

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ A Prayer for the 1st Week in Advent ~

**Come, Lord Jesus, Come
Born to set your people free;
Free me from fear,
Release me from my sin,
Let me find rest in you.**

**You are the hope of all the earth,
You are the desire of every nation,
You are the joy of every longing heart.**

**You are born to rescue me —
A child,
And yet a king.
You are born to reign in my heart forever.
Bring your gracious kingdom to me.**

**Fill me with your eternal spirit,
Rule in my heart forever.
And by your grace,
Bring me to your glorious throne.
Amen.**

CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:
The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.
phone: [440] 473-3560. e-mail: jbcsc@ix.netcom.com

Our Lady Chapel



Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

We are beginning our annual Advent-Christmas outreach program earlier this year because many have expressed concern that they have not had enough time to participate as they would like. Our Lady Chapel is again joining hands in partnership with several Parishes and social service agencies in an effort to share our lives together. The *Adopt a Family* project and the *Giving Tree* programs have been a tradition at Our Lady Chapel for many years. This year, we will again be serving these parishes and agencies in these two ways.

[1] **Giving Tree/Adopt a Child.** Our Lady of Fatima Community Center, the West Side Catholic Center, Manor Care, and St. Adalbert Parish are all trying to serve the needs of the less fortunate during this Advent-Christmas time. Most of these agencies need hats, gloves, socks, underwear, sweaters, sweat shirts, hoodies, infant needs, books, toys and games for children, ages Newborn to 16 years. Manor Care, serving the elderly, need fleece throw blankets, as well as hats & gloves. People will be able to pick an ornament off of the tree — located in the narthex of the chapel — with a label showing the item needed. [There will also be a tree located in the front lobby of the Lower School]. These items would then be gathered, UNWRAPPED, please, and the tag [ornament] taped onto the gift. **Our goal would be to have all items assembled by December 16th, for pickup by the various agencies.**

[2] **Adopt a Family.** This year we would again like to adopt between a minimum of 30-40 families from St. Adalbert Parish School. St. Adalbert identifies families — most often single parent, below poverty level families; we are given the grade levels of the children & other family information, so that you can purchase gifts appropriate to each member. In addition, if possible, we ask that you also provide a Christmas meal for the family [non-perishable items in a food basket, and/or Gift Cards for Giant Eagle, Aldi's or Family Dollar.] Those from our chapel family who participated in this project last year spoke very highly of the benefit of this project to their own families. This is a project that the entire family can get involved in. Families can be matched according to family size, ages, etc. It was truly inspiring. Adopt-a-family gifts should be WRAPPED. **We would need everything here at the chapel by NOON on Sunday, December 20th. Please call Patty at the Chapel Office [440-473-3560 or szaniszlup@gilmour.org] if you and your family would like to participate in this program, or if you have any questions.**

ADVENT DEVOTIONS:

On the table in the narthex of the Chapel are several Advent devotionals to assist you in your spiritual journey during this season of Advent. We hope that you will make use of them for you and your family. [1] **The Little Blue Book** with daily readings and devotions. This book corresponds to “The Little Black Book” that is so popular during Lent. [2] The daily scripture devotion, **The Word Among Us**, is available. It lists the scripture passage for the day along with a short reflection on one of the passages.

ADVENT PENANCE SERVICE:

On **Monday, December 21st**, at **7:00 PM**, we will celebrate our Advent communal **Penance Service**. This service will consist of scriptural reflections by those involved in the Christmas story. There will also be songs and hymns, and a time to straighten the paths of our lives to ease the arrival of our God. Each of us needs to truly hear in our heart the message of John the Baptist: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” The service will last about 45 minutes. There will be an opportunity for individual reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation following the service. Please join us.

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

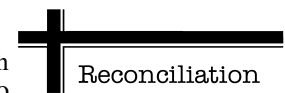
- For Pat MacCandlish who is recovering from neuro surgery.
- For Owen Timura, an 8 year old, who has been diagnosed with lymphoma
- For Jackie Goler who has been diagnosed with lymphoma
- For Jay Cusick who has been diagnosed with cancer.
- For Jesse Meyers, cousin of Cynthia Lowry, who is undergoing multiple surgeries for an infection.
- For Eddie Keating, brother of Kelly ['83] and Karen ['86], who is recovering from brain surgery.
- For Heidi Herten, mother of Hope ['13] and James ['15] Herten, who is hospitalized.
- For Vickie Norris, kitchen employee, who is recovering from emergency heart surgery.
- For Becca Curry, a young mother, who has been diagnosed with lymphoma.
- For Kate Wilson, Niece of Brother Ken Kane, C.S.C., who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Penny Morotto who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Justin Tarr who is critically ill with brain cancer.
- For Bun Riley, who is recovering from injuries sustained in a fall.
- For Joseph Frantz ['75], brother of Mark ['65], David ['66], Roger ['69], and Peter ['78] Frantz, who is critically ill.
- For Cindy Bernet who is recovering from cancer surgery.
- For Jim Spicer who is undergoing treatment for brain cancer.
- For John O'Brian who has been diagnosed with a serious form of cancer.
- For Andy Sims who is recovering from spinal surgery.
- For Bill Slattery ['77] who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For John Burkey, uncle of Rachel Burkey, member of music ministry, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Annie Trivassos who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Nicholas Zanella., who is undergoing medical treatment
- For Jan Botek, wife of Fred, mother of Fred ['85], grandmother of Matthew ['14], Jonathan ['17] and Daniel ['21] Botek, who is undergoing treatment for dementia.
- For Teddy Prusock, nephew of Lower School associate, Nina Prusock, who is undergoing neurological testing.
- For Jimmy Vickers, father of Lower School teacher, Caroline Holtz, who is seriously ill.
- For Brother James Gulnac, C.S.C., who is under hospice care for cancer.
- For Kay Yunker, aunt of Mary Schmidt, great-aunt of Maggie ['12] Schmidt who is under the care of hospice.

CHRISTMAS FLOWERS AND DECORATIONS:

Again this year we will accept memorial donations to help defray the cost of flowers and decorations which we use in our chapel for the Christmas season. If you are interested in making a donation **in memory of loved ones**, please put the names of the loved ones along with your donation in an envelope, mark it “Christmas Flowers,” and either give it to Father John or drop it in the offering basket. We will publish the names of the loved ones in the Bulletin as a memorial.

**SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:**

Father John will be available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with you on **every Saturday** between **3:30 – 4:00 PM**. Confessions are also available “by appointment.” The Reconciliation Room is located in the small chapel directly across from Father John's Office



PRAYER REQUESTS:

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Ali Priest, who is undergoing treatment for a rare muscular disease.
- For Debbie Cappioni and Alice Bruce, great aunts of Patrick [‘22], Daniel [‘26], and former Gilmour student, Morgan Miklus, who are undergoing medical testing.
- For Evelyn Bibbo, mother of Randall [‘71] and Donald [‘72] who is recovering from an infection.
- For Don Newmann who is ill.
- For Thelma Bingaman, who is recovering from injuries sustained in a fall.
- For Peggy Hurley, relative of James [‘10] and Connor [‘13] Hurley, who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer.
- For Sue Nyberg, godmother of Katie Leavitt, who is seriously ill with cancer.
- For Andrea Trivisonno who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Brother Carl Sternberg, C.S.C., who is recovering from serious surgery.
- For Brother Robert Berthiaume, C.S.C., who is recovering from injuries sustained in a fall.
- For Sister Jean Marie, O.C.D., who is undergoing treatment for a serious heart condition.
- For Mary Lou Lawlor, grandmother of Resident associate, Alec Lawlor who is undergoing treatment for brain cancer.
- For Ryan Berger [‘15], brother of Cameron [‘17] who is recovering from injuries sustained in an accident.
- For Drew Franco, son of Brian [‘90], nephew of Jeff [‘88] and Kristin [‘94] Kirkpatrick, who is struggling with a seizure disorder.
- For Michael Palumbo, father of Michael [‘14], Marisa [‘15], and former Gilmour student, Christian, who is undergoing medical treatment
- For Todd Deranek, relative of Hayden [‘28] and Hadley [‘29] Bashein, who was seriously injured in an accident.
- For Maureen Kenner, aunt of Katherine [‘09] and David Hasler [‘13], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Colleen Lowman, grandmother of Rachel Burkey, member of music ministry, who is seriously ill.
- For Dennis Kavran, father of Dennis [‘86] and Jennifer [‘95], grandfather of Adam [‘14] and Madeleine [‘16] Miller, who is undergoing further treatment for cancer.
- For Donna Farkas who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Lexi Pappadakes, who is undergoing treatment for complications from surgery..
- For Rosemarie Lemieux who is ill.
- For Robert Heltzel [‘65], father of Jennifer [‘91] and Kathleen [‘93] Heltzel, who is undergoing medical treatment
- For Matt Barry [‘13], brother of Tim [‘12], who continues treatment for cancer.
- For Maria Ricci, friend of Linda McGraw, who is ill.
- For Jeff Warner, brother of Denise Calabrese, who is undergoing treatment resulting from a stroke and seizure.
- For Janice Feenstra, sister of Lisa Habe, aunt of Jack [‘19] and Will [‘20] Habe who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Phylis McGinley, grandmother of Middle school Head of School, Elizabeth Edmondson, great-grandmother of Mollie [‘21] and Abigail [‘23] Edmondson, who is seriously ill.
- For Mary Kampman, mother of Mark [‘81], Matthew [‘85], Dean [‘86], and Douglas [‘88] who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Karen Wanders, mother of upper school Head of School, Jonathan Wanders, who continues in treatment and rehabilitation
- For Betty Herten, aunt of Hope [‘13] and James [‘15] Herten, who is undergoing treatment for leukemia.



FAITH EDUCATION — DECEMBER 6:

Faith Education for this year continues. Our Sessions go from 8:45—9:45 AM, with the hope that our children would then participate in our 10:00 AM Family Mass. Register your family for classes by contacting Patty in the Chapel Office [[440-473-3560]. If you have any questions, please call Patty in the chapel office. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility. **Dates for December and January: December 6-13-20 and January 10-24-31.**



SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Sunday, November 29: 1st Week in Advent	10:00 AM
Monday, November 30: St. Andrew	5:30 PM [Eucharistic Chapel]
Tuesday, December 1:	5:30 PM [Eucharistic Chapel]
Wednesday, December 2:	5:30 PM [Eucharistic Chapel]
Thursday, December 3: St. Francis Xavier	5:30 PM [Eucharistic Chapel]
Friday, December 4:	5:30 PM [Eucharistic Chapel]
Saturday, December 5: 2nd Week in Advent	5:00 PM
Sunday, December 6: 2nd Week in Advent	10:00 AM

UPCOMING CHAPEL ACTIVITIES:

November 28-29-----	1 st Weekend in Advent	
December 6 -----	Faith Education Session #10 Life Teen Meets	8:45 AM - 9:45 AM 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM
December 7 -----	Vigil of Feast of the Immaculate Conception	5:30 PM
December 8 -----	Feast of the Immaculate Conception	9:30 AM 12:45 PM 5:30 PM
December 13 -----	Faith Education Session #11 EDGE Giving Tree/Adopt Family Project	8:45 AM - 9:45 AM 11:30 AM - 3:00 PM
December 15 -----	Chapel Council Meeting	6:15 PM

REFLECTION ON THE THEME FOR THE WEEK:

We have almost four full weeks of Advent this year. Time is definitely of the essence. Advent invites us to fidelity and not to be fearfully watchful. We do not like waiting. Because of this, Christmas often comes before we have allowed Advent to become the grace that it is. And so, it would be well for us to take to heart these holy hints for living these days of longing.

Have you ever experienced being alone, or being left out — or even being lost? Such experiences are Advent graces. Reflect upon how you have waited for a phone call, or the arrive of a special person, or a anticipated news. If we do not enter into Advent graces, then Christmas might be a celebration of longing rather than arrival.

The Scripture Readings for this 1st Week in Advent begin with a message from an imprisoned Jeremiah. He had been prophesying about the calamities that were to befall Judah and Israel. Jerusalem will be invaded by pagans, and will become a wasteland — no person or beast shall dwell there. But yet, hidden within this sadness is a promise that God makes through Jeremiah to all of Israel — it is an advent of life and prosperity. There will be joy, marriages, singing and thanksgiving sacrifices in the temple and new life in the days to come [Jeremiah 33:14-16].

An image of new life springing from the old is used by Jeremiah to predict recovery and God's eternal fidelity. A "shoot" or "branch" will bud from the old stalk of David — the "new" will complete the "old". The future will be as safe and righteous as in former times. This "shoot" will be a man whose ways will be those of King David; this person will bring about peace with justice. Those who longed for past times of prosperity and integrity — who now sit in exile and darkness — hear this with increased longing and hope. Something and someone is worth longing and living for. Someone is coming who will bring total recovery of national and religious stability.



