

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ An Advent Prayer of Hope ~

**O Hope,
Aperture of God's expansive view;
Prism through which
all true Light breaks;
illuminating paths and patterns,
ways and wanderers.**

**Refract our shortsightedness
that we may look
to the East
with distance vision
and find our Advent way.**

**Come, O Hope,
focus our blurred
and distracted sight
that we might see clearly
the One who is coming.
Amen.**

CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.
phone: [440] 473-3560 or 216-570-9276 [cell]. e-mail: blazekj@gilmour.org

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.

ADVENT DEVOTIONS:

Welcome to Advent. 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 13th**, 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.

**OLC “ADOPT A FAMILY” PROGRAM:**

Again this year, we are going to be doing our Adopt-a-Family Program with St. Adalbert Parish School. **Because of the Pandemic, emphasis this year will be on gift cards. You certainly can purchase a “real” gift if you would like, but we thought it would be safer to do the gift cards and let the parents of the children do the shopping.** The need this year continues to be great because of the pandemic. St. Adalbert has identified families — most often single parent, below poverty level families; we are given the ages of the children and other family information, to help you identify each family’s needs. In addition, if possible, **we ask that you also provide a Christmas food gift card for the family.**



If you are buying gifts, then the gifts should be wrapped. **Gift cards from the following places are best: Walmart, Aldi or Dave’s. Chipotle, Panera, any Pizza place, Amazon, GameStop, Home Goods, Target, Marshall’s, and Old Navy, Dollar Tree, Family Dollar, and Ashley Stewart.**

There are also many **Grandparents who are raising children and need help.** For this group, **Aldi’s Gift Card or Walmart Cards** are the best.

This is a project that the entire family can get involved in! Families can be matched according to your own family size, and children’s ages, etc. Last year it was truly inspiring. **Please call Patty at the Chapel Office [440-473-3560 or szaniszl@gilmour.org] if you and your family would like to participate in this program, or if you have any questions.**

Adopt-a-Family gifts will be due by Wednesday, December 15th. Thank you!

GIVING TREE:

This year the Giving Tree will continue to look different; the tree will be there, but there will be no ornaments on the tree. **Instead here is a list of gifts to purchase and put under the tree: Gifts need not be wrapped! They can be in grocery bags or other such “outerwear”.** All gifts will be going to **Fatima Center, or to Regent of Euclid Assisted Living.** **We will also be working with Gilmour’s Kids 4 Kids Club to provide gifts for the needy.** Here is a list of the gifts that are needed for Fatima: **New Books, Games, African American Dolls, Toiletries, Gift Cards, Sweaters, Socks & Underwear, Hats and Gloves.** The assisted Living facility needs: **T-Shirts, Fleece Pants, Non-slip Footie Socks, Slippers, Fleece Throws, Sweaters, Socks, Hats, and Gloves, for Men & Women.** Gifts for the student Council outreach will be added shortly.

Please return your gift to the Giving Tree in the Chapel Lobby by Wednesday, December 15th so that they may be distributed to Fatima and the other organizations for their celebrations. Join in the 2nd Christmas spirit by bringing joy into the lives of others.

**PRAYER REQUESTS:**

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

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For John Visconsi, brother of Tom [*61] and Tony Visconsi [*75] and Paulette Poklar, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Marty Zingales, who is undergoing further treatment for cancer.
- For Brother Joseph Annan, C.S.C., who is undergoing treatment for a stroke.
- For Father Joseph O’Donnell, C.S.C., who is under the care of hospice
- For Sheila Coyne, aunt of Katie Coyne [*24], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Frank Nannicola, grandfather of Cassie [*17], Frank [*18], and Mia [*19] Nannicola, who is recovering from cancer surgery.
- For Anita Yex, who is seriously ill with COVID
- For Joseph Boehm who is critically ill with COVID
- For Ellen Smith, mother of Tina Newton, grandmother of Justin Newton [*17], who is critically ill and under the care of hospice.
- For Brother James Blaszkak, C.S.C., who is critically ill.

