



ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2022



**Catholic
in Recovery**



NOVEMBER 27, 2022

First Sunday of Advent

This Sunday marks the First Sunday of Advent and begins a new liturgical year. We start anew with the hope of our king's arrival. However, this week's Gospel reading begins as Jesus speaks to His disciples about His second coming. Jesus urges us to be prepared.

“Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” | MATHEW 24:43-44

What does this mean for those in recovery from addictions and unhealthy attachments? First, we must come to realize that nothing on this earth lasts, including the pleasures we've chased. As we find freedom from the primary source of our addictions or attachments, it can be easy to resort to other seemingly less destructive substances or behaviors as a substitute. Therefore, we gather together in general recovery meetings to understand the wholeness of our spiritual condition through the shared experience of our fellow brothers and sisters.

The Twelve Steps of addiction recovery prepare us to stand before our Lord and structure our lives, one day at a time, to seek Him and His kingdom for our ultimate fulfillment. The power which we seek to direct our will and our lives is the same power we seek as our daily bread—it is an enduring power that lasts.

This begins a season to shift our sights from the chaos of this passing world and the fleeting temptations of short-term satisfaction. Throughout Advent, we calibrate our focus to the Son of Man who reveals the love of God in our lives. We await our Lord's coming with hope and patience, knowing that His presence withstands whatever chaos we may experience in this life. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- Have you resorted to other seemingly less harmful substances/behaviors as a substitute for your primary addiction/unhealthy attachment? How can you apply the principles of 12-step recovery to keep you from substituting one compulsive behavior for another?
- How will you be spiritually preparing yourself for the coming of the Lord this Advent?

FIRST READING Isaiah 2:1-5

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

SECOND READING Romans 13:11-14

GOSPEL Matthew 24:37-44





NOVEMBER 28, 2022

Monday of the First Week of Advent

“Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed.” | MATTHEW 8:6

A Roman centurion speaks these familiar words in today’s Gospel reading, exhibiting humility and trust before Jesus. Here is a Gentile who lives outside the covenant of God and also serves in a military that oppresses God’s people. Yet, he humbly acknowledges his unworthiness. He has so much faith that he believes Jesus can heal his servant from afar. Jesus is amazed: “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith” (Matthew 8:10).

We say something very similar before receiving the Blessed Sacrament. And when we do this in humility and faith, I believe Jesus marvels at us. I believe He marvels when we trust we are truly about to receive His body, blood, soul, and divinity. And I think He also marvels when we recognize we are unworthy to have Him enter under the “roof” of our souls. While saying these words at Mass, we are admitting that we can’t get well without God’s help, trusting that He can heal us and inviting Him to do so. In other words, with our fellows we are turning our will and lives over to Him.

As we prepare ourselves for Advent and consider today’s Responsorial Psalm, we too can rejoice as the pilgrims did as they approached Jerusalem. We are nourished by God in the Blessed Sacrament, and called to not only prepare and decorate our homes for Christ’s coming but, most importantly, our souls. Let Him fortify us with His body and blood as we prepare this Advent season. As Saint John Chrysostom said, “If you are cold, do you move away from the fire?” Therefore, let us draw warmth from the Eucharist this Advent as we rejoice on our way “to the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1). | REFLECTION BY MARCIA G.

— Reflection Questions —

- *What stirs within you when you pray, “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the words and my soul shall be healed”? How can you pray this with greater humility and faith?*
- *Might you receive Holy Communion more often as you prepare your soul for His coming this Advent?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 4:2-6

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9

GOSPEL Matthew 8:5-11





NOVEMBER 29, 2022

Tuesday of the First Week of Advent

In today's first reading we encounter an astounding truth: "No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (Luke 10:22). What an amazing gift that the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has chosen to reveal Himself to us by virtue of our baptism and belonging to the Church. And as we grow a personal and daily relationship with Him, the Lord only reveals Himself more and more to us.

As we enter Advent, we are called to embrace a childlike faith and contemplate the beautiful mysteries of Jesus' incarnation. It's only with such openness and faith that we can fully understand the wonderful gift of God who comes to us at Christmas. We are being called to return to the deep sense of wonder and trust that children have and, in doing so, experience the revelation of God. As we take this truth into our recovery journey, we can remind ourselves that we make the most progress when we surrender to God and wait for the Father to reveal Himself to us. And when He does, the good news of living according to His will becomes simple, uncomplicated, and accessible to all of us. | **REFLECTION BY AARON W.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *Are you willing to embrace the childlike faith that is necessary to experience the revelation of God through Jesus' incarnation? What practices can you adopt this Advent to do so?*
- *How can you make progress in your recovery this Advent by contemplating Jesus' coming into the world this Christmas?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 11:1-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

GOSPEL Luke 10:21-24





NOVEMBER 30, 2022

Feast of St. Andrew, Apostle

A big part of my early recovery was a Monday night young adult Bible study that I participated in. Our parish priest Fr. Jim facilitated it, teaching us about the deeper context behind the Sunday Mass readings. Once we were reflecting on the Feast of Saint Andrew, and Fr. Jim asked the group, “Who here is a fisherman?” I was the only person to raise my hand. That previous summer and fall I had spent a lot of time rekindling my love of fishing.

He asked me what fishing was like, and I told him that sometimes it’s slow and you don’t get a bite. However, sometimes you keep catching fish, one after the other, and it’s the biggest thrill! It’s never the same each time but always a great experience. Fr. Jim responded, “That is how evangelization is. Sometimes it’s slow and it seems like you are getting nowhere but there is fellowship and peace. Sometimes it’s a thrill and you wonder if there is enough room in the boat for your catch.”

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, as he does to all of us, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). As a Catholic in Recovery group leader, I have found seeking newcomers to experience Jesus at a deeper level to be similar to my experience of fishing. Sometimes months pass without a newcomer, and I wonder what I’m doing wrong. Then, suddenly, I’ll get an influx of newcomers seeking recovery or family members reaching out for help with a loved one and it seems like my “boat” may be about to capsize. As Fr. Jim explained, this is how evangelizing works. Whether we aren’t catching a thing or our boat is overflowing, we can always be grateful for the opportunity to “fish” for souls in the name of Christ with a spirit of patience and *peace*. | REFLECTION BY JONATHAN H.

