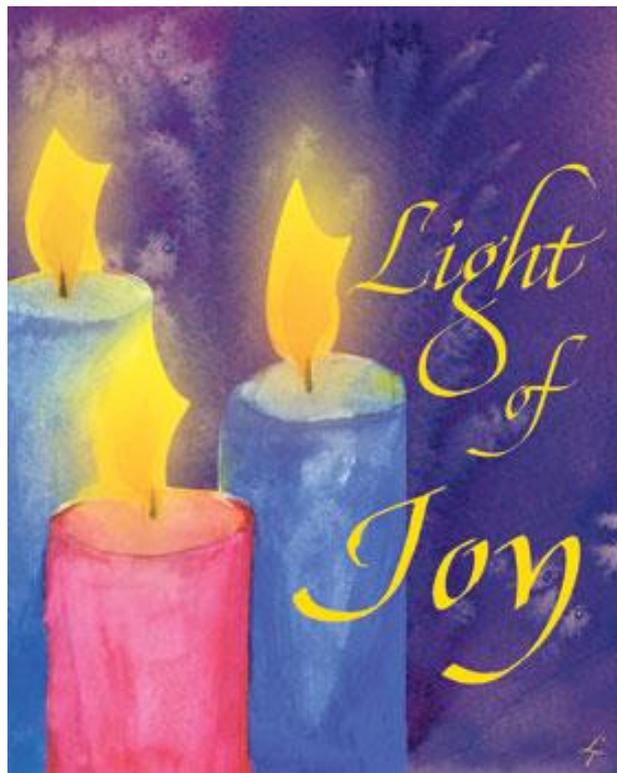


Archdiocese of Durban

Advent Daily Reflections

Longing for Light



Week Three

Longing for the Light of Joy

Sunday 13 December

Scripture: *John 1: 6 – 8, 19 – 29*

Reflection

A witness to speak for the light. These few words sum up the mission of John the Baptist and the mission of Jesus: John was to speak *for* the Light and Jesus came to *'turn the darkness before them into light'* (Isaiah 42: 16).

When we were Baptised our Baptism Candle was lit from the Paschal (Easter) Candle and handed to our parents and godparents. These words were spoken; *"Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly because your child has been enlightened by Christ. May he/she keep the flame of faith alive in his/her heart so that when the Lord comes, he/she may go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom."* How brightly does your flame of faith burn today?

The light of faith given to us at Baptism is the Light of Jesus. We radiate with his light which burns brightly within us – or does it? Truthfully and honestly, we acknowledge that over time we allow the flame of faith to grow dim through sin, fault, failure and the darkness of the things our world holds important: pride, fame, popularity, wealth, material possessions, greed, envy, jealousy, hate, conflict, division ... When we acknowledge this we begin to experience a longing in our hearts for the Light of Jesus!

The entire Advent Season is our opportunity to listen again to the *'voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord.'* (vs 23) It is a call to awaken from our complacency, our past sins and failings and to make the way straight for Jesus to come to us and to fill us with the Light of his Presence!

When we allow Jesus to be born in our hearts at Christmas we are renewed in the faith of our Baptism. It is as if we are spiritually born again! When this happens we are ready and prepared to *'go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.'* How wonderful is that! More realistically, how much we need this!

Let this Advent prepare you to celebrate and experience that Christ has come, Christ is coming and Christ will come again!

Practical Suggestion

If you haven't done so already, go to Confession before Christmas. It is the best way to *'make straight the way for the Lord.'*

Prayer

Father our hearts are filled with Joy at the nearness of the Saviour's coming

Monday 14 December

Scripture: Psalm 24: 4 – 9, Matthew 21: 23 - 27

Reflection

Oh the sheer arrogance of the chief priests and the elders! They have the audacity to question Jesus about His authority to teach in the Temple. The irony is that they, who were considered to be so well versed in their scriptures, especially the prophecies regarding the Messiah, didn't realise that the Messiah had indeed come and was standing in their midst. Arrogance had blinded them to the point of being unable to recognise Him.

In today's Psalm we read *"He guides the humble in the right path; he teaches his way to the poor."* To be humble is to be modest, without an excess pride; to be unpretentious. *"A humble person is not filled with selfish ambition or empty conceit but values others."* Philippians 2:3. The religious leaders considered themselves to be far more superior to that relatively unknown preacher who was "... teaching them as one who had authority". Matthew 7:29 and this infuriated them.

It isn't surprising that Jesus was followed by very ordinary, down to earth people. They were receptive to the wisdom of His teachings, unlike the closed-minded, self-righteous religious leaders of that time. Their focus had shifted to a warrior-messiah who would ride into Jerusalem on a noble steed, and with an army of ruthless soldiers, would destroy the enemy who oppressed their people. Little did they realise that their messiah would indeed ride into Jerusalem, but on a humble donkey and He would destroy the enemy of darkness – the enemy of sin and death, forever.

