunned. "How can you say that? How can you not believe in God? God always answers my prayers."

"Well," replied the atheist-to-be, Johnny, "You prayed for a red bicycle, didn't you?" When Billy answered in the affirmative, Johnny continued triumphantly, "Well did you get your bicycle – red, blue green or whatever colour?" "No," replied Billy. "I did not get my bicycle." Johnny was gloating now as he said, "See God does not answer prayers." "Oh, but he did answer my prayers," said Billy. "God said NO."

### **Reflection**

Our hope in God is not a vague pie in the sky mentality. It has been the fruit of the experience of generations that have gone before us. They had hope. They trusted. They were never let down. They knew about God's steadfast love that endures!

Isaiah is speaking of the political welfare of Judah. Jesus speaks of putting one's hope in someone who is reliable, someone whose love endures forever.

So often our hope in God and in other people depends on whether we get what we want from God or them. But what we want may not be what we need or what is good for us.

So often when we pray, we not only tell God what we want, but also tell God when, where, and how we want that prayer answered. God is not an “item” from a department store with an RTM – Read the Manual instructions.

When we place our hope in God in prayer, it must be unconditional. Then as Jesus says in the Gospel – whether it rains or floods or the winds blow, our hope will not come tumbling down. It is a hope not built on sand, but on a firm foundation.

### **Question to Ponder**

What are you hoping for now? Is it what you want or what you need? Is your belief based on whether you get what you want?

## **Friday-First Week of Advent-Hope and Healing**

### **A Story of Hope and Healing**

Mrs. Jones was dying. She was a woman of strong faith. Weeks before she died, she had managed to bequeath her belongs to those she wished to have them. She had a grand funeral. But there was something odd about the coffin. It was a plain coffin, but in her hand, there was a fork, which she held tightly.

People asked the parish priest if this was a strange rite. Not exactly, he answered. He shared that when visiting Mrs. Jones, she told him that this was a sign of hope.

Mrs. Jones had explained that she had come from a poor family. There was always food on the table – not fancy, but nourishing. They could not afford fruits or desserts. But every now and then, her mother would say to those at table, “Hold on to your fork” – and there was a smile on

everyone's face. These words were a message that her mother had managed to scrape up a dessert: a pie, a cake, a pudding. "Hold on to your fork" meant that there was something better to come.

Mrs. Jones insisted that a fork be placed in the coffin because she was sure as night follows day, that after she died, there was something better to come.

### **Reflection**

Often people call me, requesting that I pray for a special need. When I say, "Your prayers are equally precious or even better than mine," they will point upwards and say, "You have an inside line to the Guy upstairs because you are ordained." I tell them we all have an inside line to God if we choose to use it.

Our psalmist today was going through a bad patch as we all do at some time or another. But he hoped for better things to come. In this hope he would face difficulties without fear since the Lord was his stronghold.

People often ask why Jesus performed miracles. We read of many in today's Gospel. He cured the lame, the blind, and the possessed. In the time of Jesus, they did not have cataract surgery, or laser treatment. They had no polio vaccine nor diagnosis for epilepsy or Asperger syndrome. There are miracles being done every day by men and women created by God. They use their special skills, their talents, and their ability to do open heart surgery, cataract, and glaucoma treatment. They do surgery with bone marrow, kidney, lung and even heart transplants.

There are other ailments like cancer, diabetes, drug addictions. We have hope that one day we will have a cure for those as well.

Until that time, we pray for hope and healing using the words of the psalmist: "The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

## **Question to Ponder**

Following the example of Mrs. Jones, as you hold onto your fork, what is the “something better to come” that you are hoping for in this life and the next?

## **Saturday-First Week of Advent- Hope and the Right Connection**

### **A Story of Hope and the Right Connection**

A missionary was working far from the cities. He had managed to get a generator for electricity. The villagers were astonished to see a bulb hanging from the ceiling. When the generator was turned on, the missionary clicked a switch and the bulb lit up. The villagers watched with mouths wide open!

One of the villagers asked the missionary for a bulb. Thinking that the villager wanted it as a trinket or toy, the missionary gave him a burnt-out bulb. A few weeks later, the missionary happened to be passing by that villager’s hut and was surprised to see the burnt-out bulb hanging by a string from one of the rafters. The missionary had a difficult time explaining that the bulb had to be connected to a generator of electricity in order to light up.

### **Reflection**

We live in a world of uncertainty. The food prices are soaring, the landlords are increasing the rents, and global warming is creating havoc: floods, and droughts, and wildfires are getting out of control. Our hope is that our compassionate God will restore balance to the world which was given into our stewardship.

Unfortunately, we have abused it. Is it beyond repair? We hope, we pray that the leaders and the movers and shakers in this world will lead us in the right direction. In our Gospel we hear Jesus saying: “The Kingdom of God is at hand.”

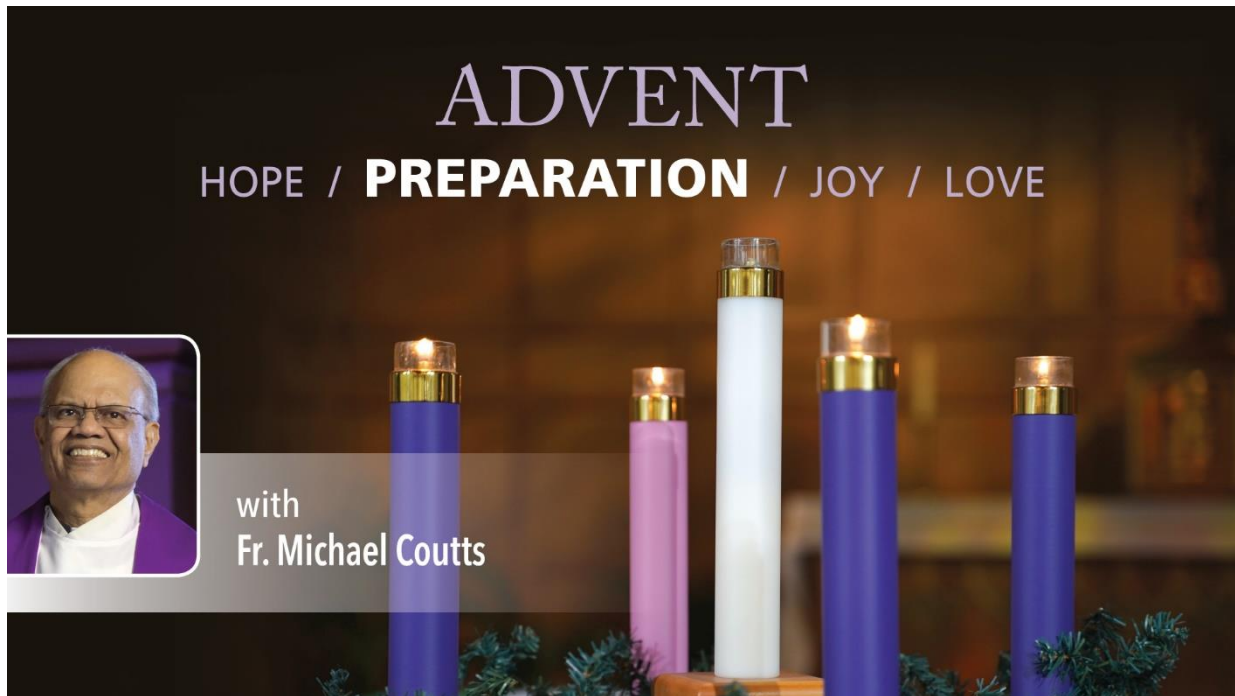
It is good to have hope for a better world. It is admirable to respect our planet and to try to reverse global warming. But that hope must be connected like a light bulb to a generator. That hope must be connected to the One who made all things possible in the first place.