— Reflection Questions —

- How does Jesus’ invitation to become fishers of men relate to Step 12 and our commitment to carrying the message of hope to others and practicing recovery principles in all our affairs? Are you responding to this invitation?
- What spiritual practices help you remain patient and at peace during the slow periods of your Step 12 work?

FIRST READING Romans 10:9-18

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

GOSPEL Matthew 4:18-22





DECEMBER 1, 2022

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

“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 ... Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.” | MATTHEW 7:21-24

Today’s Gospel reading calls us to action! Likewise, our program of recovery is a program of action. Mere words are not enough. Faith without works is dead!

Sometimes we intend to do good and take the right next step but we don’t actually take action. We can never reach our goals or be the person we desire to be if we fail to execute the steps necessary to get there. Taking action can seem overwhelming, which is why we might not begin in the first place. Yet, if we follow through with taking small steps every day, we make progress and realize that any action, no matter how small, is better than nothing. When we go to bed each night and take our personal inventory, we might ask ourselves: how have my actions (or lack of actions) today moved me toward or away from my addiction, compulsion, or unhealthy attachment?

The first reading reminds us that the “Lord is an eternal Rock” (Isaiah 26:4). Jesus must be our rock and the foundation upon which our life rests. We must build this strong foundation with our Lord so that everything else is supported and not easily shaken. If we build relationships on the foundation of our Lord, we will have good relationships. If we build our recovery on the foundation of our Lord, we can recover and experience freedom. It is only in keeping our Lord as our rock that our lives and sobriety won’t crumble. Keeping the Lord as our rock and resting everything upon Him will allow us to experience a life of meaning and joy. Then, as we take small actions to support our recovery and life each day, we can do so with the confidence of knowing the Lord is our strength and hope. | REFLECTION BY JANA I.

— Reflection Questions —

- Are you taking daily actions to grow closer to God? Are you taking concrete actions to support your recovery or merely talking or thinking about doing so?
- Are you building your life on the foundation and rock of Jesus Christ and, if not, how can you begin doing so?

FIRST READING Isaiah 26:1-6

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a

GOSPEL Matthew 7:21, 24-27





DECEMBER 2, 2022

Friday of the First Week of Advent

Trapped in our own narrow reality of self-will, consumed by our addictions, we lack true awareness of God. As we move forward in recovery we begin to see God with the eyes of faith. We are enlightened. During Step 2 we are assured that all that is required to make a start in faith is a willingness to believe. We pray for a “willingness to be willing.” This is the small break in our denial of God, an opening to God’s grace that results in the mustard seed of faith.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus assures us, “Let it be done for you according to your faith” (Matthew 9:29). As our blindness is lifted in our lives we see how Jesus’ words about our faith prove true. We realize God is a living Emmanuel, full of power and love, and here with us now. We begin to believe not only in God but that God “could and would” if He were sought. We begin to believe God can bring us to freedom and healing through our faith in Him.

God does miraculous things, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly. Our lives are transformed. We are empowered to do what we could not do for ourselves. We are restored to sanity and given the grace to stop our addictive behaviors. As we bring each difficulty, relationship, and unhealthy attachment to God, each of these areas becomes restored. Our mustard seed of faith is increased as we begin to know God by what God does and who He is. Throughout Advent, we are called to actively practice our faith in God. Jesus asks us each moment: “Do you believe I can do this?” This Advent let us joyfully answer, “Yes, Lord!” | REFLECTION BY ANN A.

— Reflection Questions —

- Advent is a time to reflect on Christ and His great love for us. What Step 11 tools of contemplation can you commit to practicing this Advent (reading Scripture, praying the rosary, etc.)?
- St. Thérèse of Lisieux said, “I believe because I want to believe.” How has the recovery principle of willingness formed your faith and belief in Christ? How has working the steps of recovery opened you up to greater faith in our Lord?

FIRST READING Isaiah 29:17-24

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

GOSPEL Matthew 9:27-31





DECEMBER 3, 2022

Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, Priest

Today's readings all make references to wounds. Isaiah prophesies about a day when the Lord "binds up the wounds of His people" (Isaiah 30:26). The psalmist tells of the Lord "healing the brokenhearted, and binding up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). In the Gospel reading, Matthew describes that "Jesus went around to all the towns and villages ... curing every disease and illness" (Matthew 9:35). We continue reading that Jesus' "heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

For those of us in recovery, we too are wounded. For those like myself who are adult children from a dysfunctional home, we may have been abused or abandoned as children. We may have felt alone, like sheep without a shepherd because our caretakers were too wounded to give us what we needed to grow into emotionally healthy adults. Our past might be a very sad story. But it's not without hope because the story doesn't end with our wounds. We have the Good Shepherd who desires to heal all of His sheep! That's the gift of our faith and the sacraments. Jesus promises us He will always be with us. As we put our trust in Him and rely on the sacraments as our anchors, our wounds begin to heal.

Jesus has also given us another way to heal—the way of recovery. In adult child recovery, we pay particular attention to how the wounds of our past impact us in the present. We do this not to blame or shame our parents or caregivers but to understand ourselves better. And as we understand ourselves better, we begin to heal. The past becomes a teacher for understanding and helps us become unstuck from the unhealthy or childish behaviors that still plague us in the present. This road to healing is difficult but not impossible. It is one that all of us in recovery can follow to find deeper healing. The good news is that no matter how difficult our journey of recovery becomes, we have each other, the sacraments, and the Good Shepherd to help us through it. | **REFLECTION BY CHLOE D.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *What wounds from your past tend to keep you stuck in your recovery?*
- *Take some time to journal about your past and invite Jesus into those places in your heart that still need to be healed. What might the Lord be revealing about those wounds and how He wants to heal them?*

FIRST READING *Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6*

GOSPEL *Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5A, 6-8*





DECEMBER 4, 2022

Second Sunday of Advent

The coming weeks are meant to prepare us in a way that readies a path for the Lord to enter our lives. As the season of Advent moves along, we will dive further into the themes of hope, love, joy, and peace. These are the fruits of setting our sights on the coming of Christ. Our preparation includes making room for Him to be a part of our lives. Often that means unlearning the things that we think we know about ourselves, our condition, and God so that we may be open to a new experience of all these things.