FOR THE DECEASED:

- For Danielle Chronister
- For Dave Howard, uncle of Gilmour Art instructor, Susan Southard.
- For John Cortens, uncle of Holy Cross seminarian, Cameron Cortens, C.S.C.
- For Robert Stork, grandfather of Anthony Monitello’s [*17] fiancé
- For Virginia Fortuna.
- For Paul Dentscheff [*79], brother of Dan Dentscheff [*77]
- For Joseph Feighan
- For Sister Rita Slattery, C.S.C.
- For Melvin Jackson, father of Taylor Jackson Wilson [*07]
- For Christ Karas
- For Sister Mary Jean Klene, C.S.C.
- For Ellen Cohn, mother of Gary Cohn [*79]

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For a family going through a difficult time.
- For an end to violence and racial injustice in our society.
- For a growth in awareness of the blessing of family life.
- For all those struggling with various addictions.
- For an end to sexual abuse and lack of respect for human persons.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.
- For a greater awareness of our call to create a more humane and just society.

HEALING:

This is part of how Jesus heals: not by relieving us of our pain and suffering, but by giving them meaning, purpose, a place to go and be used, redeemed, glorified.

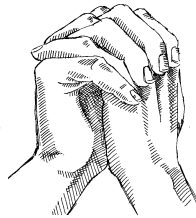
—Liz Kelly

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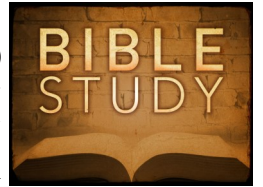
PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Catherine Ivery, aunt of Kitchen associate director, Bobbie Bonner, who is serious ill with COVID
- For Liam Kirchner, a child, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Matt Rose who is recovering from extensive cancer surgery.
- For Andrea Polomsky, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Vicki Giancola, mother of Vince Giancola ['23], who continues treatment for cancer.
- For Joseph Borkey ['82], brother of Jeff ['80] and Jerrod ['87] Borkey, father of Christian Borkey ['16], and uncle of Jerrod ['12] and former Gilmour student, Ian Borkey, who is undergoing treatment for cancer
- For Katie Poelking ['01], sister of TJ Poelking ['98], who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer.
- For Mary Goers who is undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer.
- For Serena DiCillo, daughter of David DiCillo ['84] and Polly Duval DiCillo ['84], and granddaughter of long-time Gilmour teacher, Bonnie DiCillo, and niece of John ['83], Dawn ['86], and Dan ['88] DiCillo and Laurie Duval Muller-Girard ['81], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Ray Gruss who is battling cancer.
- For John Weathers, who is undergoing treatment for liver cancer.
- For Bruce Schwartz, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Bill Barrett, who is undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer.
- For David Patterson ['83], brother of Charles ['79] and Neil ['81] Patterson, who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For Mary Curran, mother of Megan ['10], Carolyn ['12], and Catherine ['17] Curran, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For John Zippay, who is critically ill.
- For Addison McKito, sister of Aidan McKito ['24], who is undergoing treatment for Hodgkin's Lymphoma.
- For Darlene Lonardo, mother of Joseph Lonardo ['00], and grandmother of Angelina ['22] and Giana ['22] Lonardo, who is undergoing treatment for leukemia.
- For Jill Shemory, mother of Adam Shemory ['08], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Christine Maharg, mother of Lily Maharg ['21], who is seriously ill with cancer.
- For Brian Fitzgerald, who is seriously ill with brain cancer.
- For Margaret Malarney ['24] who continues rehab and medical care.
- For Bernice Girgash, aunt of Basketball Coach and Counselor, Dan DeCrane, who is undergoing treatment for cancer..
- For Krishna Gupta, Sister of Science teacher, Neena Goel, aunt of Nikhil ['13] and Nupur ['17] Goel, who is undergoing treatment for a brain bleed
- For Tara Hyland ['07], who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Karuna Singla, Sister-in-law of Science teacher, Neena Goel, aunt of Nikhil ['13] and Nupur ['17] Goel, who is undergoing treatment for bone cancer.
- For Melita Chiacchiarri, mother of Mark ['94], mother-in-law of Michelle DeBacco ['96] who is undergoing further treatment for cancer.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian ['09], Rosa ['12] and Edwin ['17] Heryak, who is seriously ill
- For Tom Podnar, father of Lower School art teacher, Eileen Sheehan, who is awaiting a heart transplant.
- For Father James Caddy, former pastor of St. Francis, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.



NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, DEC. 15th:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, December 15th at 6:30 PM. Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God's word. It's a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can't come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God's word. **Our topic for this Bible Study will be: Mary: Model of Advent and Christmas**



If you text or email Father John [blazekj@gilmour.org] he will send you the zoom link and password. This is an important step to prevent negative intruders.

We also need your help — we need future topics. **So, if you have a topic that you would like us to discuss, please let Father John know.** Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. **We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting.** Join us. You'll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Sunday, December 5: 2 nd Week in Advent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 6: St. Nicholas	NO MASS
Tuesday, December 7: Vigil — Immaculate Conception	5:30 PM In Person & Live Stream
Wednesday, December 8: Immaculate Conception	1:45 PM [with Lower School]
Thursday, December 9:	4:15 PM [Eucharistic Chapel]
Friday, December 10:	4:15 PM [Eucharistic Chapel]
Saturday, December 11: 3 rd Week in Advent	NO MASS
Sunday, December 12: 3 rd Week in Advent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

R.C.I.A [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults]:

Our RCIA program will begin shortly. If you have been thinking about investigating the Catholic faith, or if you know someone who has been thinking about it; if you have been away from the Catholic Church for a while, or are interested in learning more about the Catholic faith; if you know someone who is not fully initiated [Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation] in their Catholic faith — then consider joining or having them join our RCIA program.



A VIEW FROM WITHIN:

Our own lives are the instruments with which we experiment with truth.

—Thich Nhat Hanh

REFLECTION ON THE THEME FOR THE WEEK:

All of us carry in ourselves a repugnance for injustice, and we are distressed when we personally witness or suffer divisions that wound. We long for justice where it is denied, and union of hearts and minds where there is painful division. The longing is deep. It is a holy desire. What makes it holy is that, for us, the longing pertains not just to ourselves, but to all who suffer injustice and division. This puts us in global solidarity with one another and God, who desires justice and unity for all, and who sends us His Son to bring this about.

During the liturgical year, we do not hear much from the prophet Baruch. As a messenger and poet of God, he has accompanied the Jewish people into exile and captivity. Jerusalem is their City of Identity — but only in memory and prayer.

The Israelites have been confronted with their infidelities, and long to return to their homeland and their relationship with the God who brought them out of the first exile in Egypt. What we hear is a new song from the prophet. There is hope, and Jerusalem is the center or image of recovery and restoration. The great city — remembered by those now in captivity as beautiful, but in reality, reduced to destruction — is pictured with new glorious dressing. And while Jerusalem is the image, it is really the people who are called to return and be adorned with the glory of God, and to embrace personal holiness. The mercy and justice of God will clear the way for this to happen [Baruch 5:1-9].

The main Advent character arrives on stage in Luke's Gospel [3:1-6]. Luke introduces John the Baptist with direct reference to those who perpetrated injustice and division on the Jewish people of his time.

- Tiberius Caesar was the Roman Emperor, Pontius Pilate his delegate for Judea, and under him was Herod the Tetrarch who ruled Galilee. The imposition of Roman law on the Jewish people under their governance was brutal.
- The High Priest Caiaphas, presiding over the Sanhedrin, was the chief religious authority of the land. Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas and his predecessor as High Priest, still had great influence. Together with the Pharisees referred to in the gospels, they demanded literal interpretation of the laws in Scripture, and strict adherence to them — thus imposing a great and oppressive burden on the Jewish people.

These were the political and religious circumstances when John the Baptist began his mission at the River Jordan. John's call to repentance rings out over the windy roads and valleys of his time. To those who came to hear him he preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." The ones who came were from among those suffering the brunt of the oppression imposed by Rome, Jewish leadership, and the Pharisees. John was telling them that the ultimate relief from the oppression required their own personal renewal — ritualized by the baptism that John performed — to include repentance [sorrow for past sins, and a total and radical change of outlook in our relationship with God and others] and forgiveness — anticipated in the Kingdom of God who alone can forgive sins, a Kingdom now "at hand" with the advent of Jesus Christ the Messiah.