It is a God who so loves the world that a Son was born to us, a Child was given to us. We know him as Emmanuel, God is with us. We have the proper connections – now all we must do is turn on the switch.

### **Questions to Ponder**

What does it mean to you to hear Jesus say, “The Kingdom of God is at hand?”

Also, how have you created the right connection to God so that you are the one who lights up your home, your neighbourhood, the place where you work?



### **Sunday – Second Week – Candle of Preparation.**

The first reading throughout this week will be mainly from the Prophet Isaiah who provides a message of preparation to the Israelites while they are in exile in Babylon.

The signs of the time were evident to King Cyrus who is venerated in the Hebrew Bible as Cyrus the Messiah for conquering Babylon and liberating the Jews from captivity. His armies were spread very thin over the many countries he had subdued. In a wise political move, he decided to send all his captives to their native countries.

The Israelites however saw the hand of God in their return. They were ready to leave Babylon, but this journey would require preparation.

- Their preparation would require welcoming others.
- Their preparation would require patience.
- Their preparation would require humility.
- Their preparation would require trust. The Lord took care of their ancestors, and the Lord would take of them now.

- Their preparation would require them to be alert. Their deliverance was near, but neither the day nor the hour was known.
- Their preparation would be with a sense of deep gratitude.

Their sins, their infidelities had caused them to be weak, had caused them to be disorganised, had caused them to be captured and taken into exile. They would now need the qualities of welcoming, patience, humility, trust, readiness, and gratitude to break free.

So, what is the preparation that we need? It is in fact threefold.

First – We are preparing immediately for Christmas. We prepare spiritually, we prepare with gifts, with Christmas trees, with decorations, and with traditional food. The bridegroom is with us; the day will come (Lent) when we will fast.

Second – We prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. We do not know the day nor the hour. The parable of the bridesmaids in Matthew chapter 25 calls us to be like the bridesmaids who were ready for the arrival of the groom at an unexpected hour.

Finally – We prepare for the purpose of the Church. The Church is called to proclaim that salvation is for all; it is called to evangelize. As Jesus said, there were “sheep not of the flock”. They too should know the gift of salvation.

You are invited to join us this week as we explore the following themes:

Monday: Preparation and Welcome

Tuesday: Preparation and Patience

Wednesday: Preparation and Humility

Thursday: Preparation Means Trust

Friday: Preparation Means Being Ready and Alert

Saturday: Preparation and Decision

Welcome to the second week of Advent as we light the Candle of Preparation and await the coming of the Lord.

### **Monday – Second Week – Preparation and Welcome**

#### **A Story of Preparation and Welcome**

Way up in the Northwest Territories, there was a well-known Dene artist. The parish priest asked him to paint a mural in the Church depicting the scene of Bethlehem. The picture was to be unveiled at Christmas. He reluctantly agreed to do so.

In August, he put up the scaffolding for the mural – but as the months passed, the artist kept on delaying. Finally in the third week of Advent, the parish priest said to him, “You do not seem to want to complete this mural, do you?” He quietly agreed. “You see,” he told the priest, “in our Tribe, there would be no way on earth, that a pregnant mother would be turned away. Every home would welcome such a mother to be. I cannot even imagine the scene, and hence it is impossible to paint it.”

#### **Reflection**

Isaiah tells the story of the exiles returning from Babylon to Jerusalem. The journey was long. It was over hills and valleys. But the Lord was taking charge. The Lord was preparing a highway.

A story of preparation by God is a challenge to us as we prepare for Christmas. It is not just a historical event that took place 2000 years ago, but a ‘Christmas’ as Christ comes once again into our world.

In the Old Testament, a stranger even from an enemy clan would be welcomed if he or she sought refuge. In the Sanskrit language there is an idiom that says: “The stranger is like God asking for a home. He must always be accepted.”

The story of Mary and Joseph finding no place cannot and must not be repeated in our world, in our country, in our parishes today. So, we welcome not only friends and family, but as a community, we reach out



to the new immigrant, the refugee, those on the fringes of the community.

Our preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ involves meditation on the fact that we too have experienced welcome, reconciliation and forgiveness at times.

Our preparation requires a grateful heart as Psalm 100 says: “Give thanks to him and bless his name.”

We have not been called that far in our preparation for Christmas. Perhaps all we have been called to do is to be reconciled with one of our own – a friend, a family member, a neighbour, a person from another faith.

### **Question to Ponder**

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” says Jesus in Matthew 25:35. How friendly and welcoming are we to newcomers in the neighbourhood, to new immigrants in the parish?

## **Tuesday – Second Week of Advent – Preparation and Patience**

### **A Story of Preparation and Patience**

Carlo Carretto was a prominent Catholic activist, who was inspired to live a contemplative life. At the age of 44, he heard a voice tell him that God wanted not his action – but his person in love and in prayer. So, Carlo joined Charles de Foucauld’s Little Brothers of Jesus. He went into the desert and after years of silence and prayer, he said, “God is telling us: learn to wait, and wait and wait for your God. Be patient in everything.”

### **Reflection**

Jesus himself provided us with a magnificent example of patience. Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He started at the age of twelve in the Temple when he was about his Father’s business. Then he waited for

eighteen long years. Jesus waited and waited and waited for God. Jesus was being prepared by waiting patiently.

Patience is a quality fast disappearing in our digital age. If a file or app does not open or download in twenty seconds, we stop the action and move on to another.

God is never in a hurry. For God a thousand years is like one day, but for us it seems as though one day is like a thousand years. Our patience is always tested. We are human and finite. As a result, failures, frustrations, and difficulties are met at every corner.

God calls on us to be patient with others and just as importantly patient with ourselves.