Our journey may not always be smooth, and this week it's implied that Jesus will pave a new way of life for us. Those who have experienced a developing personal relationship with Christ have witnessed this necessary realignment. Admitting powerlessness over our addictions and unhealthy attachments moves us toward recognizing our need for a savior. Our lives had become unmanageable, and we needed a new set of directions to prepare for the road of recovery. We do this by getting honest with ourselves, others, and God. With humble anticipation, we come to believe that God can restore us—both as individuals and as a collective people—to communion with Him.

The second and third weeks of Advent feature John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. John regularly preaches the theme of metanoia, which is the changing of one's attitude or the shifting of our life's story. In recovery, we refer to this as a spiritual awakening. As we prepare our way, we recognize that our addictive behaviors—whether centered around alcohol, drugs, food, sex, gambling, or other compulsions—have been but a symptom of our spiritual condition. Removal of our addictions and unhealthy attachments is but a step in the process of preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ. Once awoken, we must be sure to take action each day to remain awake. | **REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *If you woke up tomorrow and every path on your journey was made straight, every valley filled, and every mountain made low, how would you know it? What would be different?*
- *Are you noticing themes of hope, love, joy, and peace in your life? If so, are there patterns you're recognizing or moments that point toward the fulfillment of these things?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 11:1-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 7

SECOND READING Romans 15:4-9

GOSPEL Matthew 3:1-12





DECEMBER 5, 2022

Monday of the Second Week of Advent

“Strengthen hands that are feeble, make firm knees that are weak, Say to the fearful of heart: Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; With divine recompense he comes to save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall see, and the ears of the deaf be opened; Then the lame shall leap like a stag, and the mute tongue sing for joy.” | ISAIAH 35:3-6

In today’s first reading we encounter the following descriptors: feeble, weak, fearful, blind, deaf, lame, and mute! We might add “powerless” to the list as well. The Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous* describes this state of being as a “hopeless state of mind and body” and adds that “no human power could relieve our alcoholism.” Being feeble and weak in my relationship with God, others, and self, and completely blind, deaf, and paralyzed in my disease, I was unable to experience a loving God inviting me into recovery. I was powerless.

There was a very long season of my life when I lived with fear dictating my unhealthy choices. However, when we work the steps, “Fear falls from us, we begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had spiritual beliefs but now we begin to have spiritual experiences” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*). As we work the steps, the ninth step promises about freedom materialize in ways we never could have imagined. Isaiah later declares in the first reading, “A highway will be there, called the holy way” (Isaiah 35:8). In our recovery, that “holy way” toward God’s healing is the Catholic Church, Scripture, the sacraments, and the Twelve Steps. We are privileged to have such blessings at our disposal as we live one day at a time. | REFLECTION BY MARYBETH B.

— Reflection Questions —

- What circumstances or people lifted your “yoke of captivity” to addiction or an unhealthy attachment, enabling you to start on the “holy way” of recovery? How can you continue on that way this Advent?
- Similar to the paralytic man in today’s Gospel reading who picks up his mat, in what ways do you participate in the miracle of your recovery each day? Are you still on your “stretcher,” paralyzed by the “bondage of self,” or have you picked up your “mat” and started down the road of recovery and healing?

FIRST READING Isaiah 35:1-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 85:9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14

GOSPEL Luke 5:17-26





DECEMBER 6, 2022

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

We lack the power to navigate this life on our own. Any attempt to live separately from God has led us into addiction, unhealthy dependencies, broken relationships, and spiritual death. Like the Israelites in today's first reading, God calls us into the desert of this life with all its difficulties to bring us back into proper relationship with Him.

In recovery, we learn that any power we have comes from our reliance on God. As the Big Book puts it, "We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*). One way we keep close to Him is to check in first thing in the morning. The Big Book advises that we ask God for inspiration as well as the wisdom to take the right actions over the course of our day, especially when we're feeling agitated or doubtful. These Step 11 "pauses" are keys to bringing serenity and healing into our lives.

By engaging the sacraments, Scripture, prayer, and Mary and the saints, we are brought to a "conscious contact" with Jesus himself. Getting to know Him intimately is the most powerful encounter we can have in this life. It is through Jesus that we come to know the true depth of our relationship with God. Jesus tells us in today's Gospel Reading, "It is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost" (Matthew 18:14). Jesus lets us know that God is more than just our "Employer." He is a loving Father who never turns His back on us, His precious lambs and lost sinners in need of His grace.

There will always be those moments when our selfish actions and sins make it seem that we are lost forever. But God has not abandoned us. He has sent His only son, Jesus, who is "the way" through the wasteland. This Advent, let us turn daily to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, as we work our recovery, asking for the faith to trust that He will find us and carry us back home to the heart of the Father. | REFLECTION BY ANN A.

— Reflection Questions —

- How can you use the recovery tool of the "pause" to slow down and contemplate the beauty of Advent and Christ's coming throughout your day? How can you use it to grow in your understanding of who Jesus is and who you are in relation to Him?
- Considering Jesus' willingness to go after every single lost sheep, how have feelings of shame and worthlessness due to past addictive behaviors blocked you from Jesus' merciful love? How can you respond to Him instead with confidence and hope?

FIRST READING Isaiah 40:1-11

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 96:1-2, 3 and 10ac, 11-12, 13

GOSPEL Matthew 18:12-14





DECEMBER 7, 2022

Memorial of Saint Ambrose, Bishop & Doctor of the Church

The Gospel reading is comforting for us in recovery. Whether we are in the early stages or several years into our recovery and faith journey, our Lord tells us today, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest ... For my yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

When we humbly submit to our God’s mercy and forgiveness, our lives become lightened. It’s reminiscent of what we often hear in recovery and have said out loud: we are addicts and are powerless. Yet, when we admit our powerlessness, our pain and suffering are lightened by our gentle master, Christ.

Today is the memorial of Saint Ambrose, a man who is famous because he baptized and mentored the man who would eventually become Saint Augustine. Saint Ambrose dedicated his life to study, service, and the love of Christ. He renounced his worldly ties to fulfill his vocation to spread the Gospel and defend the faith, giving us a wonderful example of a man who carried the “lightened” burden of Christ’s love into the world. | **REFLECTION BY AARON W.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *Have you accepted our Lord’s offer to rest within Him and take up His “easy yoke” of love, forgiveness, and mercy?*
- *Saint Ambrose lived a life that was entirely given over to the Lord. What parts of your life, faith, or recovery have you not handed over to the Lord? How can you take steps to do so this Advent?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 40:25-31

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8 and 10

GOSPEL Matthew 11:28-30





DECEMBER 8, 2022

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

On this day every year, we celebrate the plan designed by God and fulfilled by those He has chosen. Joachim and Anna were an aging couple from Jerusalem who were chosen by God to conceive and bear a daughter. Their daughter, Mary, was born immaculate, holy, and without sin. Later in her life, Mary's "yes" to the Holy Spirit would make way for the Christ child, Jesus. Mary and her son Jesus would fulfill God's plan and right the wrong committed in the Garden of Eden.