Luke's Gospel [21:25-36] is difficult to hear and understand. The city of Jerusalem is central to the religious sense of the people. Jesus is speaking to His disciples about the total collapse of the city which has been the symbol of God's eternal fidelity. For the city to fall is similar to the sky falling and all natural orderliness being disturbed. The stability of the temple as well as the city itself is similar to the order of the sun and moon, the seas and normal living. As with Jeremiah's prophesy, the Pagans — or more precisely the foreigners — will disturb this order by violating the city. Amid all this turbulence, Jesus encourages His disciples to stand firm because He is the "shoot of David" who will also appear and reestablish order and recovery of identity.

Jesus offers us the encouragement to stand firm against the disorders and tribulations and temptations which lead to disorder. The Man of Justice and Integrity is always coming into the disorderliness of our personal, cultural, and global worlds. It is attractive to spend time interpreting natural and astronomical signs of the coming of the end. Jesus is always inviting us to be attentive to our own dis-attractions, disorders, dis-identities, and thereby watch or be alert to the ways the Son of Man comes to bring back our own sense of integrity.

This first week of Advent invites us to begin preparing for the coming of a Savior into our lives. To do this we are called to check up on the disorders within and around us. Such disorder begins with the acknowledgement that we do not really want a Savior — we want an approver! We do not want a negative judge whom we fear, but an approving and benevolent assessor. Most Christians want to sweep away their past — or present — and hope that the God of Vengeance doesn't see even the carpet under which we have swept our disorders. A second group of Christians wants to pretend that the disorders — or the need for integrity — do not exist, and they stay alert to their denials. A third group spends their

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers

FOR THE DECEASED:

- For Joseph Schaut
- For David Dobnikar
- For Father Paschal Tsiquaye, brother of Brother Joseph Tsiquaye, C.S.C.
- For Lillian Scimeca, mother-in-law of Rich Grejtak [birthday]
- For Rita Dufresne
- For Veronique Bourgies
- For Romain Dunet.
- For Fahad Barrak, cousin of Teba Saleh [*16].
- For Charles Gasper
- For Thomas, grandfather of Ava Thomas [*18]
- For Brother Donald Fleischhacker, C.S.C.
- For Father Robert Choquette, C.S.C.
- For Patricia Grosel, mother of Charles Grosel [*77]
- For Michael Walsh [*67]
- For Brother Frank Gorch, C.S.C.
- For Jack Sutter.

ATTENDANCE:

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

ENVELOPES:

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

WEEKLY OFFERING:

Baskets will be passed during the "Preparation Rite" and will be brought to the altar as part of the Offerings to help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, your donations to Our Lady Chapel will be acknowledged so that you have a record for the IRS.

Total Offerings: Saturday [11/21/15] ----- \$ 431.00
Total Offerings: Sunday [11/22/15] ----- \$ 852.00
Total Offerings: Thursday [11/26/15] ----- \$ 260.00

A BLESSING:

"How happy I am to see myself imperfect and to be in need of God's mercy." —St. Thérèse of Lisieux

A MESSAGE OF REFORMATION:

One of the most interesting things about the prophet Jeremiah is that in the course of his ministry he changed his message. In the beginning, toward the end of the 600's BCE, he called for a reform of Judaism — a return to the covenant on which that faith was based. But by the start of the 500's, he was calling for the destruction of both the formal institution of Judaism and the city of Jerusalem which fostered and represented it. The constant rejection of his original message led him into making this drastic change. He concluded that the only hope for true reform revolved around destroying the main impediments to such change and starting from scratch.

Jeremiah regarded the invading Babylonians as God's agents in accomplishing his dream. Their capture and destruction of Jerusalem — in 586 BCE — and the ensuing exile of its people, would hopefully force the Chosen People to renew their relationship with God — this time avoiding the pitfalls which led them to renege on their covenant responsibilities. Of course, the Jewish authorities labeled him a traitor — "He weakens the arms of our soldiers!" [see Jeremiah 51], and the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar regarded him a friend. The prophet thought of himself simply as the Lord's mouthpiece, conveying the message the situation demanded.

That's why Jeremiah insists that when all this uprooting is over a new king will appear — one who returns the people to the roots of their faith [Jeremiah 33:14-16]. That faith will be so much a part of their daily experiences that the city of Jerusalem will be nicknamed: "The Lord our justice." In other words, they'll relate to one another as God relates to them. No religious institution will ever again stop them from carrying through on this.

Sadly, this never happened.

Five centuries after the Babylonian Exile ended, Jesus of Nazareth was also forced to deliver a message of reform — a message which seems to have been as generally rejected as that of Jeremiah's. But counter to the prophet's expectations, the gospel Jesus doesn't seem to have regarded the future Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE as a means to that reform, but as a punishment for not reforming. No matter the Jerusalem consequences, Jewish rejection certainly opened the door of faith to Gentiles by the time Luke writes in the mid-80's. Yet, even he believes that "things" still aren't perfect even among followers of Jesus — else he wouldn't have written his gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Luke is convinced that perfection will only arrive when the risen Jesus returns. Though the evangelist doesn't expect that to happen in his or his community's lifetime, he doesn't want anyone in the meantime to be caught watching the paint dry — "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy, and that day catch you like a trap" [Luke 21:25-36].

In the earliest Christian writing we possess — Paul's first letter to the Church at Thessalonica — the Apostle sets out some essential guidelines for a return to the basics of our faith — whether we're expecting his return in the future, or bringing it about right here and now. Writing almost 40 years before Luke composed his gospel, Paul zeros in on the basics: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts" [1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:3].

No matter what's happening in the religious institutions to which we belong, if we're serious about loving one another, we're doing what God demands we do. Since Advent was originally created as a "little Lent," perhaps the best way to approach these four weeks would be to imitate Lent's reform model — a return to the basics, avoiding Jeremiah's destruction model.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, which appear on the internet

TRUE:

"Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow."

—Swedish proverb



lives obsessed with their doing nothing but what is right; they correct things so that a savior for them is quite unnecessary.

The Savior has come; he is coming again, and will always come. The signs of disorder are all around and within us. Jesus was not born in stableish-poverty because there was no room in the inn only — the poverty is ours, and the inn that is too full is our heart. He can be born anew there only if we stay alert to the signs of disorder within us.

I once had a wonderful African/American friend who lived his whole life in the back-waters of southwest Louisiana. He told me once — with great faith and enthusiasm — that if God did not spend all His time forgiving us, God wouldn't have anything to do all day. Mr. Lienelle trusted his being found, forgiven and freed. He had lived long years in fear of the "white man" and also of the "white God", but near his last days, he knew racial — and especially faith — freedom. His honesty about his life allowed him to be more honest about Jesus' life.