Many people choose the darkness of unbelief rather than the light of faith. They settle for fleeting moments of pleasure which pass quickly. They miss out on the experience of the lasting peace and joy of a vibrant, faith-filled life. That doesn't mean we don't face our fair share of challenges, problems and disappointments along the way. We choose rather to cling to God's promise found in numerous passages of Scripture *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Deuteronomy 31:6

Practical Suggestion:

As we look forward in Joy to celebrating the birth of our Saviour, it is a good time to look at the world through the eyes of a little child and to see the simple miracles and wonders which are so often overlooked in the complexities of life.

Prayer:

Father, help me to be modest in my material preparations for Christmas this year. Help me to act with integrity in all my dealings and to show kindness and generosity to all whom I come into contact with. Amen

Tuesday 15 December

Scripture

Matthew 21: 28 - 32

Reflection

It is in the temple that Jesus squares off with the Jewish elders. The point He makes is that sometimes we react instinctively, and later upon reflection, we change what we said, and do the right thing. In reality this is genuine obedience because we experienced a change of heart – metanoia.

This change of heart is in direct contrast to pretended obedience where when we pay lip service and have little or no intention upon acting out what we said we would or would not do.

Jesus, with His ability to look into our hearts, knows our precise intentions and is ready, willing and able to rejoice with us when we believe or act for the better having regretted our threats, thoughts, words and actions.

The Lord emphasises that through His authority the lives of prostitutes and tax collectors were changed. Once they embraced the reality and power of His message and reflected on what He said, they were able to experience a profound regret for their lifestyle and changed for the better. Thus their salvation was assured. Are we willing to do as they did?

Their elders paid lip service to God, refusing even on reflection to change their belief about Him and come to believe in Him. They would have been able to change their lives. Through their hardness of heart they were condemning themselves.

Advent is a time to reflect on and hopefully regret things we have said and done - or have failed to say and do. It is a season to straighten those paths of failure by embracing the opportunities for repentance and improving our relationship with God. Or we can just do the Advent “things” with no real desire to assess our lives and make good with the Lord. It is ultimately our personal choice. The Church guides our way to repentance and renewal.

Practical Suggestion

Do you really and truly believe in Jesus but have not genuinely repented of your sins. Advent provides an opportunity for you to repent, confess and be renewed!

Prayer

Come Holy Spirit and fill my heart with the power of discernment so that I may truly know whether I pretend to obey God or am a genuine and true believer. Amen.

Wednesday 16 December

Scripture: *Isaiah 45: 6-8; 18; 21-25* "Turn to me and be safe, all the ends of the earth"

Reflection

"Be safe!" Those words have been ringing out, and ringing in our ears for months now – all related to the desire to avoid, at all costs, contracting and becoming a statistic of the global Covid pandemic that is wreaking havoc! For many, homes have become prisons – places we are afraid to leave; public spaces are places to avoid because the 'risk' is too great – so we imprison ourselves and gradually start to lose touch with others.

For centuries the Church portrayed a picture of God as someone who was 'keeping strict records of all our wrongdoings', and that put many people off from building a relationship with Him. Yet here is Isaiah, through whom God is saying, "Turn to me and be safe!"

Every relationship that we enter into, involves 'risk' – there is no such thing as an entirely 'safe' one, just as there is no such thing as 'safe sex'! Giving oneself totally to any other human being involves potential benefits, but also holds the potential to be hurt or rejected. Not so with Jesus! He invites us to find security and safety in a relationship with Him. He will never harm us because that would be entirely contradictory to the LOVE out of which He created us! This relationship, if we take 'the risk', will become the 'light of our lives.' So let us 'turn' to Him and allow the warmth of His love to enfold us.

Practical suggestion:

Reflect today on whether your relationship with Jesus is one that brings 'joy' into your heart? Do you have a sense of security that He is watching over you? If your answer to these questions is 'Yes' can you share that with someone who is struggling to build a meaningful relationship with the Lord?

Prayer:

Hold me close, Lord Jesus! May I never be parted from You for You are my light and my salvation. Amen.

Thursday 17 December

Today marks the beginning of the second part of Advent. During the first part of Advent, we focused on the Second Coming of the Saviour. Between now and Christmas the Church helps us to focus on the Birth of the Saviour which is very soon.

Scripture: *Matthew 1: 1 – 17*

Reflection

Do you have any idea where you come from, who your grandparents and great grandparents were? Most of us have some sense of where we come from, the many paths that have led us to be where we are and who we are today.

It is tempting to skip the reading of these first seventeen verses of Matthew's Gospel. Many of the names are unpronounceable but does it really matter? What matters is the ancestral line which Matthew presents. The Jewish people, for whom Matthew wrote his gospel, knew that the messiah would come from the line of David. Matthew takes them, and us, on an ancestral journey which begins with Abraham, our father in faith.

God's plan for the salvation of his people is revealed in these verses. It is a deliberate, intended plan, just as God had prepared Mary from the moment of her conception to be the Mother of the Saviour. We are truly blessed to be able to look back and witness the wonderful ways of God. This is what Advent is about: look back to how God prepared his people for the coming of the Saviour that first Christmas in Bethlehem, being in the present to experience God preparing us for the birth of the Saviour in our hearts this Christmas, and looking forward in faith to how God is preparing us for the day of the coming of the Saviour in Glory!