"Have you eaten from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat? The man replied, 'The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it.' The LORD God then asked the woman: What is this you have done? The woman answered, 'The snake tricked me, so I ate it.'" | **GENESIS 3:11-13**

From the very beginning, humanity has disobeyed God. Like Adam and Eve, those of us trapped in addictive behaviors were consumed with guilt, shame, and the fear of facing and admitting our own sinfulness. Once in recovery, we had to be honest and look at the destruction we had caused in our lives and others' lives with humility. When we surrender our sinfulness and addictions to God each day we learn to seek and trust in His will. His help comes to us through others in CIR, 12-step fellowships, sponsors, the Twelve Steps, the sacraments, and prayer. By partaking in these gifts, we replace the twisted path of Eve's sin, fear, pride, and disobedience with the straight path of Mary's holiness, obedience, love, and perfect trust in God. | **REFLECTION BY KATHY B.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *Where in your life and recovery are you struggling to say "yes" to our Lord? What are some steps you can take today to begin saying "yes" to God as Mary did?*
- *In what ways have you been chosen by God to carry His love to others in recovery and beyond?*

FIRST READING Genesis 3:9-15, 20

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4

SECOND READING Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

GOSPEL Luke 1:26-38





DECEMBER 9, 202

Friday of the Second Week of Advent

Before we started working the Twelve Steps, we likely experienced challenges as something outside ourselves rather than within. Today's Gospel reading reveals this same projection. John the Baptist preached, modeled, and taught that repentance and self-denial were necessary means of preparing for the Lord's coming. Many responded to him by saying John "was possessed by a demon" (Matthew 11:18). Yet, this accusation was a thinly veiled cop-out to avoid honestly looking at one's internal state, revealing the crowd's denial, prejudice, hardness of heart, and attachment to their sinful ways. John's message was too threatening. Therefore, it should be no surprise that Jesus' message was also rejected since it was even more threatening. They made more excuses: "Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11:18).

Similar to the crowd, we too may have grasped for any justification to avoid admitting to our addiction and entering recovery. One of my common excuses was figurative assassination of the concerned messenger's character (just like the crowd with John and Jesus). I would also claim that if Jesus really cared about me my life would be easier. Despite my denial of Him, Jesus never stopped pursuing me.

Our response to our life's situations and even God's working in our lives depends on our internal disposition. I was still scared to trust God but, eventually, fellow travelers in recovery shared their experience, strength, and hope, and their unlikely stories of transformation encouraged me to give a relationship with Jesus a chance. I came to know the truth that He loves me, forgives me, will never leave me, and has written my name in heaven. I also learned that our powerlessness and weaknesses don't scandalize Him but actually console Him when we give them to Him. Jesus knows what we are like, yet He also sees what we can become. He is never in despair over any of us, and this is unfathomably good news! May we never despair of ourselves or others but hold fast to the same hope our Lord does. | REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.

— Reflection Questions —

- As we see in today's Gospel reading, many found Jesus' message too hard to hear. Is there an area of your life where God is speaking to you and inviting you out of your comfort zone? How do you sense God pursuing you this Advent?
- How much are you willing to put yourself out there for the love of God as John and Jesus did?

FIRST READING Isaiah 48:17-19

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

GOSPEL Matthew 11:16-19





DECEMBER 10, 2022

Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

Today's first reading recounts Elijah's deeds and departure from the earth "in a whirlwind, in a chariot with fiery horses" (Sirach 49:9). Elijah preached to the people in words like a "flaming furnace" (Sirach 49:1). In today's Gospel reading, as Jesus and His disciples were coming down the mountain after His transfiguration, His disciples ask Him if Elijah must come first before His kingdom is established. Jesus tells them that Elijah has already come in the person of John the Baptist.

Before entering the rooms of recovery, I lived with reasonable success as a functional alcoholic. I never saw the inside of an emergency room or courtroom because of my alcohol addiction. Not that I couldn't have and wouldn't have deserved it, but God preserved me from those experiences. However, as time went on and my alcohol consumption increased, I needed to hear that clarion voice to "repent and be saved." I needed to hear that voice "crying in the wilderness" and calling me to repentance and recovery. Eventually, I heard it and responded with the aid of God's grace.

It has been my experience that God will send messengers to convey directly to us the reality of our situation and the change we need to make. However, just like those who heard John the Baptist, each one of us has to make the choice to respond to this call for ourselves. Therefore, whether we are already in recovery or in need of it, let us respond daily to the voice of the Holy Spirit calling us to seek greater healing and hope in Christ. | REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.

— Reflection Questions —

- What were the "clarion calls" you received that helped bring you into recovery? What new calls for deeper conversion do you hear today?
- Is there someone in your life you can be a witness to by living out your recovery and faith? How might you become a "clarion call" for this person with respect to recovery and faith?

FIRST READING Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 80:2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19

GOSPEL Matthew 17:9a, 10-13





DECEMBER 11, 2022

Third Sunday of Advent

As people in recovery, we await the coming of our Lord with expectant hope. We witness God do miraculous things on a daily basis, and the readings today remind us to delight in His presence. By the grace of God, we've been uprooted and given another chance. We begin to experience the peace of Christ and the freedom that accompanies 12-step recovery. This is very good news as we await the coming of our Lord with patient trust. This week's second reading guides our efforts to endure whatever we may face.

"Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." | JAMES 5:10

Upon being awoken to the Good News, it is natural for us to ask the same question the crowds ask John the Baptist in this week's Gospel reading—what should we do? Showing kindness to all and allowing God to do His will in us, with us, and through us is a good start. Setting aside self-seeking expectations provides an opportunity for God to make all things new.