Luke's Gospel is not asking us to interpret the signs around us concerning the end of time. Rather, Luke is encouraging us to experience the signs within ourselves which indicate disorder; he is asking us to kneel there in the poverty of our truth which will bring us to the richness of His coming always and again. As believers, we are waiting for the "new beginning" rather than an ending.

—taken from the writings of Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

CLEAN OUT THOSE CLOSETS AND SERVE OTHERS:

Winter is here — another time to once again clean out the closets. Clothing that no longer fits, or has been replaced by new items, can become great items for others. Always remember the words of Jesus: "The poor you shall always have with you" [Matthew 26:11]. Please continue to bring your *gently used* men's, women's and children's clothing to the Lennon Board Room, or place it in the cedar chest which is located in the Chapel narthex [just press the key button to open the chest]. We partner with Fatima Center to help provide clothing for general use. Also, **business work clothing for this season is especially needed. The Fatima Center helps men and women prepare for job interviews.** If you have some of these items, this would be a good time to send them along. Clothing for all seasons is accepted, but please try to keep in mind that storage facilities are limited at Fatima — so it would help if you could focus on winter items at this time. You may pick up a tax form when you drop off the clothing here at Our Lady Chapel — there are forms in the cedar chest. Clothing may be brought on the weekend, or during the week. Thank you. **If you have any questions, please contact Patty in the chapel office [440-473-3560].**

**AMAZON.COM:**

Please remember that when you want to buy something from Amazon.com, you need to first go to www.ourladychapel.org and click on the Amazon logo at the bottom of the home page! Because of this simple step — and at no cost to the purchaser — Our Lady Chapel receives a percentage of all purchases that are made from Amazon.com. Ever since we have begun this program, we have consistently been receiving significant checks from Amazon that are being credited to help pay for chapel expenses. This affinity program remains in effect throughout the year, so we ask everyone to continue to remember to start your purchases at Amazon on the Our Lady Chapel home page! Thank you.

**YOUR CHOICE:**

"Every day, a new opportunity to decide where your next step will go is given to you. Your future will be determined by the accumulation of these daily decisions. You control your steps and therefore your destiny, so choose wisely."

—Kevin Ngo

LIVING ADVENT:

A story is told of the photographer taking a picture. He says to the woman: "Smile pretty for the camera." A moment later: "OK, madam, you can resume your usual face." Whether you and I will have a successful Advent these next four weeks will depend on the attitude or face we bring to it today. We must stay awake, as Jesus advises us in Luke's Gospel [21:25-36], and be on top of our game. If we do this, then Advent can literally alter our lives. We would all do well to make our own this season the prayer of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manly Hopkins: "O Lord of life, send my roots rain."

Scholars trace the season of Advent back to the fifth century. It was placed in the Liturgical calendar of the Church so that we might purge out of ourselves all that is wrong. In a word, we have the opportunity to remake our own selves anew. And we have the luxury of four weeks to do the job.

When you look at yourself and your sometimes monumental flaws, do not become overawed. The Chinese advise us the way to move a mountain is by beginning to carry small stones. You would do well to bring a pail and a shovel to this Advent — "If you have faith..., you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there!', and it will move; nothing will prove impossible for you" [Matthew 17:20].

This new season invites each of us to become all that we can be. The quarry you hunt is yourself. The Greek philosopher Plato — who lived out his life several centuries before Christ — wrote: "The greatest victory in the world is the victory of self-conquest." There is no one who will challenge that wisdom.

The most serious coronary disease in the world is not a blockage of the arteries but rather hardness of the heart. If you are not willing to recast yourself into a more attractive Christian this Advent, you have a serious heart condition. While God does not require you to be the best in the several weeks ahead, He surely wants you to try your best.

Luke's Gospel [21:25-36] speaks of the "Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." When will He come? Many would-be prophets have given a day, month, and year to that question. As 1000 AD approached, a number of Christians in many countries were convinced that the Second Coming was about to occur. So, they settled all their affairs. Then they just settled back to wait for the Christ. It is reported that some even starved to death. A celebrated evangelist in 1950 promised that the end of the world would come on January 1st, 1957. It will not surprise you to learn that he stopped reminding his followers of that prediction on January 2nd.

Someone has suggested that every day should be considered a day of judgment. Live as if Jesus died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back at any moment. We must labor in the now and here. The question of the Second Coming we must place on the back burner. The Teacher will plan His own arrival and set up His own schedule.

If you are looking for an Advent program, you might consider the following — "Smile often. Pray. Tell those that you love that you do. Rediscover old friends. Make new ones. Hope. Grow. Give. Give in. Buy some flowers. Share them. Keep a promise. Laugh often. Reach out. Hug a child. Slow down. See a sunrise. Listen to rain. Trust life. Have faith. Enjoy. Make some mistakes. Learn from them. Explore the unknown. Celebrate your own life. Give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others."

Perhaps the same author has written the prayer we should recite daily this Advent — "Help us this day, O Lord, to serve thee devoutly and the world busily. May we do our work wisely, give help



hell whenever we do choose not to live in the light, the truth, and inside God's spirit. And that judgment is self-inflicted, that punishment is self-inflicted, and those fires of hell are self-inflicted.

There are a number of lessons in this. First, as we have just seen, the fact that God judges no one, helps clarify our theodicy — it helps deflate all those misunderstandings surrounding God's mercy and the accusation that an all-merciful God can condemn someone to eternal hellfire. Beyond this, it is a strong challenge to us to be less judgmental in our lives, to let the wheat and the darnel sort themselves out over time, to let light itself judge darkness, to let truth itself judge falsehood, and to, like Pope Francis, be less quick to offer judgments in God's name and more prone to say: "Who am I to judge?"

—taken from the writings of Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., which appear on the internet

READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Monday: Romans 10:9-18, Matthew 4:18-22

Tuesday: Isaiah 11:1-10, Luke 10:21-24

Wednesday: Isaiah 25:6-10, Matthew 15:29-37

Thursday: Isaiah 26:1-6, Matthew 7:21-27

Friday: Isaiah 29:17-24, Matthew 9:27-31

Saturday: Isaiah 30:19-26, Matthew 9:35-10:1

2nd Week in Advent: Baruch 5:1-9, Philippians 1:4-11, Luke 3:10-16

DRESSES FOR HONDURAS:

One of the nurses in our Gilmour Clinic is involved in a **dressmaking project** for the children of Honduras. They have devised a method of making sundresses out of common pillowcases, and then adorning them with other items for decoration. And that is where you come in. **If you have any old buttons, ribbon, ric-rac, lace or other sewing trim, please bring them in.** The group would like to collect these items to help decorate the dresses they are working on. This is an on-going project; the dresses will be sent to Honduras every time there is a mission trip. The next trip is scheduled for March of 2016. There is a **basket in the narthex of the Chapel** to collect any donations you may have. Thank you for your help!