We need to prepare the way of the Lord by waiting patiently, just as God did when God prepared for his Son to become flesh and dwell in our midst. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.” (Hebrews 1:1)

### **Questions to Ponder**

It has been said that patience is a virtue. What role does the virtue of patience play in your life? What causes me to become impatient with others and yourself and how does this impact your preparation for an important event?

## **Wednesday – Second Week of Advent - Preparation and Humility**

### **A Story of Preparation and Humility**

In certain regions of South Africa, when someone does something wrong, he is taken to the centre of the village and surrounded by his tribe for two days while they speak of all the good, he has done. They believe

each person is good but sometimes we make mistakes, which is really a cry for help.

They unite in this ritual to encourage the person to reconnect with their true nature. They believe that unity and affirmation have more power to change behaviour than shame and punishment. This is known as *Ubuntu* – humanity towards others and the participants undertake the ritual with a great sense of humility.

### **Reflection**

Preparation requires the virtue of humility. We like to be in control of things. Nothing irritates us more than when we are blindsided with an unexpected obstacle or difficulty.

However, a humble person realises that in preparing for an event, a celebration or when trying to accomplish a task, we do not have the full picture. We do not see all the eventualities, even when we plan things down to the last detail. We do not see the repercussions of our actions.

Humility comes from the Latin word, *humus*, which means earth. A humble person knows that we are dust and to that earth, to that dust we shall return. And so, with humility, we have our feet firmly planted on the earth. We are called “well-grounded” persons.

The Jesuit scientist, Teilhard de Chardin, wrote that wonderful book, *Hymn to the Universe*. It is a realization that we are part and parcel of the planet on which we live. We realize that we must treat the ground on which we walk with respect. The rivers and seas, the hills and mountains have been here long before us and will be here long after we have gone. They tell us that we are guests on this planet, not its master. That should keep us humble. That should make us realize how small and insignificant we are. Yet God has chosen to make us in God’s image and likeness.

This fact that we are created in God's own likeness together with a strong sense of humility should allow us to come with a deep sense of gratitude as we light the Candle of Preparation.

### **Question to Ponder**

The opposite of humility is pride which is the first of the deadly sins. Is there a time my pride caused me to hurt another person or deterred me from following Jesus' teachings on being humble?

## **Thursday – Second Week – Preparation Means Trust**

### **A Story Where Preparation Means Trust**

There is a very popular T.V. game show. Three contestants are given a shopping cart each. They are given five minutes to go through the store. Whatever they can pile up in the carts is theirs to keep.

Contestant #1 did not go casually rushing through the store. This person went directly to the gadget department and picked up a 40-inch T.V. (the 72-inch did not fit), six laptops, and as many cellphones as would fit into the cart. The audience cheered wildly and shouted instructions on what to take next.

The second contestant ran for the designer fashions, watches, and jewellery collections. You can imagine what contestant #2 piled up. Again, it was to the cheers of the audience.

Contestant #3 left the cart behind and picked a shopping basket. The crowd booed loudly. Not impacted by the negative reaction this contestant walked casually to the grocery section and picked up a carton of milk, a loaf of bread, and some butter and cheese. The crowd was aghast.

This simple shopper was interviewed a day later. "Why did you pick just a few things – and the least expensive?" After a moment of reflection this person replied, "I have all that I need. I did not want to clutter myself with what I want but will not use. But most importantly, my

parents own the department store. I can always come back if I need anything. It is a matter of trust.”

### **Reflection**

Our reading from Isaiah 41 gives us words that we hear 365 times in the Bible: “Be not afraid.” Isaiah tells the exiles that God has a message: “Do not fear, I will help you. Remember your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.” Preparation means trust.

We like to be independent. We want to sing with Frank Sinatra, “I’ll do it my way.” We might not trust others to help us even if it is clear they know more about a problem than we do. We are surprised when we fall flat on our face in failure.

This happens to us because we often fail to realise that we are not here to save the world. Salvation has already been achieved through the Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All we must do is announce these gifts, these treasures to those in our care.

We sing the song: “He’s got the whole world in his hands he’s got the whole wide world...” But we hardly act as if everything is in God’s hands. The psalmist puts it so beautifully in Psalm 139: “Lord you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up...My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret...”

God knew us even before we were born. Surely, we can trust such a powerful God. This is the God who has the very best desires for us.

Like the contestant in the game show, our Father knows what we need. Our Father owns the store. Our Father will give us our daily bread – just as God cared for the Israelites in the Exodus experience.

## **Questions to ponder**

Think of a time when you needed to trust another person as you faced an important task. Did you ask for help from God or another person? Why were you able to truly trust the other in this situation?

## **Friday – Second Week of Advent – Preparation Means Being Ready and Vigilant**

### **A Story about Preparation and Being Ready and Vigilant**

This story is taken from the folklore of the Cherokee Indigenous People. Why do some trees stay evergreen?

The Great Power planted various types of trees and gave them a command. They would receive a gift based on their readiness and vigilance. The Great Power asked the trees to stay awake and guard the earth for seven nights.

The trees were excited at the responsibility and eager to know their reward. The first three nights were easy. The trees talked and swayed. They kept awake. But the fourth and fifth nights were more difficult. The talk tapered off to a whisper. One by one they fell asleep. By the sixth night, only a few trees remained standing erect. On the seventh night, the Cedar and the Pine, the Fir and the Spruce were standing tall and erect.

The Great Power marvelled at their endurance and praised their responsibility. Now for their gift: they would remain evergreen through all seasons. They would continue as guardians of the earth. When autumn came, the other trees would lose their leaves. They would seem lifeless through the winter. The evergreens would always be ready and vigilant.

### **Reflection**

On this Friday in the Second Week of Advent our response to the readings comes from Psalm 1. This first of the Psalms gives a “floor-

plan” for a person who seeks holiness. It is a theme for the rest of the Psalms as the Psalmist proclaims that God is great, and God must be given glory and praise. We give God this glory by walking in the paths of the Torah and Tradition.

This also gives us a definite set of steps as we prepare to receive the gift of salvation. This gift is freely given. Psalm 1 tells us what a blessed person should not do. The person should not walk in the company of the wicked, should not stand in the path of sinners, and should not sit with the scoffers.

Preparing for Christmas can be time consuming. There are Christmas sweets, and the traditional fruitcake to get ready, we buy presents and decorate the Christmas tree. We spend time, money, and a great deal of thought. This is good and admirable. We want to be ready for the celebration of Christmas Eve and Christmas day with family and friends.

The collateral joy comes when we spend time with grateful hearts, thinking about how good God has been to us. God did the very same thing: he spent time and thought on us. God did this to bring peace, joy, and smiles to our faces. The gift of this joy is free, and it is always there.