It is a two-fold journey: the physical journey which places us in this moment now, and prepares us for the moment of our physical death; and the spiritual journey which reveals God's plan for our salvation to this present moment, and enables us to prepare for that day and time when Jesus will come again in glory.

Just as God had a plan proclaimed by the prophets who foretold the coming of the Saviour, and John the Baptist who prepared the people for his imminent coming; so too has he revealed his plan for our salvation in and through his Son Jesus. When God's plan was fulfilled in the birth of the Saviour most of his chosen people missed it. When his plan revealed by Jesus for his coming in glory is revealed, will we miss it too?

Practical Suggestion: As we are reminded about the genealogy of Jesus today, take some time out to think about and be grateful for your parents, grandparents and great-grand parents. If any of them are still around, call them

Prayer:

Father, I thank you for the wonder of my being, for who I am and for the love of the people from whom and through whom I have life. Bless them with your love and may the souls of those who have died rest in your peace for all eternity. Amen.

Friday 18 December

Scripture: *Matthew 1: 18 - 24*

Reflection

In none of the four gospels do we have a single word uttered by Joseph! In the Catholic Church there are many titles given to Joseph, for example: the Foster Father of Jesus, Guardian of the Holy Family, husband of Mary, and patron of workers. Matthew, however, presents Joseph as a 'righteous man.' Have you ever considered Matthew's description of Joseph as a 'righteous man'? Frequently when I have read and reflected on the nativity of Jesus, I have overlooked this most important role of Joseph as a 'righteous man'.

Matthew says: *"He was an upright man and in no way did he want to disgrace her."* Joseph was considered righteous because of his profound concern for the other person; in this case, Mary. In today's gospel Joseph places the life and dignity of Mary before his own reputation and feelings. He did not want to shame Mary. *"If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel"* (Deuteronomy 22:22). Joseph, however, chose the brave and gracious path that would spare Mary's life. Here was a powerful demonstration of fairness and kindness to Mary and her situation. God had made a wise choice in Joseph.

A righteous and just man and woman must listen! In last Friday's reflection I pointed out the great responsibility we have to listening to the voice of God. Joseph listened to God and it was in listening that he found a solution to his precarious situation. Following the angel's instruction, he took Mary as his wife and offered her his protection. Through God's intervention he was able to see the bigger picture; God's eternal plan of salvation. A righteous and just man and woman knows when to stop and to heed the voice of God.

What does Joseph teach us in this Third Week of Advent? In our time very few people demonstrate qualities of kindness, fairness and righteousness. As Christians we need to be a people of righteous actions. Sadly, many of us would not have had the courage to do what Joseph did, primarily because we put ourselves first! In our longing for the gift of joy, we must know that true joy is found in reaching out to others, knowing that we have placed their needs before ours. Joy always comes to us when we act with kindness, love and selflessness.

Practical Suggestion

"I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight" Jeremiah 9:24. The world has a desperate need for people who have these three important qualities: kindness, justice and righteousness. Can you be this person?

Prayer:

Almighty ever-living God, you give us the unwavering call to do justice and you remind us to defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow, to love the foreigner residing among us, to provide for the hungry, thirsty and naked. May your Spirit fill me with joy as I embrace the call to be a person of justice, kindness and righteousness. Amen.

Saturday 19 December

Scripture: *Matthew 1: 5 - 25*

Reflection

St. Luke begins his gospel with the revelation of God's plan of salvation, unfolding through Zechariah, Elizabeth and later, John the Baptist. We have already encountered John the Baptist during the last two Sundays of Advent. Now we read about the circumstances surrounding his conception.

It is easy for us to point a finger at Zechariah regarding his hesitation "*How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years.*" It is a perfectly logical question, not unlike Mary's question to the Angel Gabriel "*How can this come about since I am a virgin?*" The power of God was at work in both these situations into which God's messenger appeared.

This same power of God is at work in our world and our lives. But like Zechariah, we are hesitant, unsure and perhaps even disbelieving. For him it was just too incredible to believe; he was old and his wife was getting on in years. For us, we probably don't consider ourselves worthy enough, or good enough for God to do incredible things in us and through us. Do we also need to lose the power of speech before we will believe?

This Advent we are called to believe and embrace the powerful and incredible ways in which God works in the lives of ordinary people of faith like ourselves.

Practical Suggestion

With complete faith, hope, trust and in sincerity of heart pray the prayer below.

Prayer

Father, I open myself to allow your power to work in my life and to fulfil your mission for me as you did with Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and John the Baptist. Amen.

These Daily Reflections for Advent 2020 are written by Fr. Desmond Nair, Veronica Donnelly, George Cominos, Irene Helsdon and Fr. Wandile Cagwe. Please acknowledge the authors when copying and distributing. We wish you blessed Advent.