The redemptive events which began with John in a remote corner of Judea were — by God's design — the beginning of the fulfillment of God's concern for the salvation of "all flesh" — which includes us and excludes no one. Luke underscores this theme repeatedly. His concern for all continually pushes us to break down the barriers of injustice and division that deaden our world — just as it did the world faced by John the Baptist. The story that began with John and took hold with the ministry of Jesus and the



But, for all kinds of reasons, we always go back to dry land, to solid ground, to where we are safe. But the ocean beckons us out anew and we risk again being afloat in something bigger than ourselves. And we keep doing that, wading in and then going back to safety, until one day, when we are ready, we just let the waters carry us away. —taken from the writings of Father Ronald Rolheiser, O.M.I., which appear on the internet

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME?

"When things get better, I'll make my move." Ever say that or something similar under your breath? It's certainly a valid excuse for not doing what the risen Jesus asks us to do. "This just isn't the right platform. There're too many grey areas in my life. I've got good intentions, but this isn't the time and place to carry them out. God knows I have dreams for a better world in my heart. Eventually I'll carry through on them, but in the meantime . . ."

Perhaps these justifications for our inaction are why Luke begins his gospel with an historical overview of the historical Jesus' day and age. Why did God choose this particular time and place in which to send his/her son into the world? They certainly weren't ideal. In some sense, they were just like any other time and place. They had their good points and their bad points. Galilee was just as significant as Illinois; Herod and Caiaphas as any of our political and religious leaders today. John the Baptizer and Jesus of Nazareth had no choice but to play the hands they were dealt. Neither could set up ideal conditions in advance. Long before anyone created poster art, both learned to grow where they were planted. Had they waited for a better time and place, God's will would never have been accomplished.

They're not the first followers of God to experience similar, challenging situations. Baruch, who seems to have worked with the prophet Jeremiah, lived in a world that was falling apart. His mentor had finally reached a point in which he was convinced that God's Chosen People were incapable of reform. His only hope was for an enemy to wipe them out, drag the remnant of the people into exile and start their faith experience over again. Only this time they'd better not screw things up.

Baruch has no choice but to prophesy against this "iffy" background. He's not even certain Israel will continue to exist for more than a few years. Yet the prophet is convinced that God will eventually take care of the people even though both Jerusalem's present and immediate future aren't very promising [Baruch 5:1-9]. Baruch has terrific faith in an imperfect history. He doesn't have any other history in which he's involved.

Reflecting on the importance of our historical context, perhaps Paul offers us the best advice [Philippians 1:3-11]. Paul is convinced that the specific day and age in which he and his community are involved is actually an ongoing process. Their experiences are constantly evolving. "I am confident," he writes, "that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." One thing is certain: "Your love will increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception to discern what is of value." Eventually "things" will become clearer, though at the present moment I'm still wondering what I'm doing here.

We, like John the Baptizer, have no control over when the word of God comes to us. We're simply expected to recognize and use it the way he expects us to. The historical John seems to have been a member of the Dead Sea scroll community, ministering in a place that has less than an inch of rain a year, preaching to someone who not only doesn't want to hear him, but eventually has him killed.

The late Cardinal John Wright once asked us North American College students: "What would you do if you're the best preacher in the diocese and your bishop assigns you as chaplain to an institution for the hearing impaired?" Certainly, it wouldn't be the first time — only God knows what I'm doing here.

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



THE STRUGGLE TO TRUST:

Perhaps the most important thing we ever need to learn is this — it is safe to love! Yes, it is safe to be vulnerable because we are in loving hands. It is safe to surrender because we fall into light — not darkness. It is safe to be weak because the strength we need is found when we give up on our own power. It is safe to give up the hurts we cling to because these lose their force when we are in love. It is safe to trust, to let our loved ones be free, because a power beyond us loves them more than we do, and ultimately takes care of their safety. It is safe to give ourselves over without fear, because, as faith teaches, in the end, all will be well. And it is safe to live our lives with daring because God, as Julian of Norwich assures us, sits in heaven, smiling, completely relaxed, his face looking like a marvelous symphony. The world is ultimately safe. It is safe to love.

But it's not easy to believe that. Perhaps if we had all been loved perfectly — had perfect confidence, and had never been wounded, disappointed, betrayed, or made to cry tears of regret — we would find it easier to believe that it is safe, that we can trust, that we have no need to protect ourselves, and that we do not need to be forever anxious about how we are measuring up, how we are being perceived, how we are being understood, and whether we are worthy of love.