The question for us is: Are we vigilant and ready to receive the true gift of Christmas? Too often we are immersed in trivialities and side issues, and we miss the true joy of the moment.

### **Question to ponder**

Think about how you prepare for Christmas day. How do you make sure you are ready and vigilant for the spiritual gifts of Christmas which come freely from our God?

## **Saturday – Second Week of Advent -Preparation and Decision**

### **A Story of Preparation and Decision**

Anthony de Mello tells the story of a Sufi who was a man of tremendous goodwill.

He worked for the Better World movement. He prayed for strength, stamina, and knowledge to change the world in which he lived.

As he reached middle age, he realized that he had achieved little or nothing. He now prayed that he would have the energy and understanding to change his family, friends, and neighbours.

As he grew old, he realised that there was no change in the violence, bitterness, anger, and jealousy around him. So, he prayed to God that he would have the courage to change himself.

This Sufi man of tremendous goodwill had the talent, he had the desire, but he would not have wasted his ability and talent if he had started with himself.

### **Reflection**

We live in a society with oodles of good people with generous hearts and caring souls. We have the intelligence, the knowledge, and the wisdom to deal with issues that trouble us today: guns and violence, depression and drugs, insecurity, and intolerance, ignoring the weak and taking advantage of the elderly, to name a few.

We seem to be always waiting for someone to take the lead. We are hoping that someone with administrative qualities will “muster the troops.” We are continually in the mood of “Coulda-Woulda-Shoulda.” We have the classical scenario of: If not you, Who? If not now, When? If not here, Where?

We ask those questions because we are often over-whelmed with the issues that face us. This calls us to sit down and divide the problem into its parts. These are more manageable. We find a solution to one part, and



it dovetails into the next. Soon we find that others are infected by excitement and enthusiasm. They too want to be part of the action.

As we light this candle of preparation at the end of the week, we have a decision to make. Once we make it, then let's do it.

### **Questions to Ponder**

What is something I know I should change about myself? Have I asked God for the courage to make this change?



### **Sunday – Third Week – Candle of Joy**

As we think of joy, certain images come immediately to mind: a three- or four-year-old doing cartwheels, or a babbling stream brimming over as it flows, or a lamb frolicking in the fields with boundless energy. That is the joy that comes from integrity.

In the public life of Jesus, there were always clashes with the Scribes and Pharisees. These were apparently good people, wanting to keep the Torah and tradition. But they were constantly seeking to find a way to trap Jesus. There was no integrity and consequently no joy – they would be incapable of cartwheels or frolicking anywhere, even figuratively.

However, the integrity of the child, the stream and the lamb are temporary. The child will grow up and have to make choices. The stream will get polluted as it runs through its course. The lamb will end up as a lamb chop on someone's plate. Despite our life experiences, we light this candle of joy in this third week of Advent. We are encouraged by Isaiah to rejoice with joy and singing. The celebrant is encouraged to exchange the usual

Advent purple for rose coloured vestments in anticipation of the joy of Christmas.

So, what is that joy which is everlasting? It seems easier to say what joy is not than what constitutes joy. Joy is a surprise. Joy comes because of another virtue or action. It cannot be bought, sought, or created. Joy will not be found in a life of entitlement which seems prevalent today. When we demand from others that they meet our needs, bring order from our chaos, rescue us from our impetuosity, we will never encounter joy.

We confuse joy with the TGIF mentality. Thank God it's Friday – now I can let off steam. After a week of stress, deadlines, worries, emotional and financial ups and downs, we think we can find joy by partying. This will cheer us up. It may – but it will not bring joy.

The second misconception of joy is that it cannot co-exist with sadness, pain, or difficulties. While we go through these challenges, we will not say that we are in joy. Yet as we work through these ups and downs of life, keeping our dignity through tension and hardships, we suddenly realise that we have a deep and intense joy down in our hearts.

Jesus must have felt that on the cross, when he realised that the will of the Father, which he had come to do, was now accomplished. He could rejoice through parched lips while in pain. But there was joy in the depths of his heart.

The prayer of St. Francis of Assisi says it so beautifully:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...

Where there is sadness [let me sow] joy.

You are invited to join us this week as we explore the following themes:

Monday: Joy and Achievement

Tuesday: Joy and Peace

Wednesday: Joy & Finding a Lost Treasure

Thursday: Joy and Forgiveness

Friday: Joy and Understanding

Saturday: Joy and Selflessness

Welcome to the third week of Advent as we light the Candle of Joy and await the coming of the Lord.

### **Monday - Third Week of Advent - Joy and Achievement**

#### **A Story of Joy and Achievement**

Janice had polio when she was two. As a result, her left leg below the knee was always in a brace. However, she never allowed this disability to slow her down. She wanted to be involved in all the sports and games. She could and would swim whenever she had the opportunity. She could not partake in soccer, except as a goalkeeper, but she tried her best there.

On the school sports day, she wanted to take part in the races. Her dad did not want her to be disheartened, so he thought she should give this a pass. However, Janice was determined. Her dad got ready to pick up the broken pieces of disappointment.

When she came back from school, she was beaming and holding a ribbon for a second-place finish. “Well done, Janice,” said her dad. “I suppose they gave you a little advantage.” “No way,” protested Janice. “I just had to try twice as hard as the rest – and I missed the first place by just a little.” Wow, wouldn’t that have been wonderful? Joy filled not only her heart but was brimming over in the heart of her father.

## **Reflection**

There is a sense of joy when you have planned, prepared, and then accomplished a task. Authors have a sense of joy when they have sent their book off to the publisher. It is only secondary when the book is published and for sale. The carpenter is full of joy when he has finished a woodcarving.

You can imagine the joy in heaven among the angels and archangels when Mary uttered those words: “Let it be done unto me according to your word.”

Joy can also exist in the middle of pain. I imagine the joy that must have filled the heart of Jesus, even as he was in agony on the cross. He had come to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He had begun the work. He had left that work in the hands of twelve fragile human beings. Now joy filled his heart as he could say to his Father: “*It is accomplished.*” It is finished. Truly, if anyone, Jesus could now rest in peace. He was in pain, but his heart was full of joy for a task well done.

Joy is a gift which thieves cannot break in and steal. This joy does not have a ‘best-before-date’. It is not only a gift that we can treasure, but one that we can share with others by just being filled with joy. It shows.

## **Questions to Ponder**

- When was a time when you were able to rejoice in the joy of others? Describe the feeling you had during this moment.
- Perhaps you find it difficult to rejoice in the success of others. Why do you think this might be and what might you do about it?

## **Tuesday - Third Week of Advent - Joy and Peace**

### **A Story of Joy and Peace**

Diane finally sank down into the sofa for some quiet and rest at the end of the day but there was little of either.