Surrender does not always come naturally, but if we exercise the first three steps of recovery through the lens of our baptism, we might experience it happen supernaturally. We can cooperate with the transformation process by working the remaining steps—taking a moral inventory, sharing it with others, asking God to remove defects of character that stand in the way of our usefulness to Him and others, and making amends. Along the way, we get to know peace, joy, and freedom thanks to the saving grace of God. | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- What thoughts of gratitude come to mind as you consider your recovery journey and preparation for Christmas?
- Are you hiding anything behind the walls of anxiety, mistrust, and isolation? Are you happy, joyous, and free?

FIRST READING Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

SECOND READING James 5:7-10

GOSPEL Matthew 11:2-11





DECEMBER 12, 2022

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

In today's first reading we read, "Silence, all mankind, in the presence of the LORD! For he stirs forth from his holy dwelling" (Zechariah 2:17). In light of today's feast day celebrating Our Lady of Guadalupe, we might read this as a reference to the physical tabernacle of Mary's womb. It becomes a powerful reminder for us to call upon our mother Mary when seeking to be in the presence of the Lord.

One way of doing this is to pray the rosary, which has been a powerful instrument in my own recovery as well as a powerful spiritual weapon in general. During our dark moments of temptation to give into our addictions or unhealthy attachments, the rosary and our mother's love can give us hope. Our Lady of Guadalupe is a beacon of hope for our recovery. Therefore, let us remember fondly the message of the Blessed Mother as she appeared to Juan Diego: "I am your merciful mother." And so today, on this wonderful feast day, let us say yes to the glorious invitation from the Queen of Heaven to carry us toward the presence of the Lord. | REFLECTION BY AARON W.

— Reflection Questions —

- Do you have a relationship with the Blessed Mother? Consider saying the rosary daily this Advent or praying the following to foster your relationship with her: "Dearest Mother, Virgin of Guadalupe, please intercede for me as I place my trust in you. Amen."
- What are some other ways you can remain in "the presence of the Lord" that you can adopt during Advent to nourish your recovery and spiritual life?

FIRST READING Zechariah 2:14-17

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Judith 13:18BCDE, 19

GOSPEL Luke 1:26-38





DECEMBER 13, 2022

Memorial of Saint Lucy, Virgin & Martyr

Today the Church celebrates the Memorial of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr. Lucy, which means “light,” was born around 283 in Syracuse, Italy during the Diocletian Reign, a time of terrible Christian persecution. She made a vow of virginity at a very early age, and courageously kept that vow until her torturous death. Not much is known about her, so legends have been disseminated about her life throughout history. She is also the patron saint of the blind because some say her eyes were gouged out during torture and miraculously restored by God right before her death.

In today’s Gospel reading, we encounter “The Parable of the Two Sons.” Each son is asked by their father to go out and work in the vineyard. The first son replies he won’t but later changes his mind and goes out into the vineyard. The second son replies that he will but never actually goes out into the vineyard. My answer to many requests in my own life were like that of the first son: “No, I can’t, not now.” Later, though, out of guilt I would obey the request. Behaviors like these were very common during my active alcoholism (and occasionally I still do them today). Intense feelings of guilt and remorse would haunt me until I got into recovery and did my third step.

Surrendering one’s will to the will of God is the basis of a healthy and long recovery. It takes a lot of determination and humility to learn how to do this. The structure of the AA and CIR programs, their meetings, the Twelve Steps, and fellowship help us along this path of surrender, freeing us from guilt and giving us peace. As Psalm 34 reads, “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted, saves those whose spirit is crushed ... The LORD is the redeemer of the souls of his servants; and none are condemned who take refuge in him” (Psalm 34:19-23). Being happy in recovery requires being thankful to God for all of His graces with a spirit of surrender. And when we do this, we no longer act from a place of guilt but, instead, a place of love and peace. | REFLECTION BY LORETTA L.

— Reflection Questions —

- Which of the two sons from today’s Gospel reading do you most identify with? Why?
- What does surrendering your will to the will of God mean to you? What are some practices and routines that you can engage in as Advent continues to support a healthy and long recovery?

FIRST READING Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 34:2-3, 6-7, 17-18, 19 and 23

GOSPEL Matthew 21:28-32





DECEMBER 14, 2022

Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, Priest & Doctor of the Church

In 1984 I was living the life of a student in New York City and I came upon a group of people who I thought would help me lose some weight. I soon discovered this group, Overeaters Anonymous, was not a weight loss club. I'd take the train a couple of nights a week to an OA meeting where they studied the Big Book to help with food-related issues. One piece of my recovery at the time was to commit to finishing what I started. I was asked to finish *The Dark Night of the Soul* by Saint John of the Cross. The reading meant little to me at the time even though I was searching to fill the God-sized hole in my heart. Saint John's writings were difficult to understand. However, I did remember his constant temptations and torments from the Evil One and his need to cling to Christ.

Saint John of the Cross was born in 1542 in Fontiveros, Spain. He was raised in a very poor family and was sent to work as an apprentice. He was a frail man and spent all of his free time either in prayer or visiting the sick. Because of his devotion to the Blessed Mother, he joined the Carmelite Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. After meeting Saint Teresa of Avila, they both sought permission to open the first monastery of the Discalced Carmelites to promote an even more austere spirituality. Spiritual joy is contagious, and soon other monasteries sprang up. Saint John was imprisoned and tortured when disruption emerged between the Carmelites and he miraculously escaped and fled to Saint Teresa for protection. The sisters loved listening to him and he recorded his thoughts in poetry and prose so that the Carmelite nuns might be led to higher paths of mystical prayer.

In recovery, we often refer to "hitting bottom" as a dark night of the soul. While Saint John describes the soul's mystical journey toward God by purgation, illumination, and union with God as a life's work, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous lead us in the same direction. We purge ourselves from addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments as we climb the steps toward recovery and higher spirituality. What a gift for us to have received the wisdom of recovery, which aligns so much with the wonderful wisdom of one of the Church's great saints, Saint John of the Cross, whom we celebrate today. | REFLECTION BY MARCIA G.

— Reflection Questions —

- What has been purged from your life since starting recovery?
- What still needs to be purged from your life and how can you invite the Lord to help you with this as we progress through Advent?