Most of the time we find it hard to trust because we find ourselves wounded, lacking confidence, anxious about many things, and feeling the need to protect ourselves. It is hard to trust, and especially it is hard to show weakness and to be vulnerable. In the air we breathe everywhere — sometimes even in our most intimate relationships — we inhale a distrust that makes us want to show a superior strength, attractiveness, talent, intelligence, self-reliance, and cool detachment. Distrust and self-protection are everywhere. It's hard to let ourselves be vulnerable and to trust that it is safe to love.

And yet, deep down, vulnerability and surrender are what we most deeply want. At every level, we need and want surrender. Morally and religiously, the entire gospels can be put into one word — surrender. Emotionally, psychologically, and sexually the deepest imperative inside of us is simply — surrender. And, deeper than all of our anxieties and our need to protect ourselves, lies a truth that we know at the core of our being — namely, that in the end we cannot take care of ourselves, we cannot make ourselves whole, and we cannot hide our weaknesses from each other. We need to surrender, to trust, to let ourselves fall into stronger and safer hands than our own.

But in order to do this, we need to trust — trust that it is safe to love, to let go, to reveal whom we really are, to show weakness, to not have to pretend that we are whole and self-reliant. This, as we know, is not easy to do. Indeed, on any given day and at any given moment, it is existentially impossible for us to feel safe, to give ourselves over, and to be vulnerable. And so we generally risk the cold misery of detachment rather than risk being misunderstood, rejected, shamed, or seen as needy.

How do we move towards trust? How do we, as Henri Nouwen puts it, move from the house of fear to the house of love?

There is no easy way, no simple formula, no magic bullet, and simply realizing where we need to go is not enough to get us there. A while back, at a workshop, a woman came up to me at the break and said: "I agree with what you, trust is everything, but I can't get there!" She speaks for almost all of us.

How can we get there? How do we pull the trigger on trust?

This is a journey that takes a lifetime. To master this is to be a saint. So we shouldn't be surprised if we still find ourselves — at least on any given day — a long ways from where we want to be. Perhaps the best advice comes from Ruth Burrows, the British Carmelite. In her *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer*, she offers us this: "Surrender and abandonment are like a deep, inviting, frightening ocean into which we are drawn. We make excursions into it to test it, to see whether it's safe, to enjoy the sensation of it.



spread of the early Church in his Acts of the Apostles, is now our story. We are called to confront and deal with the injustice and divisions in our world, and, joined in the Mystical Body of Christ, to replace them with the Kingdom of God.

To do this we need to renew our own "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," just as John's disciples did — we need to let go of all the unholy hanging-on-to's in our lives. John is asking us to check out what we are holding onto for our identity and our security. In short, John is asking us to let go of all the old and stale forms of relating with God, and to prepare for something — a Some One — who is coming to be held on to. The familiar is so comforting, and the Baptist is proclaiming the latest surprise in a long history of unusual revelations.

That is the purpose of Advent. Luke's Gospel reminds us that we have the grace to acknowledge our sins and the sins of the world, to repent and change, to enjoy God's unconditional forgiveness, and to join in the wisdom and work of our Lord. In doing that, we fulfill what John the Baptist prophesied when he quoted Isaiah — "Make straight his paths, and every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

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

PREPARE YOUR HEART:

Advent is that unchangeable season when the same concepts — the same words — rise over and over again, year after year, to challenge our hearts and plague our minds. Advent is the season of waiting. And who hasn't waited? When we are little children, we wait for gifts from our parents. When we are young adults, we wait for the lover who will take us to the magic world of Everything. The problem is that the presents pale and the magic world sags all too quickly into reality. But then Advent comes — relentlessly and throughout life — with its words of hope and faith — shepherds and magi, crib and star, Emmanuel and glory — and stirs our hearts to pinnacles of possibility one more time. Ruben Alvez wrote: "Hope is hearing the melody of the future; faith is dancing to it today." The real Christmas gift for which Advent is the process is learning to hum hope, learning to dance the divine.

Advent is a high spiritual season when we prepare to birth the Christ in our lives. In the monastery, we pay special attention to the vigil services that take place each Saturday during Advent. "Vigil" means to keep awake, to be watchful. The community gathers in prayer by candlelight to anticipate the Sunday feast — to spiritually prepare for Christmas. I love that the community prays the Advent vigils by candlelight. Praying in the dark means that we have to know all the songs and psalms by heart. If you're looking for a good Advent practice, you might memorize a favorite Advent scripture passage.