First it was her 15-year-old Kelly who had a broken heart after splitting up with her BFF – best friend forever. Then it was 10-year-old Derek who was stressed out because he could not figure out his math problem. Finally, it was 4-year-old Rose with a loose tooth. Would Mummy kiss it and make it better?

Diane had longed for her children to get out of diapers. Now she wished they were back at that age when they were easier to handle. But as she sat and looked back at the day, besides peace, there was a deep and proud sense of joy. She would not have it any other way.

### **Reflection**

As we read the newspaper and watch TV, it seems there are either scenes of devastation after a hurricane or a spate of shootings or stabbings. Sometimes we ask with the words of the song: “When will we ever learn?”

However together with all the violence, there are ambassadors of peace, whose exploits, whose tireless works are never reported either in the news or on TV unless it is something spectacular.

We experience pockets of peace in small groups, in small villages and townships as ordinary folks gather and pool their resources together after a storm, a hurricane, a tornado or fire. The bigger jobs of clearing the debris are left to government agencies or even the military. But small pockets of concentrated efforts by a haphazard small group bring peace, joy, laughter, and tears of satisfaction as together they turn the corner of some tragedy.

Those who have suffered sometimes have to pinch themselves when they realise that they really have pulled through what they thought was a horrendous disaster. They realise how much good, how much kindness, how much care and generosity are present in the hearts of those around them.

These are the people you see daily. You rarely know their names. You say hello to them. You respect their space. But now, time and circumstance make them leave their comfort zone and come to the aid of those in need. This brings oodles of joy and happiness. As Robert Browning wrote in the poem "Pippa Passes," we say: "God is in heaven and all's right with the world."

### **Question to Ponder**

Think of an event or encounter that brought joy to your heart? Would you change anything? Why?

## **Wednesday - Third Week of Advent - Joy & Finding a Lost Treasure**

### **A Story of Joy & Finding a Lost Treasure**

On Saturday, September 24, 2022, when tropical storm Fiona barrelled through Nova Scotia's Pictou County, four-year-old **Grady MacKinnon** wandered off into the woods in rural Springville, N.S.

Grady's mother said, "We were out with the children, and for just a minute we didn't have our eyes on him. A minute led to fifteen hours of just pure panic and torture. It's ten acres of thick wooded old trees and we searched, and we couldn't hear him, we couldn't see him. He was in the woods with fallen trees and tons of rain that had fallen to the ground. These are unforgiving circumstances. Anything could have happened," his mother said.

But after fifteen hours, his grandfather found him wandering around. The relief and joy not only by the parents, but by the entire community was indescribable.

As for Grady, he sat wide-eyed in his father's arms, wondering what the fuss was all about!

### **Reflection**

Each of us has been given a treasure at the time of our baptism. It is an inheritance. It is an invitation to sit down one day at the banquet table in heaven. Most of us were baptized as babies. The invitation was given to parents and godparents, with the injunction: Keep this flame of faith alive in your hearts until the day the Lord calls you to himself.

As we grow up, we are tempted with the lures of this world. We are pre-occupied with the chores of putting food on the table for our family, of buying garments to clothe us, and paying rent or mortgages on the houses in which we live. In all this, sometimes our faith is put on the back burner. We fail to realise that we get strength to do all these chores from that very treasure of faith and trust in God. This faith is not a set of doctrines to which we swear. It is rather a lived experience of a relationship with God.

Often, it is in the constant prayers of mothers like St. Monica, that help us to be aware of the treasure of faith. This awareness brings a sense of deep and unaccountable joy. Like St. Monica's son, St. Augustine, we have to say: "Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new!" But it is better late, than never. It fills us with joy.

### **Question to Ponder**

Besides family members and household pets, if your house was on fire, what treasure would you rescue? Why would you treasure this item?



## **Thursday - Third Week of Advent - Joy and Forgiveness**

### **A Story of Joy and Forgiveness**

One would expect a religious community to be an example of love and kindness. It should be a place where forgiveness comes easily but that is not always the case.

Fr. Joe was the director of a Retreat Centre. It survived on free will donations. A suggested donation was \$70 a day with three meals. A friend of Fr. Bill, another priest in the community, came to make a thirty-day retreat. The friend turned out to be less than honourable. He not only did not make a retreat, but he also did not pay a cent for the thirty days. The icing on the story was that the man told his friend, Fr. Bill, that the director was inhospitable and snobbish.

Instead of clearing the air, Fr. Bill believed his friend. He cut Fr. Joe off completely. He refused to greet him, talk to him, or even answer questions for two years.

Often in an impasse, it is the one who is hurt that must make the first move towards healing. But how could this happen if Fr. Bill left the room each time Fr. Joe entered? So, Fr. Joe just silently prayed each day for Fr. Bill and for healing.

Then out of the blue, one day, with no apparent reason, Fr. Bill asked Fr. Joe how he was doing and how many retreatants were expected that week at the Retreat Centre. Fr. Joe had to blink back the tears. He thought: God is good. God has wonders to perform. His heart was filled with joy.

### **Reflection**

Joy comes with forgiveness and with the repair of broken relationships. The intensity of that joy is in proportion to the depth of closeness in the relationship before the split.

When people are friends, when people trust one another, when people are in close relationship, sometimes a rude word or thoughtless action can hurt deeply and cause a lot of pain. It can at times rupture a friendship totally. However, if the friendship is genuine and has strong foundations, a word, a deed, a thoughtless action should not break the relationship.

But the reality is that relationships are often broken, even between the best of friends. This can happen among families with the result that brothers and sisters are estranged. You expected support from a sibling, and he or she failed to deliver. They failed to come and help when you thought you needed it badly.

Peace comes with a generous heart. This heart seeks and finds reasons why a friend or relative did not rally to help or give support. With that peace, there is joy even when you are disappointed. The joy is doubled when the relationship is repaired.

### **Question to ponder**

Jesus teaches us to pray by saying ‘Father forgive us our trespasses’ and then adds the words ‘as we forgive those who have trespassed against us’.

Think of a person or persons who have trespassed against you. Have you been able to forgive them? How did that make you feel? If you have not been able to forgive why not and how do you feel about what happened?

## **Friday - Third Week of Advent - Joy and Understanding**

### **A Story of Joy and Understanding**

During Covid, Rose was laid off from her executive position at work. She and her husband were making good salaries. When they were both working, one thing they could afford was to take a yearly holiday. They could fly their five children all under fourteen to back to their hometown to see their grandparents.

Now on a single salary they had to make some decisions. After talking over their options, they decided Rose would stay home with the children while the pandemic was raging. This meant that they would have to tighten their belts.

It was difficult to explain this to the children, especially the younger ones that things were going to change. The kids wondered why they could not go on holidays. Why did they have to cut down on piano lessons, soccer practices, ice hockey time and ballet?

