

First Sunday of Advent



Blessing the Wreath

God our Father,
as Advent begins,
we look forward to celebrating
the coming of your Son as a human child,
and we look forward also to his Second
Coming.

Bless all our preparations,
especially this Advent wreath.

We light the first candle,
asking you to illuminate our hearts
and ground us in your goodness.
May we be like Christ to each other
and to our communities.

You who sent your Son
into a human family, grace ours.
When we become busy or frustrated,
give us peace.

We ask this through the same Christ,
our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, November 27, 2011 The Mood of Advent

Today's Readings: Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7; Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19 (4); 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Mark 13:33–37. We start Advent with joyful anticipation. It's like welcoming into our homes a dear friend or relative whom we haven't seen for a while. There's probably a flurry of cleaning, grocery shopping, and cooking—all done with delight. When we look forward to renewing a close relationship, the preparation isn't burdensome. Though tiring, it's happy. Jesus tells the disciples in today's Gospel: Don't be snoozing when an important visitor arrives. Be alert, awake, and as watchful as people are at an airport, searching the crowd for a beloved face.

How much more carefully we await the arrival of God! Although God is already with us, always and everywhere,

our Advent preparations highlight that presence, helping us become more aware. If we are lulled into unconsciousness by the anesthesia of busy schedules or over-familiarity, Advent is the wake-up call. Look at what richness surrounds us. See how blessed we are. Do we look for God like the Gospel's gatekeeper, with a sharp eye? Or do we surrender our spirituality for the artificial cheer of sales and malls?

One way of marking time, a way honored by Christians for centuries, is the Advent wreath. This circle of pine with four candles can become the center for Advent prayer, reflection, and song. It reminds us to pause, breathe deeply of its fragrance, and remember what distinguishes this time of year from the rest.



This Week at Home

Monday, November 28 Slowing Down for Prayer

The Roman centurion in today's Gospel is so full of trust in Jesus' healing powers that he believes the healing of his servant can be accomplished long distance. Can we learn from him as we start Advent, and work on strengthening our trust? What if we were to *slow down* our pace—rather than *accelerate* it—with prayer? What might encourage prayer in your home? Consider one explanation for the beginnings of the Advent wreath: Since most farm work stopped in winter, medieval Christians removed the wheels from their wagons and stored them hanging from the ceiling. The wheels became the base for the Advent wreath and a center for household prayer.

At Sunday Mass, listen for the centurion's words in the new translation of our response before Communion, which we begin using this Advent. ("Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof . . ."). Today's Readings: Isaiah 2:1–5; Psalm 122: 1–2, 3–4b, 4cd–5, 6–7, 8–9; Matthew 8:5–11.

Tuesday, November 29 Attention to Children

In today's Gospel, Jesus praises the childlike. If there are children in your home or neighborhood, plan Advent celebrations for them: an Advent calendar, opportunities to read or act out Bible stories, a Jesse tree, crèche, cookie baking, visit of Saint Nicholas (December 6). Customs cherished at home may help offset the advertising pressure of the media. Today's Readings: Isaiah 11:1–10; Psalm 72:1–2, 7–9, 12–13, 17 (see 7); Luke 10:21–24.

Wednesday, November 30 Feast of Saint Andrew

Today's Gospel recounts Jesus' calling of the fishermen. Like Saint Andrew, we too are called. What does Jesus ask of us as Advent starts? More work? Less? More service to the

community, or time spent with the family? Less television and more quiet? The answer is not one-size-fits-all. An honest, useful response will spring from quiet reflection. Today's Readings: Romans 10:9–18; Psalm 23:1–3a, 3b–4, 5, 6 (6cd); Matthew 4:18–22.

Thursday, December 1 Rock-solid Prayer

Jesus praises the house built on rock, which storms and winds can't destroy. Have we built our faith solidly on prayer practices, which no crisis can disturb? Many people like journaling, keeping a written record of their discoveries: where God entered their activities most clearly, where they felt more distant from God. Over time, a pattern emerges, and the journal can be a helpful tool for growing closer to God. Today's Readings: Isaiah 26:1–6; Psalm 118:1 and 8–9, 19–21, 25–27a (26a); Matthew 7:21, 24–27.

Friday, December 2 Healing Our Blindness

As you read about Jesus healing the blind man in today's Gospel, identify your "blind spots"—impatience? over-generalizing? carelessness? insensitivity? a bias of some kind? What poses an obstacle in your path to God? Pray for awareness and healing. Today's Readings: Isaiah 29:17–24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13–14 (1a); Matthew 9:27–31.

Saturday, December 3 Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier

Saint Francis Xavier had compassion like the shepherd Jesus describes in today's Gospel. What need in your community could you or your family address? Visiting the homebound? Helping a homeless shelter, food pantry, or soup kitchen? Shoveling snow for or bringing soup to an elderly neighbor? Reading to a child who needs attention? Could you send cards or invitations to people who are grieving or lonely and might find Christmas difficult? Today's Readings: Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26; Psalm 147:1–2, 3–4, 5–6; Matthew 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6–8.