FIRST READING Isaiah 45:6C-8, 18, 21C-25

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 85:9AB and 10, 11-12, 13-14

GOSPEL Luke 7:18B-23





DECEMBER 15, 2022

Thursday of the Third Week in Advent

In today's first reading, we read:

"Do not fear, you shall not be put to shame; do not be discouraged, you shall not be disgraced. For the shame of your youth you shall forget, the reproach of your widowhood no longer remember. For your husband is your Maker; the LORD of hosts is his name, Your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, called God of all the earth." | **ISAIAH 54:4-5**

The shame and disgrace of my own youth were difficult for me to embrace, painful to remember, and required the healing and hard work offered by the Twelve Steps. Step Four and Step Five provided a holy path back into my past, where I could take responsibility for my actions and open myself up to the healing grace of God. As we read in the Big Book, the promises of recovery are a hopeful witness that "we will not regret the past, nor wish to shut the door on it" and "no matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*).

In today's Responsorial Psalm, we encounter a concise summary of our path from addiction into recovery: "O LORD, my God, I cried out to you for help and you healed me. LORD, you brought my soul up from Sheol; you let me live, from going down to the pit" (Psalm 30:3-4). God does for us what we could not do for ourselves when we turn our lives over to Him. By the grace of God, we are "raised from the dead, suddenly taken from the scrap heap to a level of life better than the best [we] had ever known" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*). | **REFLECTION BY MARYBETH B.**

— Reflection Questions —

- *In what ways has the "shame of your youth" been transformed by the healing power of God and recovery? Do you still feel shame and disgrace from your past and, if so, how might you hand that over to the Lord?*
- *Do you think of your life in recovery as a miracle that has lifted you from the "pit" of addictions, compulsions, and/or unhealthy attachments? How does reflecting on this deepen your gratitude to God?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 54:1-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 30:2 and 4, 5-6, 11-12a and 13b

GOSPEL Luke 7:24-30





DECEMBER 16, 2022

Friday of the Third Week in Advent

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus makes clear that there is no substitute for truth itself. Jesus' very existence is the revelation of truth, which is God's merciful love for us. When Jesus points to John the Baptist's testimony to the truth, Jesus follows up that He does not accept human testimony. At first glance, this may appear somewhat disrespectful toward John. Yet, Jesus is trying to make a point that the revelation of truth comes ultimately from God the Father and not from human beings. He references John to meet the people where they are, so to speak, and to show that, while John's testimony of truth is valid, there is something greater now before them. Jesus is the living and full testimony of truth.

This might remind us of the early days of recovery. We had to rely on the testimonies of others—our own "Johns"—to believe that change was possible through God's power and grace. When many of us began attending meetings, defeat, shame, disbelief, and humiliation were common themes in our lives. However, as we listened to testimonies of fellow travelers in recovery, we were struck by the contrast in how they described themselves prior to entering recovery with the sane people now speaking. Like John, they testified to the truth of God's powerful work in their lives.

However, like John, their heartfelt and authentic testimonies would only be a small light in comparison to the fullness of truth of experiencing Jesus directly in our own lives. We had the opportunity to make an act of the will to surrender to God and allow Him to work the miracle of recovery in us. And it is through this surrender that we came to the fullness of truth, allowing God to change us and then, afterward, becoming witnesses of truth to others. Thank God for our fellow travelers who shared and still share their journeys humbly with us. Through their truthful testimonies, we are again and again encouraged and strengthened to surrender to God, the ultimate source of truth. | REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.

— Reflection Questions —

- How are you strengthened by your fellow travelers in recovery and their truthful testimonies?
- What light of truth do you have to offer to others in recovery? How can you offer this more fully and regularly with others as we near Christmas?

FIRST READING Isaiah 56:1-3a, 6-8

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 7-8

GOSPEL John 5:33-36





DECEMBER 17, 2022

Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

Today's Gospel reading traces the genealogy of Jesus. Where did Jesus come from? Who were His ancestors? To the Jewish people of the time, one's ancestry was very important, which is why Matthew's Gospel begins with this lengthy genealogy. Our past is also important to us as well. Most everyone wants to know who their grandfather or grandmother was, or if there was someone famous in their ancestry. Our past reveals a lot about us and tells us who we are. However, our past isn't all about our ancestors, since it also includes our personal past, our previous life experiences, former events, and people who have come in and out of our lives and have shaped us. Good or bad, everything in our past has helped make us the person we see looking back at us today in the mirror.

Our past may also include addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. These too are part of what shaped who we are today. We may not be quick to remember them—and we may not want to remember them—but they're still part of our past and, therefore, still part of us. They are a good reminder of what we don't want to repeat from our past. This is something we do in recovery meetings. We read in AA meeting literature: "Thus, these meetings are not so much dedicated to dwelling on the past, but toward developing the appropriate attitudes and behavior for living this particular day successfully." Reflecting on our past can help us learn from it and shape a better future for ourselves with the Lord's help.

Jesus also had a personal past. He was a poor carpenter's son from Nazareth who was seen as a nobody. Yet, with perseverance and faith in His heavenly father, He was able to accomplish His great and redeeming mission. We too can accomplish our God-given mission in life no matter our personal history with God's assistance. There is a popular saying: "Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future." Many of us have a past of addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. Although we have this sinful past, by staying close to God and working our recovery we can help ensure that our future is bright. | REFLECTION BY JEFF R.

— Reflection Questions —

- How has your past shaped you into who you are today? How has the Lord worked in your past to shape your present life?
- How can reflecting on your past—both the good and bad—help ensure a future of freedom and healing with God's help?

FIRST READING Genesis 49:2, 8-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 72:1-2, 3-4ab, 7-8, 17

GOSPEL Matthew 1:1-17





DECEMBER 18, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Advent

The hope and peace of our Lord await us as we approach the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. We are also in the midst of the winter holidays, which can be an unusually difficult time for those in recovery. Cultural expectations, heightened family tension, or a general sense of loss and loneliness may impact the way we feel and behave this time of year. The accounts of the birth of Jesus in the Gospel depict plenty of confusion during the first Christmas, which may bring us comfort as we expect perfection for ourselves. Joseph becomes aware that Mary is pregnant and plans to divorce her quietly in order to keep her from being publicly shamed. As is often the case for us, fear seems to be guiding Joseph's actions. Therefore, when an angel appears to him in a dream, the angel's first words are, "Do not be afraid."