As time went on Rose and her husband realised that this new arrangement had many benefits. Rose could stay at home and watch the little ones grow. Life for the family became simpler in many ways. The entire family had a 'Eureka' experience and with that came joy.

### **Reflection**

This is like the joy that comes with forgiveness. There is a difference, however, as this joy doesn't involve broken relationships, but rather a 'Eureka' experience. It is often described as an 'aha' moment!

Life is unpredictable. We have dreams. We have hopes. We have plans. For many this involves finding a loving person to be a partner for life. Then there may be children. Your dream is that they grow up and have steady jobs and one day they will settle down so that you can enjoy your grandchildren.

Then life takes a turn you did not expect. Perhaps you have a family and one of the children has Down or Asperger syndrome. Perhaps a child has a defective heart valve or a stutter in speech. You spend long sleepless nights in the children's ward of the local hospital.

Your dream may be that the children grow up to be respectful and produce good results in school. Suddenly one falls into bad company, and you have a teenager on drugs, who is rebellious; you must bail them out of jail. You might wonder how can I go on with shattered dreams and hopes.

Over time and with experience you gain a new understanding about life. You become tough and resilient. You find courage when you were most afraid. You and your spouse have pulled through when everything seems to fall apart. There have been situations you could not change – but you have handled it.

You might have wished that things had been different. Many people have confided in me over the years that they had encountered difficult situations in their lives and then worked through them. They share that they would not have it any other way at the end of the day.

Understanding brings a sense of joy into our hearts.

### **Questions to Ponder**

- If you had an interview with God – what would you like God to help you understand or clarify?

## **Saturday - Third Week of Advent - Joy and Selflessness**

### **A Story of Joy and Selflessness**

Mitch Albom, the author of the best-selling book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, told the following story about a chance encounter that had a dramatic impact on him.

“I left the Michigan football game one night and saw a homeless woman crying on the street. I asked if she were ok. She said yes, she was crying because someone had just given her twenty dollars. She said her name was Jenny. I said if she wouldn’t cry, I would like to do the same for her. When I gave her the money, she asked for a hug. She said she wanted to give something to her kids for Halloween. We spoke for a few minutes. She asked again for a hug and she told me her kids, now grown, were nice looking, and I said I was sure of it.

I walked away humbled and stunned at the people we encounter. Everyone has a story. How easily we can touch that story if we take even a moment to connect. Thank you, Jenny, for making a night less about me and more about something precious.”

### **Reflection**

I was on a Parish Mission in Cincinnati. I had a week to rest and relax after the mission, and one of the locals invited me to spend some time “debriefing.”

Jim and his wife Sandra were a delightful couple. Sandra said, “You two go off and do your thing. I have my bridge games and painting sessions with my friends. “

Jim and Sandra were intelligent and strong-willed persons. They not only survived but had a thriving relationship. They respected each other’s skills. Head-strong as they were, they did not dig in their heels on any matter. They let the other plan, prepare, and execute family chores. They

were content to fetch and carry and do any work delegated to them in the other's expertise.

When I observed Jim and Sandra, I could see that they were happy. They were considerate. There were small secret tokens of affection when they thought no one noticed. I was happy to be with them. As I looked out at the steadily flowing river, I realised my heart was full of joy at their happiness, at their easy repartee and genuine bubbly laughter. My joy was flowing like the river in the background – silently, steadily, and endlessly.

Joy can come as we see and witness the joy in others. Mitch Albom was filled with joy at the kindness of a stranger to a homeless woman.

The birth of Christ did not bring joy to Herod, who only thought of himself and his power and glory.

The events in that dingy manger brought great joy to Mary and Joseph; great joy to the angels as they watched from the heavens and sang, “Glory to God in the highest”; great joy to the shepherds as they minded their flocks by night; and great joy to the wise men who travelled from the east as they found this new-born king from heaven.

### **Question to ponder**

- Name a person in your family, your parish, your community who constantly acts for the good of others.

As part of your preparation during this third week of Advent, I encourage you to pick up the phone or write a small note and tell them how their caring has touched your heart.



## **The Fourth Candle – Candle of Love.**

We light the fourth candle as we hear Isaiah in Chapter 54 speak about God’s enduring love for all of us.

The evangelist John tells us that what really matters is not that we love God, but rather that we are deeply convinced that God loves us. Once we are convinced of that, we listen to Jesus as he tells us “Love one another as I have loved you.”

So, we ponder: How did Jesus love? At the end of Mass, the presider says, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” We do this by loving as Jesus himself loved.

We can discover the love of Jesus by examining the way the life of Jesus unfolded. Each day this week we will take one episode or event in Jesus’ public life. We will experience the texture, the fabric, the ingredients of the love of Jesus. It is a love that knows no end – and finally, Jesus will show this love in a dramatic gesture as his hands are nailed to the cross. They extend from east to west – and lest they get tired and fall by his side,

they are nailed there in perpetuity. This was done by others, but Jesus tells us, “No one takes my life. I lay it down of my free will and I can pick it up again.”

Love has been the theme of many award-winning songs. These songs haunt us with their melodies. Love or lack of love is the key to most gripping movies and soap operas. It captures our imagination, our attention, our memory. Love endures everything. It shapes how we live and how we die. It gives us the energy to get up in the morning. It shapes our choices in the persons we meet or avoid and in the actions we take. But the most precious and eternal gift of love is the love of this world and all the inhabitants of this earth. That is the love of God who sent us what we celebrate each Christmas: The Word made flesh dwelling in our midst.

You are invited to join us this week as we explore the following themes:

Monday: Love and Respect for Others

Tuesday: Love and Concern for Others

Wednesday: Love and Compassion

Thursday: Love and Forgiving

Friday: Love and Reaching Out

Saturday: Love and Abiding with the One Who Loves

Welcome to the fourth week of Advent as we light the Candle of Love and await the coming of the Lord.

### **Monday - Fourth Week of Advent - Love and Respect**

#### **A Story of Love and Respect**

In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela describes his long years of imprisonment on Robben Island. He tells how one day he was called to the main office. General Steyn was visiting the Island and wanted to know from Mandela if the other prisoners had any complaints. Badenhorst, the officer in command was cruel, feared and hated. Without bitterness, Mandela gave an account.



Soon after this meeting the General had the camp commander replaced. As he left, Badenhorst came to Mandela and said, “I wish you people good luck.” It left Mandela dumbfounded. Mandela says that he thought of the incident for a long time afterwards. That incident revealed that there was another side to Badenhorst’s nature, a side that had been obscured but that still existed. Even the seemingly cold-blooded person, had a core of decency. If you reach this core of decency, people can change.

