

Sunday, Dec 08, 2019

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Back to the garden

Among the cards arriving daily are the usual crèche scenes, angels, wise men, shepherds, and Bethlehem stars like searchlights against the night. Truth be told, there are plenty of Santas and reindeer, snowfolk, and cute animals too. But somewhere is the odd pairing of a lion and a lamb snuggling together—which never happens in Isaiah’s prophecy, by the way. The lamb hosts the wolf, and the calf dines with the lion, but no matter. The idea is that the world’s original harmony is achievable—if we all retract our claws and keep our teeth to ourselves. Be a peacemaker!

TODAY’S READINGS: Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12 (4). “*The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to lead them.*”

Monday, Dec 09, 2019

SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY [PATRONAL FEAST OF THE U.S.A.]

Mary was no angel

Since her very conception, Mary of Nazareth has been named “immaculate,” “pure,” “unblemished.” And rightfully so for she was born without sin and remained so throughout her life. Yet because of this pristineness, we sometimes think Mary was untouched by the messiness of everyday life. But Mary was a flesh-and-blood human and a strong, loving woman. She experienced the beauty and struggles of family and village life. She faced poverty and a refugee’s life, persecution and heart-breaking sorrow when her son was tortured and killed. With Mary as your companion, take time this Advent to peer into your heart and see what beautiful, messy, tender, and broken things you are holding.

TODAY’S READINGS: Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (689). “*God chose us to be holy and unblemished.*”

Tuesday, Dec 10, 2019

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Embrace the lost sheep

In today’s gospel, Jesus elevates the importance of the single “lost sheep.” It’s worth leaving the 99 on their own for a time because the lost one has enormous value. Catholic social teaching hinges on the idea that every single human being has infinite worth, including our own lost sheep. Today those who are “outside the fold” include addicts, the homeless, prisoners, refugees, the mentally ill—even our most unlovable relative. Who are the lost sheep in your community? Can you take one small step today to affirm their dignity and worth?

TODAY’S READINGS: Isaiah 40:1-11; Matthew 18:12-14 (182). “*Will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray?*”

Wednesday, Dec 11, 2019

MEMORIAL OF DAMASUS I, POPE

Stick with a church that sticks around

If you love singing “Adeste Fideles” and “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” at this time of year, you can probably thank Pope Damasus I for that. As the bishop of Rome during the fourth century, he championed many aspects of the faith that persist to this day— aspects that have helped ensure the cohesiveness and longevity of Catholic practice. These include: a common language (Latin) for

worship, an official list of books for the Bible, the veneration of Christian martyrs, the denunciation of certain heresies, and the primacy of the bishop of Rome as pope. His actions laid down some of the first stones of a church that Vatican II saw as having an “eternal foundation” based on Christ.

TODAY’S READINGS: Isaiah 40:25-31; Matthew 11:28-30 (183). “*Have you not heard? The Lord is the eternal God.*”

Thursday, Dec 12, 2019

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Of the people and for the people

Our Lady of Guadalupe is probably the most iconic image and story of Mary in North America. One reason for this overwhelming devotion is that she appeared in the form of an indigenous woman to an indigenous man—Indians being the lowest tier of Mexican society both then and now. That God’s own mother could be of the poor and for the poor continues to be a powerful message with strong implications about how we treat one another. In your prayer today, reflect on whose image Mary might take on if she were to appear in your community today.

What would her face look like? And what might she ask of us?

TODAY’S READINGS: Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab; Luke 1:26-38 or 1:39-47 (690A). “*A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*”

Friday, Dec 13, 2019

MEMORIAL OF LUCY, VIRGIN, MARTYR

See with new eyes

The music of Lucinda Williams is beautiful, simple, and challenging. In 2011, she released the song “Blessed,” a litany to remind us that even in the challenges of life, we are blessed. She sings, for example, “We were blessed by the blind man / Who could see for miles and miles.” We have a patron saint for people who are blind, Saint Lucy. Though tortured, blinded, and martyred, she is remembered as a woman of great vision for her love of Christ and poor people. How can you see “miles and miles” through a challenge you face?

TODAY’S READINGS: Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 11:16-19 (185). “*I, the LORD, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go.*”

Saturday, Dec 14, 2019

MEMORIAL OF JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

The change we need

Here’s a simple truth: People resist change. The greater the change, the greater the resistance, generally speaking—even when the change is long overdue and much for the better. John of the Cross embraced the Carmelite reform initiated by his spiritual sister, the visionary Carmelite Saint Teresa of Avila. However, a group of his fellow Carmelites strongly opposed the reform and went so far as to imprison John and treat him harshly. He persevered, and even wrote most of his famous *Spiritual Canticle* while jailed. Try to see unfair treatment or setbacks that come your way as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

TODAY’S READINGS: Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Matthew 17:9a, 10-13 (186). “*I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased.*”

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



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