"The power of the Most High will overshadow you" [Luke 1:35] the monastic liturgy prays during Advent. But who really believes it? We spend our lives — as nations and as individuals — waiting to be saved by the power of our own achievements or the power of destructive force. And yet, it is the clear, soft, consuming, overshadowing power of the Most High in us — the power of goodness that is undeterred by any other power on earth — that lies within our grasp, that can really turn all of life benevolent.

Candles are prominent symbols in the monastery's Advent services. Candles focus our minds on the light of Christ and remind us always that time is going by — that light is ebbing. Light a candle occasionally during the Advent season and reflect on these questions: What is time for? If time is only for work, then what will be left of me when the work is done? If there is no light in me, what will happen when the darkness comes, as darkness comes to every life? What is the gain of leading a useful life if I do not also lead a meaningful one?

—taken from the writings of Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B., which appear on the internet



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HELL AND HEAVEN:

A story is told of a soldier who asked a monk: “Teach me the difference between heaven and hell.” The monk said: “You are an obvious coward, not a warrior. Furthermore, I believe you do not know how to use that gun.” The soldier was so enraged that he drew his revolver from his holster to shoot the monk. As he prepared to squeeze the trigger, the monk said calmly: “That’s hell.” The abashed soldier immediately came to his senses and placed his gun back in its holster. And the monk said quietly: “That’s heaven.”

In nineteen days, we shall salute the feast when heaven came to earth as a Child. As a fitting preparation for that feast this second week of Advent, why doesn’t each of us attempt to reproduce heaven on earth in the here and now? Why need we wait for Christmas day itself?

I met a person today who was busy doing such. This woman makes barely above a minimum wage at her job. Her employer gives her neither medical plan nor pension. Yet, despite my words of caution, she mailed a check for \$200 to the Red Cross for the victims of a recent disaster. She was giving not from her surplus, but from her household funds. It was, you might say, her birthday gift to the Christ. Using Matthew’s Gospel as a yardstick, we know that Jesus will never forget it [see Matthew 25:34-37]. In addition, Jesus promises that He will return the gift to her a thousand-fold [see Matthew 19:29]. The Master will not be outdone in generosity.

The monk in our opening story would probably say to the woman: “While the damage done by the disaster is hell, your gift is heaven.” That generous woman deserves not only our commendation and admiration but also imitation in some form by ourselves throughout these next several weeks. She is what this season of Advent is all about. The Son was generous enough to leave the heavens to become what we are. Why then are we not generous enough to reproduce the heavens immediately in our own corner of this global village?

Luke’s Gospel [3:1-6] talks about how John went about the whole Jordan district preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We would like to think that the Baptizer was speaking to hardened sinners, but as William Bausch points out, he was doing nothing of the sort. The record shows that he was preaching not to criminals, but to the Pharisees, Scribes, and the Jewish people themselves — good church-going folk.

In a word, his message is directed squarely at us. While we certainly are aware of our “limitations”, most of us spend more of our time looking privately upon ourselves as just about the salt of the earth. Unhappily John the Baptizer would not be a member of our fan club. In Matthew’s Gospel, the Baptizer is on the record calling us a “brood of vipers!” [see Matthew 1:7]. John the Baptizer is certainly no man to mess around with. John continues: “prove your repentance by the fruit it bears” [Matthew 3:8].

And so, the challenge is before us; a change in attitude is called for. Make friends with someone you’re at odds with. Pick up the phone and talk to somebody you haven’t talked to in months or years. Be the first to hold out the hand of reconciliation even though it gets slapped or rejected. Don’t turn your head at shady dealings. Be willing to put some of your possessions on the line. Support the Church — not out of your excess, but out of your substance. Add up your Christmas spending bills that you chalked up for presents, and then slice off 10 percent and give it to the poor. Give evidence that you mean to repent. While great opportunities to help others seldom come our way, the small ones surround us every day. It only takes only a minute to be kind, but the prophet reminds us the end result can remain forever and a day.



Historically, after each massive world crisis — the Black Death, world wars, etc. — we see a resurgence of a search for meaning. Religious vocations rise and multitudes turn to God anew with the feeling that surviving the crisis has reoriented them. People reevaluate their lives. Might that be the call our Scriptures offer us during this Advent season? Are we desirous and capable of a 21st century metanoia?