### **Reflection**

Let us consider the Wedding at Cana from the Gospel of John which the evangelist highlights as the first of the signs Jesus performed in his public life. His mother, Mary, comes and tells Jesus that the wine has run out. Jesus gives an enigmatic answer: “Woman my hour has not yet come.” The hour of Jesus was the hour when he would be lifted up on the Cross. Then he could say to his Father, “It is finished.

Jesus had accomplished the work. He would love and obey his Father to the end.

But on earth, he would anticipate another type of hour. It is the hour when he would gradually reveal himself, first to the Apostles and then to anyone who had ears to hear: “He was the Word of God come into this world.” Because of his love and respect for his mother, Jesus would anticipate that hour. He would change the water into wine. His disciples would be amazed. The Book of Sirach tells us how important it is that we honour and respect our elders.

You can love a person when you find something good in the other person. It is that good that commands your attention and earns your respect. However, that good is not a good in and of itself. It is a gift given which consciously or more often subconsciously makes the people around you grow in appreciation of you. Consequently, it also makes them feel good about themselves.

This goodness is infectious in a healthy way. It was the atmosphere in the Garden of Eden. It was a respect for beauty seen in animals, birds, fish, and nature itself. All lived in harmony. All lived in respect of each other's goodness. As Nelson Mandela mentioned, "even a cold-blooded person has a core of goodness." This can be respected, and it leads to love.

### **Question to Ponder:**

Respect is most shown with the words: please, thank you, I beg your pardon. It is also seen in listening to another not only with your ears but also with your heart. This is called effective listening.

Think about your conversations with others, especially those closest to you. How effective are you as a listener?

## **Tuesday - Fourth Week of Advent - Love and Concern for Others**

### **A Story of Love and Concern for Others**

In certain regions of South Africa, when someone does something wrong, he is taken to the centre of the village and surrounded by his tribe. For the next two days they speak of all the good he has done. They believe each person is good but sometimes we make mistakes, which is really a cry for help.

They unite in this ritual to encourage the person to reconnect with his true nature. They believe that unity and affirmation have more power to change behaviour than shame and punishment. This is known as Ubuntu – humanity towards others.

### **Reflection**

Jesus asks us to love one another as He himself loved us. Let us consider the Miracle of the Feeding of the Multitude. Jesus had been teaching the crowd and they had been with him for days. Obviously, they were growing hungry. They needed something to eat.

When a person loves, they are quick to perceive, to notice any stress or anxiety. Their love will urge them to reach out. Jesus loved his people.

The Apostles on the other hand were probably thinking of their own hunger, their anxiety to buy some food for their own needs. They told Jesus, “Send the crowd to the towns – where they can buy something to eat.” But Jesus would have none of that and he said to them: “You feed them.”

Our call to love helps us to quickly see those in need. It calls us to act. We have the new immigrant who needs to know the basics of transport, health care, educational and job opportunities. Our call to love as Jesus loved challenges us to go the extra mile and help them. Like the Apostles, Jesus instructs us not to say, “We pay our taxes, let the government provide.”

True love is not tax deductible. Love by nature is outward looking.

In our society there is an emphasis on being the best, achieving the best, getting the best house and car. There is a tendency to use persons and events to gain this goal.

This is the very opposite of love. Love by its nature seeks to improve and be the best precisely because you can see and respect the talent and qualities in others. Love helps you to make others flourish, prosper, and see that their talent is put to the best use to achieve the best fruits. When you help others, you are filled with joy that cannot be measured. You are filled with peace in a world of chaos.

## **Questions to Ponder:**

In John Chapter 13 Jesus gives us a new commandment, to love one another. He tells us that “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

When have you been able to love another as Jesus loved us? How did this type of love make you feel?

Think of a time when you helped the stranger? How did this make you feel?

Think of a time when you failed to follow the commandment to love one another as Jesus loved us. How did this make you feel?

## **Wednesday - Fourth Week of Advent - Love and Compassion**

### **A Story of Love and Compassion**

It was the second-grade class. Little Tommy was by nature shy and timid. One day while sitting in the class, he wanted to go to the washroom, but the teacher had told the class to answer the questions on the test and not to disturb her while she was working at her desk. Tommy was so timid. Furthermore, the test was giving him a lot of problems. Horror of horrors, he wet himself. He was embarrassed as the front of his pants got wet and dark.

Little Susie sitting on his left noticed it. She got up, clutching a glass of water and next moment she tripped and spilt the water all over Tommy's pants. “Oh, Miss, I am so sorry. I dropped water all over my friend here.”

Tommy looked up at Susie with grateful eyes.

## **Reflection**

As we talked about yesterday, Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Today we consider the compassion and love of two special women, who are central to our Advent story, Mary and Elizabeth.

Our Gospel today tells us about Mary’s visit to Elizabeth. Mary knows that Elizabeth is elderly and pregnant. She will have difficulties. Mary reaches out in love and visits Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is moved deeply by the Holy Spirit. She knows that there is something special about Mary. Instead of dealing with her own issues, she reaches out in love and blesses Mary because of her faith and because she is to be the mother of the Saviour.

In the past few years, our newspapers have reported a high rate of teenage suicides. These teenagers may have been bullied because they were not pretty or handsome. They may not have been intellectually clever or among the rich or the elite. Their bullies may have teased them to such an extreme that they took their own lives.

Love is sensitive to those who are bullied. Love reaches out not to seek a harsh justice, but to help others seek the goodness, the beauty, and the wonder of themselves.

This ability to reach out with kindness and goodness is a gift called compassion. The word compassion comes from a Greek word which means to feel with. The gift of compassion allows to put on the feelings of another person. You can put on the feelings of inadequacy, of fear, of being isolated and being made to feel like an outsider.

This type of compassionate love helps us to make the fragile persons we encounter feel included in a gentle way, without being patronizing. When we offer our compassionate love to another, we quickly come to realise that we are receiving more than we ever gave. We may not be able to rid

the world from bullies, but we can pick one person who is being bullied and reach out to them and let them know they are not alone.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

Think of a time when you were called upon to look after another person? Were you able to do this with a strong sense of compassion and love or were you perhaps judgmental and resentful. How did you feel in these situations?

Has there been a time of darkness in your life when another person helped you by being with you and showing understanding and compassion for you? How did this make you feel?

## **Thursday - Fourth Week of Advent - Love and Forgiving**

### **A Story Love and Forgiving**

Two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: *Today my best friend slapped me in the face.*

They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: *Today my best friend saved my life.*

The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, “After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?” The other friend replied “When someone hurts us, we should write it down in the sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it.”