**BRINGING UP THE OFFERTORY GIFTS:**

Would you and your family or group like to bring up the gifts at the offertory at Mass? In the past, our Council people have invited people to bring up the gifts, and we have found that many — if not most — of you like to be asked. But in using this method, we may be leaving people out, especially if it is done as a "last minute item". So, we are posting a sign-up sheet on the Easel in the narthex of the chapel. **If you or your family or group would like to bring up the gifts on a certain Saturday or Sunday — or if you are open to doing this at any time — please call the chapel office [440-473-3560].** We look forward to opening this beautiful experience to all in our community.

**KNOW THIS:**

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was: "thank you" — that would suffice. —Meister Eckhart

WHO AM I TO JUDGE:

Perhaps the single, most-often quoted line from Pope Francis is his response to a question he was asked vis-à-vis the morality of a particularly-dicey issue. His, infamous-famous reply — “Who am I to judge?” Although this remark is often assumed to be flighty and less-than-serious, it is, in fact, on pretty safe ground. Jesus, it seems, says basically the same thing. For example, in his conversation with Nicodemus in John’s Gospel, he, in essence, says: I judge no one [see John 3].

If the Gospel of John is to be believed, then Jesus judges no one — God judges no one. But that needs to be put into context. It doesn’t mean that there aren’t any moral judgments and that our actions are indifferent to moral scrutiny. There is judgment — except it doesn’t work the way it is fantasized inside the popular mind. According to what Jesus tells us in John’s Gospel, this is how judgment works:

God’s light, God’s truth, and God’s spirit come into the world. We then judge ourselves according to how we live in the face of them — God’s light has come into the world, but we can choose to live in darkness. That’s our decision, our judgment. God’s truth has been revealed, but we can choose to live in falsehood — in lies. That’s our decision, our judgment to make. And God’s spirit has come into the world, but we can prefer to live outside that spirit — in another spirit. That too is our decision, our judgment. God judges no one. We judge ourselves. Hence we can also say that God condemns no one, though we can choose to condemn ourselves. And God punishes no one, but we can choose to punish ourselves. Negative moral judgment is self-inflicted. Perhaps this seems abstract, but it is not. We know this existentially, we feel the brand of our own actions inside us. To use just one example: How we judge ourselves by the Holy Spirit.

God’s spirit — the Holy Spirit — is not something so abstract and slippery that it cannot be pinned down. St. Paul, in his letter to the Church at Galatia, describes the Holy Spirit in terms so clear that they can only be rendered abstract and ambiguous by some self-serving rationalization. How does he describe and define the Holy Spirit?

So as to make things clear he sets up a contrast by first telling us what the Holy Spirit is not. The spirit of God, he tells us is not the spirit of self-indulgence, sexual vice, jealousy, rivalry, antagonism, bad temper, quarrels, drunkenness, or factionalism. Anytime we are cultivating these qualities inside of our lives, we should not delude ourselves into thinking we are living in God’s spirit, no matter how frequent, sincere, or pious is our religious practice. The Holy Spirit, he tells us, is the spirit of charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and chastity. Only when we are living inside of these virtues are we living inside God’s spirit [Galatians 5:16-26].

So then, this is how judgment happens. God’s spirit — charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and chastity — has been revealed. We can choose to live inside the virtues of that spirit or we can choose to live instead inside their opposites — self-indulgence, sexual vice, rivalry, antagonism, bad temper, quarrels, drunkenness, and factionalism. One choice leads to a life with God; the other leads away from God. And that choice is ours to make — it doesn’t come from the outside. We judge ourselves. God judges no one. God doesn’t need to.

When we view things inside this perspective it also clarifies a number of misunderstandings that cause confusion inside the minds of believers as well as inside the minds of their critics. How often, for instance, do we hear this criticism — if God is all-good, all-loving, and all-merciful, how can God condemn someone to hell for all eternity? A valid question — though not a particularly reflective one. Why? Because God judges no one; God punishes no one. God condemns no one to hell. We do these things to ourselves — we judge ourselves, we punish ourselves, and we put ourselves in various forms of



secretly, go to our meal with appetite and dine moderately. May we please our friends duly, go to bed merrily and sleep soundly. All of this for the joy of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

—taken from the writings of Father James Gilhooly, which appear on the internet.

TAKING A POSITIVE APPROACH:

The first week of Advent, begins the new liturgical year with Luke sending us dire warnings from Jesus — “People will die of fright;” “the powers of the heaven will be shaken;” “on earth nations will be in dismay.” This striking imagery pointing to the end times can also direct our attention to life as we know it now. Frightening things happen — terrorists kill innocent people; random violence strikes our cities and schools; marriages collapse; friendships break up; illness attacks healthy bodies; natural disasters disrupt life.

In dealing with the inevitable collapses in life, we look to Christ for guidance. He warns us against destructive approaches such as carousing and drunkenness that make our hearts drowsy. Excessive drinking is not a healthy response to a failed marriage. Rejecting all refugees is not a Christian response to terrorism. Unrelenting anger at God is not finally a helpful response to the diminishment of life.

Christ has more positive advice for us when things fall apart — “pray for strength” so that we can hold it together; “be vigilant” so that tragedies do not take us totally by surprise; “stand erect and raise your heads” confident that the Son of Man will one day come to restore all things in himself.

We can imagine individuals who have followed the advice of the Lord when their lives unraveled. When Sam lost his job in his early fifties, he spent too much time sitting around feeling sorry for himself and anesthetizing his pain with excessive amounts of Scotch. Throughout, he wisely kept going to Mass, and one Sunday he caught part of the homily suggesting that Advent is a season of hope — a time to stay alert to new possibilities. Right then he decided to do less drinking and start making contacts to find a new job. Nothing broke his way for months, but he persevered in his networking efforts, somehow trusting that Christ was with him. When he finally found a good job, he vowed to try to help others facing similar problems.

When Rebecca’s husband suddenly walked out on her after 20 years of marriage, she retreated into an inner circle of pain, anger, and frustration focused on a burning desire to get back at him. She stopped going to Mass, but continued her lifelong habit of saying prayers before going to bed. One night while saying the Our Father she was struck by the part about forgiving those who trespass against us. It was clear to her that she had to forgive her husband if she was going to get on with her life. Trying to forgive proved to be a difficult process. She prayed regularly for God’s help to follow the example of Jesus who forgave his enemies. She tried to be vigilant, blocking out negative feelings, and to stand erect, rising above her confining circle of resentment. Over time she made progress which deepened her trust in Christ the Son of Man who restores all things.