"The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' ... When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home." | MATTHEW 1:20-24

Mary learns that she is pregnant with the Messiah and abandons herself to God's will. As part of the angel's message to Mary, she has also learned that Elizabeth is six months pregnant and she proceeds in haste to be of service to her older relative. She does not travel for the sake of mere curiosity or to discover if the angel is really telling the truth. Instead, she sets out to uncover more of God's mystery and to do His will. Similarly, Joseph serves Mary with the same motivation.

When we are committed to understanding our role in the greater context of God's kingdom, we find grace and blessings in abundance. Just as Joseph and Mary each came to understand their roles in the story of salvation, we are awoken to our part in the same story. We might seek to pray alongside Mary as we proclaim the words, "May it be done to me according to Your word." | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- What challenges, if any, are you experiencing during the holidays? What changes have you made in your approach to seasonal expectations and family relationships?
- How can you be of service to those you love this Christmas?

FIRST READING Isaiah 7:10-14

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

SECOND READING Romans 1:1-7

GOSPEL Matthew 1:18-24





DECEMBER 19, 2022

Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent

Let us consider today that we are called by God to know, love, and serve Him. We in recovery have been the constant recipients of His blessings. Yet, do we notice these in our daily lives? Do we take time to listen to the still small voice of God in the silence of our hearts? When the silence seems heavy and impenetrable, it can always be broken at the most unexpected time and in the most unexpected circumstances. Like Mary, we must be still enough to hear the voice and courageous enough to act on it in preparation for the coming of Jesus as we near the end of Advent.

The calls we hear in the silence of our hearts can evoke fear and doubt, making us desire a sign before giving our full yes. Are we letting our fears get in the way of a generous response to God? By repeating what Mary said in our heart—"I am the servant of the Lord"—we can find strength in the midst of our fear and respond to Him with trust.

In today's Gospel reading, the angel says to Zechariah, "Do not be afraid" (Luke 1:13). We see that Zechariah's and Elizabeth's patient faith has blessed them with a child in their old age. Even when we are afraid or confused about God's will, we can take heed of the angel's words and trust that God has a wonderful plan for us. He has something in mind for each of us to do and, like Mary, we are called to bear good news to others with the Holy Spirit's help. Like Mary as well as Zechariah and Elizabeth, who gave birth to John the Baptist, we too came into the world for a purpose. And it is the Holy Spirit who lives and works in us even when we are afraid, feel far from God, or our prayer is dry and arid. God, help us to go daily into the quiet of our own hearts to meet you there in love and adoration and say yes to your wonderful call to each one of us. | REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.

— Reflection Questions —

- *What causes you fear in your life that the Lord is inviting you to surrender with trust and faith? How might fear be in the way of responding to God through being more open, generous, humble, and of deeper service to Jesus Christ?*
- *How do you understand your unique calling from the Lord to bring Jesus Christ to others?*

FIRST READING *Judges 13:2-7, 24-25A*

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 71:3-4A, 5-6AB, 16-17*

GOSPEL *Luke 1:5-25*





DECEMBER 20, 2022

Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

“Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.’” | **LUKE 1:38**

We often hear the phrase, “What is your *why*?” In giving her fiat, Mary clearly reveals her *why*. She identifies herself as the “handmaid of the Lord.” Her identity is that of a humble and beloved servant of God, perfectly embodying her humility as a creature subservient to her creator. Additionally, her words “May it be done to me according to your word,” reveal both her acknowledgment that all good comes by the grace of God as well as her perfect commitment to doing His will.

It can be easy to question our identity and priorities in moments of fear and uncertainty. Those moments may tempt us to turn back to our addictions, compulsions, or unhealthy attachments. The weight of the unknown can make it scary to surrender to God. However, we have glorious good news: the power of the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of the Catholic Church is available to strengthen and sanctify us! Because God has already graced us with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity through our baptism, the “feeling” of trust in the midst of our fears is not a requirement.

We can make an act of the will to surrender to God’s will because we know God has providentially given us the virtue of faith even if we don’t feel close to Him at times. When we do this, the power of the Holy Spirit overshadows us just as He did with Mary. Incredibly, God has given us the unique privilege and dignity of participating in His divinity, and we can do this now by engaging in the sacraments (especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist), which activate the God-given virtues of faith, hope, and charity in our lives. While we may introduce ourselves with our names and what qualifies us in recovery meetings, we are to remember our primary identity as beloved sons and daughters of God. This is why Mary is a perfect model for us since she knew the truth of her identity as God’s beloved daughter and fully surrendered herself to be His humble servant. | **REFLECTION BY STEPHANIE N.**

— Reflection Questions —

- How do you live out your identity as God’s son or daughter in your life? What helps you to trust God more and surrender to His will?
- What specific resources aid you in discerning God’s will for your life and how might you make better use of them this Advent?

FIRST READING Isaiah 7:10-14

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4ab, 5-6

GOSPEL Luke 1:26-38





DECEMBER 21, 2022

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

In today's first reading, the prophet Zephaniah proclaims that it is a time of great rejoicing.

“Shout for joy, daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has removed the judgment against you, he has turned away your enemies; The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear.” | ZEPHANIAH 3:14-15

In today's Gospel reading, we read of Elizabeth's prayerful exclamation to her cousin Mary when she realizes who dwells in her womb: “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42).

As we have been preparing for the arrival of the Christ child these weeks of Advent, today's readings lead me to reflect on when I experienced a similar joy in my life upon entering the rooms of recovery. This newfound joy to those of us new to recovery is often called the “pink cloud.” It was a time of great rejoicing, and I started to experience the fruits of sobriety. No longer waking up hungover, I no longer had to tap every ounce of courage and strength I could muster just to get to work and appear productive. And as I continued to walk the road of sobriety, I began to look forward to and experience a new life. For those of us in recovery, let us pause today and reflect on the moment we handed our lives over to God in recovery and first began to “sing joyfully” to God for His healing and grace. | REFLECTION BY KEVIN S.

— Reflection Questions —

- Did you experience the “pink cloud” as you began your recovery journey? If so, how might you reflect on that experience to help sustain your recovery today?
- What gifts in your life can you “sing joyfully” about to God?

FIRST READING Song of Songs 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18a

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21

GOSPEL Luke 1:39-45





DECEMBER 22, 2022

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Advent

In today's first reading, we see Hannah offering her son Samuel back to the Lord after she prayed fervently for him. Hannah prayed to, depended on, and was blessed by the Lord. This comes as a biblical foreshadowing of the great sacrifice Mary is asked to make in her own time. Our Gospel reading today takes place right after Mary goes in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth, comforting Elizabeth as she prepares to welcome her son, John the Baptist.

