

Sunday, Dec 02, 2018

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

A sober reckoning

Happy Advent! Although this season shares Lent's purple color, it's not meant to evoke the penitential atmosphere of that other preparatory season. Yet Advent does invite us to a more contemplative mood. Apart from the dizzying holiday pace of December, we make room to ponder a mystery. God is with us: as a baby born to mortal limits, as the boundless Lord of the end-times, and as the Spirit that accompanies us right now, through all our days. Our times give us many reasons to be afraid. The perfect love of God-with-us casts out every fear.

TODAY'S READINGS: Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 (3). *"People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world."*

Monday, Dec 03, 2018

MEMORIAL OF FRANCIS XAVIER, PRIEST

Dress to impress

One of the founding members of the Jesuits, Saint Francis Xavier (1506-52) is considered to have been one of the greatest missionaries since the apostles. Appointed to re-evangelize portions of the Far East, Francis placed himself with the outcasts, preaching to the sick and dying at hospitals and orphans and slaves in the street. He understood that, were the fire of Christianity to spread through the East, the kindling must begin at the base of society. Rather than arriving like a royal ambassador, Francis clothed himself with rags and made his home in the lowliest shelters. His example shows us how humble appearances can be the greatest tool for bringing the message of Christ to others.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 8:5-11 (175). *"Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith."*

Tuesday, Dec 04, 2018

MEMORIAL OF JOHN DAMASCENE, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Your cup will overflow

God does not send us away hungry. Remember this promise of faith the next time you find yourself feeling empty. During times of spiritual dryness, trust that you will eventually be fulfilled. As Saint John Damascene observed, as created beings, humans are subject to flux: "By flux," writes this seventh-century church doctor, "I mean . . . depletion, for dry things and wet things and spirit suffer depletion, and require repletion." The best thing you can do to restore your soul is to continue to pray and to do good works. As you feed others, you will soon find yourself satisfied as well.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 10:21-24 (176). *"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see."*

Wednesday, Dec 05, 2018

ADVENT WEEKDAY

On top of the world

"We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop," Martin Luther King Jr. said in his last public speech. "I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land." In scripture, mountains are sacred places; the mountaintop is the epitome of the experiences that show us the glory of God. From that vantage

point, everything fades away and we see like God—with a clarity that gives glory and can change the world.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 25:6-10a; Matthew 15:29-37 (177). *"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples."*

Thursday, Dec 06, 2018

MEMORIAL OF NICHOLAS, BISHOP

He comes bearing gifts

Saint Nicholas spoke out against heresies and was imprisoned for a time for his beliefs. His faithfulness is exemplary, but charity remains his signature virtue. What started with Nicholas tossing a few bags of coins into a poor family's yard has been transformed over centuries of retelling, embellishing, grafting, and adapting into the magical tales of Ole Saint Nick (Father Christmas, Santa Claus, Kris Kringle), whose yearly ambition is to deliver gifts to every girl and boy. We may not bring out our best robes and a fatted calf for the annual return of Santa, but cookies and milk serve nicely to show our gratitude to Saint Nick for inspiring ole souls of every stripe to be jollier and more generous.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 26:1-6; Matthew 7:21, 24-27 (178). *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."*

Friday, Dec 07, 2018

MEMORIAL OF AMBROSE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

We're expecting!

Expectant mothers and fathers hear the stories of the coming of the Christ child with new ears. They know what it was like for Mary, large with child and focused on an inward life; and for Joseph, large with anxiety and focused outward on protecting and providing for this expanding family. Yet even those of us who do not anticipate carrying an infant in our arms anytime soon are Christ-bearers, as Saint Ambrose (c. 340-397) reminds us: "Christ has only one mother in the flesh, but we all bring forth Christ in faith." Prepare a place for the newborn!

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 29:17-24; Matthew 9:27-31 (179). *"Let it be done for you according to your faith."*

Saturday, Dec 08, 2018

SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Past and present

Advent is a good time to ponder the mysteries of Mary, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (which celebrates Mary's conception) is a good place to start. According to Pope Pius IX's 1854 solemn decree on the Immaculate Conception, "Mary was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ." Here's the mystery: God preserved Mary from sin through the love of her son. What does this mean? It means that God works in the past as well as the present. It means further that our own past wounds and deeds—which we thought were cast in stone—are available to be transformed, too. What in your past needs healing?

TODAY'S READINGS: Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (689). *"The angel said to her, 'Nothing will be impossible with God.'"*

Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time



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