What collapses and breakdowns have troubled you the most, and how can you manage them better with Christ’s help?

—taken from the writings of Father Jim Bacik which appear on the internet

CHAPEL 20th ANNIVERSARY NOTE CARDS:

Note Cards of the Vatican Treasure — Our Lady Of Gilmour — are also available for purchase. The card has a beautiful photo of Our Lady of Gilmour — taken by John Reid — on the front. The inside is blank for your message, and the back of the card has a description of the Vatican Treasure and it was brought to the Chapel, along with appropriate credits. **The Cards sell in packets of 5 for \$10.** The Cards are located in the chapel office and are available by contacting **Patty Szaniszló at (440) 473-3560 or at szaniszl0p@gilmour.org.**



MAKING ADVENT A TIME OF PREPARATION:

A lot of things in the Church seem to be upside down — not the least of which is heaven itself which sees the poor and lowly invited to the top seats. The same thing happens during this First Week in Advent — the Church's New Year's Day if you like — as we begin with a severe warning from Jesus about the End of the World [Luke 21:25-36]. What is import here is not to become overly concerned with the actual details of the events surrounding the Last Day, lest we get distracted from the real message of Christ. Not every earthquake or great storm is going to be a precursor of the Last Day.

It is amusing to see certain Christian groups which seem to concentrate on these things — they look deep into the corners of the Bible trying to find out what the precise signs of the Last Day will be, and then they try to work out if these signs are present in the world today. Focusing on these signs actually distracts us from the real meaning of the Gospels which is always Good News. It is important when reading the scriptures to always think that what we are reading is actually Good News. Things that might initially sound severe when looked at in this way make a lot more sense.

So in Luke's Gospel Jesus tells his disciples about some of the cataclysmic events that will happen on the Last Day; He tells them that that Final Day will come unexpectedly and unless we are ready and prepared it will come upon us like a trap. But while his words are meant to be a warning, they also aim to be reassuring — they are intended as Good News. Jesus does not want us to be caught off guard; rather, he wants us to be ready and, as he says, he wants us to be able to stand with confidence on that Last Day. He wants us to be prepared for that final judgment, and unafraid because we will know that having lived good and worthy lives it will be a favorable judgment.

It is important to know the end of the story so that we are always ready for the conclusion whenever it comes. It is vital that we live our lives in the knowledge that we will ultimately face judgment. This helps us to see everything in its true perspective and to realize that we are accountable for our actions during this all too brief life on earth. So there is an important logic in starting at the end of the story. In this season of Advent, we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus by realizing that he comes ultimately as the Savior and Judge of all. With our eyes fixed on heaven so to speak we will avoid being confused by the many distractions that we face as we go through life.

Of course distractions are always going to be with us. There will be many things that preoccupy us and take us off the right track. Besides those things which are obviously sinful — and which run completely contrary to a life of grace — there are other things which might at first glance appear to be very legitimate. But these legitimate concerns can grow out of proportion and distract us from living our lives the way Jesus wants us to.

A good example of this comes in the rearing of children. Yes, it is important to love our children and to be very concerned that they grow up in the proper way. But some parents exaggerate these concerns and make their children objects of worship in themselves. This leads them to spoil their children and do all kinds of things which actually end up being a distortion of proper child rearing. Think about those parents who take their children to football but who get over-involved, ending up with them shouting at the referee or getting into arguments with other parents for perceived unfairness. They are doing their children a disservice and actually depriving them from learning a lot of the important lessons in life.

The Season of Advent is about preparation — preparation for the celebration of Christmas, but also and very importantly the preparation of ourselves to meet Christ on that final Day of Days.



And I am hopeful, I'm waiting on You, Lord
 Though it is painful, but patiently, I will wait.
 I will move ahead, bold and confident,
 Taking every step in obedience.
 While I'm waiting, I will serve You.
 While I'm waiting, I will worship.
 While I'm waiting, I will not faint.
 I'll be running the race even while I wait.
 I'm waiting, I'm waiting on You, Lord and I am peaceful.
 I'm waiting on You, Lord, Though it's not easy.
 But faithfully, I will wait. Yes, I will wait.
 I will serve you while I'm waiting,
 I will worship you while I'm waiting.

The wait for Christmas is just a glimpse of the real waiting we have as we wait for the Lord to come again. So we are told to stay awake, and wait for the Lord.

And when the wait is over, what will we have to show for our lives? Will we stand before the Lord and say: "I was planning to come closer to you Lord and spend every day talking to you in prayer, but I just didn't get it into my schedule." Will we say: "I had always wanted to do things for others without seeking any form of payment from this world, but I was too busy doing other things." Or will we say: "Lord, you know that while I waited I tried my best to serve you in others. You know that while I waited I talked to you every day."

If our wait is one of action, one of service, and one of prayer, then when the Lord comes again at the end of our time or the end of the world, we will be found, as St. Paul says, blameless and holy before God at the coming of the Lord Jesus and His Holy Ones.

May our lives be lives of actively waiting for the Lord.

—taken from the writings of Father Joseph Pellegrino which appear on the internet

LIFE TEEN:

Next Sunday, December 6th, our Life Teen group will be discussing how to get the most out of our Advent. Come and try us out. Life Teen meets right after Sunday Mass — from **11:30 AM—1:00 PM** in the **Lennon Board Room**. Life Teen is open to **all high school aged young people. Just call the office and let us know that you are going to be coming.** We ask you to do this because there will be food involved. We have a great deal of fun together and we grow in our faith at the same time. **Respond to your texts and/or emails, or call the chapel office [440-473-3560] to be notified.** Please continue to remember all our teens and young people in your prayers. **Our next Life Teen meeting will be on Sunday, December 13th** when we will be shopping at Aurora Farms Outlet for our Giving Tree and Adopt-a-Family programs. Please join us for a wonderful experience.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP — THE EDGE:**

Our next meeting of the EDGE is on Sunday, Sunday, December 13th when we will be going shopping at Aurora Farms for some families for Christmas — our Adopt-a-Family program. Come and try us out. Come and find out what **the EDGE** is all about. If you have not joined us before, that's OK. **Just call the office and let us know that you are going to be coming.** We ask you to do this because there will be food involved. Our EDGE Youth Group has a Faith-Service-Social component, and we look forward to your participation. All are welcome. **EDGE will also meet on Sunday, December 20th as we decorate the Chapel for Christmas.** Please join us.



giving her strength because He loves her. In all of the worst moments of our life, He is there to hold us and love us through it. I know that sometimes it doesn't feel like it. Sometimes He seems so far away. But He is there, and this is where faith comes in — faith that believes despite what we can see, hear, or feel. As Father d'Elbee says: "I do not fear any cross, because I know that when a cross comes, you [God] always come too. The Crucified is never found without the cross, and neither is the cross found without the Crucified. It always bears Jesus. I press it to my breast to press Him at the same time to my heart. So tell Him: 'With You I do not fear any cross'".

