

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

As we approach the fourth Sunday of Advent, the Church invites us into a quiet space of anticipation—one shaped not by the frenzy of the season but by the calm, intimate movements of God drawing near. For people in recovery, this time can stir both gratitude and vulnerability. The holidays can surface old wounds, complicated relationships, and emotional triggers, yet Advent reminds us that Christ comes precisely into these places with healing and peace.

This Sunday's second reading offers a reminder that God's grace has a purpose in our lives—calling us into deeper belonging and obedience of faith (Romans 1:5-6):

Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles, among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

St. Paul reminds us that we receive grace not for ourselves alone but so that our lives might bear witness to God's transforming work. In recovery, this is deeply familiar: we receive hope, and we share hope. We surrender, and we become instruments of surrender for others. This "obedience of faith" is not blind compliance but a willingness to trust God with our lives, step by step.

This Sunday's gospel recounts Joseph's moment of deep confusion and the divine reassurance that guides him toward trust and surrender (Matthew 1:18-24):

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, 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.

Joseph is afraid. He feels the weight of uncertainty, the pressure of expectations, and the fear of making the wrong choice. Many of us know this experience intimately—especially in recovery. Yet God meets Joseph in his fear, reveals a larger story, and invites him to take the next right step. Joseph's response is not grand or dramatic. It is simple, humble obedience: "*he did as the angel commanded him.*"

This is the heart of Advent and the heart of recovery: letting God reshape our fears, reorient our plans, and guide our daily actions. Like Joseph, we are invited to trust God with situations we do not fully understand. We may feel overwhelmed, uncertain about relationships, or unsure how to navigate old

patterns during the holidays. But recovery teaches us what Joseph embodies: when we listen, pause, pray, and surrender, God shows us the path of peace.

As Christmas approaches, we remember that Christ enters our lives not where we are perfect but where we are honest. He comes into the fragile places—into fear, confusion, and longing—and brings new life. Our "yes," like Joseph's, does not need to be dramatic. It simply needs to be willing.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you sense God inviting you to an "obedience of faith" in your recovery right now?
- How do you relate to Joseph's fear or confusion in this Gospel story?
- What does taking the next right step look like for you as Christmas approaches?

MASS READINGS

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