With Hannah, Elizabeth, and Mary all bearing sons, we are reminded in today's Responsorial Psalm that "the Lord puts to death and gives life." We remember that everything we have is from Him and sometimes we are asked to bear great crosses in exchange for beautiful blessings. Like Mary, if our interior compass is correctly oriented towards the truth of God's goodness, we can keep a heavenly view of life's unpredictable events. We can trust that all of life's happenings are guiding us into greater communion with and reliance on the Lord.

Fear or reverence of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a gift of the Holy Spirit. Addiction is a disease of long-suffering. Those of us who have been graced with the gift of sobriety know that "His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him" (Luke 1:50)." The more we come to revere the Lord with a spirit of Marian humility, the more we experience the gift of healing and recovery. Mary refers to herself as a lowly servant and the handmaid of the Lord, titles she earns by doing the will of God perfectly. Let us look to her submissiveness to God's will as a powerful example of how we're called to do the same in our own lives. | REFLECTION BY ALLISON H.

— Reflection Questions —

- Do you fully believe that God is good? As Christmas approaches, how can you ask for the grace to better know God's goodness and love in your life?
- Have you completely surrendered your will and life over to the care of God as Mary does in today's Gospel reading?

FIRST READING 1 Samuel 1:24-28

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8abcd

GOSPEL Luke 1:46-56





DECEMBER 23, 2022

Friday of the Fourth Week of Advent

Today's readings speak of a messenger sent by God to prepare His way. The first reading from Malachi prophesies about this coming messenger and the Gospel reading reveals it with the birth of John the Baptist. John would be the harbinger of good news—the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ. He would grow up to proclaim the Lord's coming and baptize believers. Though most of John's followers thought he was the messiah, John's mission was to be the forerunner of the messiah—the voice of one crying out to prepare the way of the Lord. John's mission, one could say, was to point people to the good news of healing and forgiveness in Christ.

Oftentimes, when we're in the clutches of an addiction, compulsion, or unhealthy attachment, we're in need of direction. We need someone to point us in the direction of our own "good news." We need someone to point us to the "way" of Christ. In other words, we need our own "John the Baptist," a guiding light to direct us to salvation and freedom in recovery and God's grace. This might have been a recovery fellow, sponsor, friend, or family member who remained a light to us, even in the midst of our darkness. As we think about John the Baptist, and his role this Advent season, let's remember and pray for our own personal "John the Baptists"—those who showed us the way to recovery, healing, and Christ's mercy. | REFLECTION BY JEFF R.

— Reflection Questions —

- Who were your personal "John the Baptists" and how did they help you with your recovery? Consider praying for them or reaching out to thank them for their role in your life.
- How can you be a "John the Baptist" to another suffering from an addiction, compulsion, or unhealthy attachment and point them toward recovery and Christ?

FIRST READING Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 25:4-5ab, 8-9, 10 and 14

GOSPEL Luke 1:57-66





DECEMBER 24, 2022

Nativity of the Lord

Today's Gospel reading opens with Jesus' lineage. At first glance, it might be hard to understand why this is all that interesting, aside from it establishing His inherited right to the throne of Israel. However, by considering my own recovery, I realize that where I come from has had a strong influence on who I am today. It has also had a strong influence on my relationship with God and others. The Gospel reading today reminds us that where we come from matters.

The Gospel reading then turns to the story of Joseph. Upon learning that Mary was pregnant, Joseph plans to "divorce her quietly" (Matthew 1:19). But a messenger from God, an angel, appears to him in a dream and drastically changes his perspective, causing him to do a 180 and become the adoptive father of God. What a task! When I reached rock bottom with my addiction, I hit a point where I saw my life going nowhere. That was my point of hopelessness. I looked in the mirror and thought, "You need to ask for help." And when I did that, it changed my life and perspective forever. My "yes" at that moment was similar to Joseph's "yes" to the angel, changing both of our lives forever.

The angel tells Joseph that the child shall be named Emmanuel, meaning God is with us. Those of us in recovery may have had similar experiences when, after admitting our powerlessness and asking for God's help, we suddenly experienced Jesus with us as a personal God and not some distant deity. That is the true beauty of Christmas. The God of the universe lowered Himself to be with us out of love and mercy. Today's Gospel reading reminds us that, despite where we come from or where we've been in our lives, we are invited to encounter the living God made flesh and make for Him a dwelling place in our hearts. | REFLECTION BY JONATHAN H.

— Reflection Questions —

- *Similar to Joseph, have there been moments when God changed your perspective and life? How?*
- *What about Jesus' incarnation gives you hope? How might this hope nourish your recovery as you head into the Christmas season?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 62:1-5

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

SECOND READING Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

GOSPEL Matthew 1:1-25





DECEMBER 25, 2022

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

MASS DURING THE DAY

We rejoice together for the coming of our Lord at Christmas and for the hope of a new year ahead of us. This season of the year carries hope and anticipation for something new. This was the experience of Mary and Joseph as they sought a home for their newborn child. By knowing the family of Jesus, we get to know Him in a deeper way.

In the readings leading up to Christmas, we were given a chance to reflect upon Mary and Joseph's willingness and humility—two important components of recovery. Mary's "yes" paved the way for Christ's entry into our world, revealing God's ultimate love for us and salvation from bondage. Joseph set aside his pride and cared for Mary throughout the start of their marriage, even though there were plenty of uncertainties. And from their trust in God, the world received a savior.

"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." | JOHN 1:14

Gathering in fellowship provides us a special opportunity to learn from the experience, strength, and hope of each other. It allows us to celebrate, together, that God came into our world to save us from our addictions, unhealthy attachments, and sinfulness. This Christmas, let us adore the Lord who has entered into the dark night of our own lives to bring light, love, and joy to us and all of creation. O come, let us adore Him! | REFLECTION BY SCOTT W.

— Reflection Questions —

- *In what ways have you recognized that the Lord is with you along your recovery from addiction, compulsions, unhealthy attachments, and their impact on the family?*
- *How have you responded to God becoming incarnate in Jesus and His invitation to bring the hope of new life to others?*

FIRST READING Isaiah 52:7-10

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6.

SECOND READING Hebrews 1:1-6

GOSPEL John 1:1-18