—taken from the writings of Blair LePanne, an associate of the Bible Geek

WAITING:

The season of Advent begins with two very positive readings, followed by a stern warning. The prophet Jeremiah begins our reflection [Jeremiah 33:14-16] — "The days are coming when the promise will be fulfilled," Jeremiah wrote to people who were decimated by their enemies. The Babylonians had captured many of them and sent them in chains to Babylon. The Hebrews knew that they had sinned against God — the exile was a result of their sins. But did God totally desert them? "No," Jeremiah said. By their own choice they were no longer in a righteous relationship with God. But God had not given up on them. The time was coming when Jerusalem and Judah would be safe from all terrors. A righteous shoot of David would lead them. And Jerusalem would be a place of justice — a place of union with God.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Church at Thessalonica, takes a different approach. The people expected the Lord to come soon; some were nervous, some were absolutely frantic. Paul tells them that all they have to do is abound in love for one another and for all. This will strengthen them so they will be blameless in holiness before God at the coming of the Lord Jesus and his holy ones.

These are comforting words — particularly in light of Jesus' warnings in Luke's Gospel [21:25-36]. Jesus speaks about horrible signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and people dying of fright. But he also says that when we see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory, we should stand straight and raise our heads because our redemption is near.

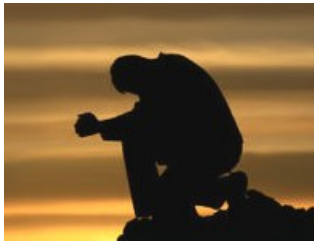
Waiting for the Lord to come again is the focus of this first week of Advent. This waiting for the Lord is different than the usual way we wait. It is not like the waiting we experience when we go to the doctor's office and sit in the lobby reading old magazines, or playing on our phones. We wait and wait and hope that when the nurse opens the door it's going to be for us — all so we can get stuck with a needle. And we are bored. Waiting for the Lord is not like waiting on line at Disney World. We go through that endless maze, and keep walking and walking and going nowhere. But at least we know that when the wait is over and we get to the front of the line — if there is a front of the line — we are going to have fun. But waiting for the Lord is not like those long lines in Orlando because when we are on those lines we are not doing much — at least nothing all that constructive.

Waiting for the Lord demands that we make the best use of the time we have before He comes.

How do we use our time? How do we wait for Him? So much of our time is wasted. We sit in front of a screen — computer or TV — for hours. Now, there is nothing wrong with relaxing, and there are great programs out there. But we need to accomplish more with our lives than watch TV, or play video games. When the Lord comes, we will have to show Him how we used the time He gave us. Hopefully, we will have accomplishments greater than achieving level 8 or watching the entire *Once Upon a Time* series.

John Waller wrote a song called *While I'm Waiting*. It is about the waiting we do during the Advent of our lives — waiting for the Second Coming of the Lord.

I'm waiting, I'm waiting on You, Lord,



Nowadays people often forget about this beautiful liturgical season. Blame it if you will on the consumer society which is already full into the Christmas swing. Advent gets passed over and completely forgotten. Consumer culture has us celebrating Christmas long before we get to it, and then rushes on to the winter sales immediately afterwards. In the world of work it is a time taken up with Christmas staff parties and other celebrations.

Despite the secular world, the Church gives us four weeks of preparation followed by twelve days of celebration. Advent has always been properly seen as a mini-Lent. It is a time of sobriety and stillness; it is a period of reflection and preparation. And it is a time when we use the Sacrament of Reconciliation to help us celebrate Christmas properly with our souls truly brought into relationship with God.

It used to be that Advent Calendars were completely religious. As you progressed through Advent you opened a little window each day to reveal a religious picture or symbol and then when you got to Christmas Day it had a bigger window containing the Nativity scene. Just being able to see a picture of the Baby Jesus was regarded as sufficient reward. Today, however, Advent Calendars are more about chocolate than anything else, instant gratification is their real message.

What we are seeing here is a beautiful liturgical season being devalued and debased by an increasingly secular culture. So I urge you to think about ways to make this season meaningful in your homes. Besides traditional Advent Calendars, there is of course the Jesse Tree which can be made and put up in the home. This would be a good activity to do together as a family involving cutting up paper, drawing pictures and sticking them on a tree. Jesse Trees are also a good way of reconnecting with the Old Testament which is another thing that is easily forgotten in our increasingly secular world. Think creatively this Advent and try to find a way to make it a season that is properly celebrated. That will lead you to a greater appreciation of the true meaning of Christmas.

—taken from the writings of Father Alex McAllister, S.D.S., which appear on the internet

DO YOU NEED ADVENT?

Think for a minute about the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas. What thoughts and images come to your mind? — the warmth of family and friends gathered to share food and laughs; determined hours at the office or doing homework with the kids; bargaining with yourself to make it until Christmas break. There are people for whom you plan to buy gifts, detailing what you plan to purchase, what you have budgeted and what you actually spent.

And then — if you stop — you can see a navy blue night sky with one star that shines brighter than all the others. It's this last image that can pull you from the hurried pace of the secular holiday season into the peaceful purpose of Advent. As the Psalmist says: "Justice shall flourish in his time and fullness of peace forever" [Psalm 72].

Advent is meant to be a time of peace and prayerful preparation for the coming of the Christ Child. Sometimes we forget that Advent is a season at all — with all our thoughts focused on the trappings of Christmas. Do you remember the song, *I Need a Silent Night* sung by Amy Grant? Here's the chorus: "I need a silent night, a holy night to hear an angel voice through the chaos and the noise. I need a midnight clear, a little peace, to end this crazy day with a silent night."

What can we do to create that kind of peace in Advent this year for yourself and your family? The answer will differ for each of us. It might be the lighting of the candles of the Advent wreath at dinner each week; it could be shopping for a gift from the St. Vincent de Paul Christmas tree — a gift for someone who is truly in need. Maybe it's receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation to bring God's peace and forgiveness to our souls.

O God, help us to seek and cherish the peace of Advent as we wait for the birth of the Prince of Peace.

STAY
AWAKE

WHERE IS GOD?