**Reflection:**

Today let us consider the love Jesus shows Peter. Peter is the first person whom Jesus calls to work in the service of God – *“Come follow me as I proclaim the Kingdom.”*

Peter leaves all and follows Jesus. As we read the Gospels, we experience Peter:

- when he is generous: “We have left all to follow you.”
- when he is impetuous: “Bid me to come and walk on the water.”
- when he is caring: “Lord you should not talk about suffering and death.”
- when he is humble: “Lord, you will never wash my feet.”
- when he exaggerates: “Lord not only my feet, but my whole body.”
- when he is boastful: “Others might deny you, but I never will.”

Three times during our Lord’s passion Peter denies Jesus with the words “I do not know the man”. When the cock crows after the final denial, Peter goes out and weeps bitterly. Jesus is quick to see the good and the potential in Peter. Jesus’ love for this bumbling fisherman is total. He not only forgives, but he makes Peter the rock on which the church is built.

The experts tell us that a relationship is bound to break up if those involved keep a score of each other’s failures and mistakes. By the same token, love grows when you notice and commend the good, the kind acts, the tokens of love and the smiles that you exchange.

They say, in love you must forgive and forget. That is only partly true. In a strange way, love involves forgiving and remembering. We are hurt, but love reaches out and forgives. However, hurts do not go away the same way as we wash grime from our hands. Hurts tend to come back again as the memory of the hurt returns. It is a challenge to forgive again and again and yet again. Love reaches out each time.

In Matthew Chapter 18, Peter comes to Jesus and asks him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus says to Peter, and he says to us, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. Jesus teaches us that healing only comes when we are open to forgiving those who have trespassed against us.

### **Questions to Ponder**

Father forgive me my trespasses: Who do you need to reach out to this Advent to ask for forgiveness?

Father forgive me as I forgive those who have trespassed against me: Who has hurt you and how can you offer forgiveness to them?

### **Friday - Fourth Week of Advent - Love and Forgetting**

#### **Story of Love and Forgetting**

In *Les Misérables* upon release from the galleys after nineteen years, Jean Valjean cannot imagine how to lead his life in any other way than through theft and concealment. When the bishop shows kindness towards him by giving him dinner and a room for the night, Valjean is shocked and overwhelmed, but is still unable to prevent himself from stealing the bishop’s silverware and running away in the middle of the night. When he is brought back by the police, the bishop exclaims that Valjean forgot to take the silver candlesticks when he said adieu. He pretends that the silver was a gift to Valjean so that the policemen will let him go. The candlesticks thus symbolize the mercy shown to Valjean by the bishop, as well as humility and goodness in the bishop’s lack of interest in beautiful possessions and wealth.



## Reflection

This week we have been reflecting on Jesus' commandment to "Love one another as I have loved you". An example of the type of love that Jesus has for us can be seen in the love Jesus had for the Apostle Judas right to the very end.

Jesus saw potential in Judas. But Christ was not naïve. He gradually noticed the direction in which Judas was heading. Like the rich young man, Judas had his heart set on things that were passing. Judas saw in Jesus a means to get political freedom and fame. He saw in Jesus a leader who had outmanoeuvred the Pharisees. Judas decided to push the envelope. He would betray Jesus thinking that Jesus would outwit his captors, as he did before.

Jesus' love for Judas was right to the end. Christ gave him a warning at the last supper. In John's account of the Passion, when Judas came to betray Jesus with a kiss, Jesus pre-empted this act by asking the soldiers "whom are you seeking." When they said: Jesus – he replied, "*I am he.*" Judas was not forced to betray our Lord with a kiss. Jesus loved Judas to the end.

When two friends fight, a coldness often sets in between them. Communication can be broken. Reality tells us that the rift is healed often by the victim rather than the one who has caused the harm, pain or hurt. It is when a person loves and reaches out in love that peace is possible.

Now there are some hurts that demand justice and emotionally we may want retribution. Love, however, knows that the damage will not be undone. Love is content to leave the justice in the hands of the law and in the hands of God.

As we discussed yesterday it is not always possible or perhaps wise to forgive and forget. The path to reconciliation is a different one than the call in the gospel to offer forgiveness to those who have hurt us.

Reconciliation requires two or more people while forgiveness only involves you and your decision to forgive.

### **Questions to Ponder:**

In the sacrament of reconciliation, we ask God for forgiveness with the complete trust that he will say the word and our soul will be healed.

How do you feel when you have been absolved by God of your sins?

When you have offered forgiveness, especially for things you can not forget, how has that made you feel?

What has made reconciliation with another person possible or not possible? How have you felt in these circumstances?

## **Saturday: Fourth Week of Advent. Love and Abiding**

### **A Story of Love and Abiding**

Seven-year-old Freddy was a real problem in the school. This was the opinion of his principal. Whenever there was noise, whenever there was any disturbance in the gym, Freddy was bound to be there or to have just walked away from the scene. One day, the principal saw Freddy walk out of the school grounds during recess. That was forbidden. He went up to a tree and pinned a piece of paper on the tree. “Finally, I have caught you, Freddy,” said the principal to himself. As soon as the bell rang for the end of recess, the principal went up to the tree and picked up the paper. On it, Freddy had scribbled in a red marker, “Whoever reads this, know that God loves you and so do I.”

## Reflection

Today we hear the hymn of Zechariah: *“In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us.”* Jesus tells us to love one another as he has loved us. The best way we can do that is to stay close to Jesus, watch his actions and put them into practice. Jesus shows us the way: *“I am the vine. Abide in me.”* We cannot get closer to Jesus than to abide in him. It is a close encounter of the life-giving kind.

In a world of anger and violence, of high-speed digital media, in a world where humans are being replaced by machines, how would Jesus love in this world? How are we called to abide in his love.

The best-known story in the Bible of abiding in love is the story of Ruth and Naomi. When Ruth is told that she can go back to her people, the Moabites, she answers Naomi, “Wherever you go I shall go.” I will stay with you; your God will be my God too.

We have all experienced “fair-weather” friends. These were the friends who left the prodigal son in Luke’s Gospel, when the son had spent all his money. Love that is worth its salt, is shown by the person who stays with a friend, especially when his friend is in dire straits. Love makes you stay even when the person in need tells you to leave, tells you that they can manage on their own.

Abiding in love helps you to read the body language, the eyes, the tone of voice, the sagging shoulders, the sense of hopelessness. Love makes you stay even when you know that physically or financially you cannot help. You are there for support, for affirmation – for confirming your friend in their decision or life action. Love is very special when you keep vigil with a dying person. That final step can be frightening, and love helps you hold the other person’s hand.

## Questions to Ponder:

They say true and lasting friendships and marriages work not because a people fall in love, but because they abide in that love.

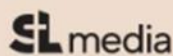
Have you had a long-lasting relationship where you abided in the other? What made this friendship so special and enduring?

Think of a time when you may have been a fair-weather friend? Why do you think you walked away from this friendship?

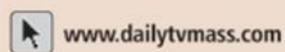


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