There are a lot of crazy things that happen in our world — tsunamis and hurricanes and other natural disasters, children are abused, terrorists killing hundreds in a single action — when things like these happen, where is God?

I'm a nurse in a pediatric intensive care unit. I have seen the worst of the worst. I've seen children cold, still, and as blue as the water they drowned in. I've seen babies with bandaged heads and blank eyes who will never speak or walk or laugh because they were abused. I've seen big, strong teenagers waste away in a matter of months from the cancer that doesn't care that they wanted to be president. I've watched grown men lose control as they kneel at the bedside of their child and beg for forgiveness for crashing the car. I've cared for children with brains damaged beyond repair — with the pictures of them laughing and riding their bike just a few days before, surrounding me on the walls of their hospital room. When bad things happen, it is tempting to despair, and questions arise such as: **Where is God in this mess? Does He really love us? If He loves us, why do these bad things happen?**

God is here in our chaos. He's so much here a part of our mess that He sent His only Son to our world to save us. If that's the case, why are there still bad things in the world?

God in His omniscience — infinite wisdom — created us with free will. Free will means that we have the power to choose. God could have made us creatures without will, or creatures whose only will was to choose Him. Imagine that you put a nice bone in front of a dog. The dog is not capable of thinking: "Oh hey, my buddy Skip — the terrier next door — would love this bone. I'm going to forgo my own ravenous stomach and save it for him." No, your dog is going to go at that bone like it's his job.

We as humans, however, possess the power of choice. With this power of choice comes our ability to do beautiful and selfless things — like turning off that T-swift jam because your brother is about to throw a chair through the window if he has to listen to "Style" one more time.

But choice can also be dangerous — people choose to kill, abuse, hurt, lie, break down, and destroy. **The gift of free will given to us by God can be misused for evil.** Evil is not a separate force that is competing with God on the same level — evil is the absence of God, just as darkness is the absence of light.

God does not ever will a person to do evil, but He allows it. If we were only capable of choosing good, it would be the same as having no choice at all. God knows the magnitude of the gift of choice that He has given us, and He knows that some will abuse it.

Furthermore, in our post-Eden world, in addition to battling sin, we also face sickness and disease. These were never willed by God, but with the fall of humankind — when Adam and Eve chose to sin — God allowed sickness and death to enter the world. So we face sickness and disease — and it oftentimes seems senseless. There is some truth to that. Sickness on its own is just an unfortunate and unpleasant occurrence to be avoided. God allows sickness in the same way that He allows bad things to happen — it's a consequence of our sin and fallen nature, but it is also an opportunity for powerful sacrifice.

You and I never signed up for the job of being omniscient. You know who is? — God. He has perfect 3D vision of the whole world's past, present, and future because He created it. When tsunamis and forest fires and freak accidents happen, it's not because He hates China or California — it's because... well I don't know why.

God has the master plan. We are all going to die someday, and it's not up to us to pick the when and where. I don't know why things happen, but I know who I want if I am ever in the middle of burning forest or a wave the size of New York City — I want God.

Bad things are going to happen. You will rip a hangnail off your toe before an 18 mile hike and ask yourself why, oh, why couldn't you just leave it alone? You will run up to the Coldstone doors just as they are closing for the night and be left ice cream-less. You will lose friends, you will cry, there will be moments when you wonder why life has to hurt. **Suffering is real. But you know what else is real? Sacrifice.**

The difference between suffering and sacrifice is monumental. **Suffering is the bad thing that is happening, but sacrifice is when we choose to do something good with it.** Sacrifice changes everything because bad things will happen constantly, and they are out of our control, but with sacrifice we can choose to put things back into God's hands. Suffering without the lens of sacrifice is just something to avoid — something to hate, something to disregard. The world see suffering as something to avoid. But read what Father Jean d'Elbee writes in his book, *Believe in Love*: "Another reason to love the cross is that it was the lot of your Savior, and therefore you choose it as your own lot. Must we not find good what He chose for Himself and for His Mother? Can we desire that He choose something else for us? He does not want us to consider something as an evil the means by which He saved us. Do two people love one another if one regards with horror what the other regards with love? When people love one another they have the same tastes — and **Jesus wants us to share with Him His taste for the Cross.**"

Christ suffered more than any man ever has — or will — because He was both God and man — and therefore took on a divine size dose of suffering that we are incapable of. When He chose to suffer and die on the cross for the sins of every person who had and would ever exist, He felt more physical pain, rejection, hatred, and despair than we ever will. This makes Him the perfect one to come to when you are suffering. When your heart is breaking, He is opening up compassionate arms to you. He is holding you and saying gently: "I understand, my child, I have suffered too." By the merits of His suffering and death, Christ opened the gates of heaven, and thus showed us the power of redemptive suffering. Redemptive suffering means that our suffering does not have to go to waste. It's a holy exchange, or trade.

Here's an example. Suppose that I am suffering from the abandonment of a close friend. I can take that abandonment, and offer it to God, saying: "Hey God, this hurts; I am going to offering up this suffering to you for my aunt who is trying, but can't get pregnant." Do you realize how huge this is? This means we don't have to suffer in vain. **Every thorn is a gift, every rejection a prize, every tear a drop of precious gold.** Obviously, like with every prayer, it is not a guarantee of getting what we want, but God grants enormous amount of graces and favors to those who give Him their pain. Read what St. Paul writes to the Church at Corinth: "A thorn in the flesh was given to me. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but He said to me: 'my grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong" [2 Corinthians 12: 7-10].

Sacrificing changes us for the better. When we get into the habit of taking our sufferings and offering them up to God, it completely changes the way we view the things that happen to us. A difficult soccer practice becomes an opportunity to offer up your sweat for your test next week; your cold is offered up for the end to abortion; humiliation becomes the prayer for your friend who is depressed.

I wish there was no pain. I wish that I was out of job because all the children were alright. I wish that people did not chose to reject God and spread evil with their free will. I also wish that every person — rale thin, hungry, and homeless — knew that there was a God who loves them intensely and incomprehensibly. I wish that I could look into the sad and broken eyes of every child who was abused and tell them that it's not their fault, and their Father in heaven is infinite gentleness and compassion. **The worst things will happen. So when you see them, encounter them, feel them, or have them happen to you, know that this is not a reason to dismiss God. He is there.**

There's an image burned into my memory of a mother, 8 months pregnant, sitting in a chair, bent over the body of her two year old. He had fallen into a pool and been found and pulled out too late. He was on a ventilator and heart stimulating medications, but he was not going to make it. He was gone. I remember closing my eyes and asking God to be there with this mother — and do you know what? He was. Not because I asked — although He does love it when we invite Him. But He was there with her,