The thing about genuine conversion or metanoia is that we can’t plan it. It is God’s offer in a particular moment of history — a grace of insight that shakes us up and turns us around. All we can do is be open to it. So, let us gather the willing and accompany one another on the adventure God offers us with this new Advent of the year 2021. The time is right.

—taken from the writings of Sister Mary McGlone, C.S.J., which appear on the internet

GOD IS INTERESTED IN THE WHOLE PERSON:

A remarkable study has told us that while Americans’ overall mental health declined during the pandemic, those who attended religious services actually saw an improvement in their mental health. Part of the reason for this is our hybrid nature. We have two aspects — physical and spiritual, body and soul — that are intimately united. We are embodied spirits. Not only do we have muscles, blood and internal organs; we also have a spirit — an inner core that can turn away from God or turn toward him.

This biblical view of the human person avoids two extremes — on one side extreme materialism that says we are nothing more than matter in motion. For example, Sigmund Freud thought that one day we would have drugs that would take away our psychological problems. While medications can be very helpful, they have limits. We have a spiritual as well as material nature.

The Bible avoids extreme materialism. It also rejects extreme spiritualism. A group called the Gnostics thought they had such powerful spiritual insights that physical reality — the body — was inconsequential. We had a mild version of Gnosticism when I was growing up — Norman Vincent Peale with his *Power of Positive Thinking*. It influenced many people — including Donald Trump. As a young man Mr. Trump was a big fan of the *Power of Positive Thinking*. The problem is that no matter how strong your will, just thinking something does not make it so. The Bible rejects extreme spiritualism as well as extreme materialism.

We can see that today in John the Baptist — “John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” [Luke 3:1-6]. John himself was an ascetic who downplayed the body. Yet he insisted on a physical ritual — an external washing that signified the internal cleansing from sins. He called people to repentance. It’s a constant need because we humans keep turning away from God. Things starts crowding out prayer. Always something more interesting on the cell phone or TV. In our relationships, resentments start taking over. Like Adam in the garden, we hide from God [see Genesis 3]. John calls us to come out of hiding — to repent and turn back to God.

John’s baptism begins the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy — all flesh shall see the salvation of God [see Isaiah 40]. John points to Jesus. Jesus saves our souls. He also saves our bodies, our human flesh. The Church not only cares for people’s souls, but also their bodies. That’s why we have organizations like Catholic Charities. We should not treat our bodies lightly. Our flesh has an eternal destiny. To me that’s a cause for rejoicing

—taken from the writings of Father Phil Bloom which appear on the internet.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:

Father John is available to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with you. Please call him [440-473-3560] to arrange for this experience. All social distancing will remain in place. Always remember the Lord’s invitation: “I will give them a heart with which to understand that I am the Lord. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart”. [Jeremiah 24:7].



TAKE THE ROAD OF TRANSFORMATION:

In the seventh year of the papacy of Francis, bishop of Rome, when António Guterres was secretary general of the United Nations, Ursula von der Leyen was president of the European Commission, Archbishop José Gomez led the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Joseph Biden was president of the United States, the world, plagued by climate change and still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, wondered where to find signs of hope.

That might be the way Luke would start writing a Gospel for our day. The first two chapters of Luke's Gospel — the infancy narratives — serve as a prelude to what follows. Luke starts over with Chapter 3, placing everything in the context of world and local events. He wanted his readers to understand just how the story he was about to tell played a role in the trajectory of human history.

Obviously, Luke would suggest that we too need to read his Gospel in the light of our own religious, social and political context. He would tell us that the state of the world's health and environment, the extremes of wars and peace, wealth and poverty, racism, division, social activism, religious devotion, lack of faith and anti-religious activities are the environment to which we must apply the Gospel if it is to have meaning for our time.

Although Luke probably never met John the Baptist, he knew as much about him as the millennials know about the Rev. Martin Luther King. Luke's information came from storytellers, some eyewitnesses, and Christian communities — people who remembered John's message because of his relation to Jesus.

Luke paints John as a prophet — the last and greatest of them. Luke shows how John applied Isaiah's nearly 600-year-old message to his own day. John combined tradition and his own unique ritual to gear people up — to draw their attention to their world so that they could decipher God's fingerprints and the echo of God's voice in what they saw and heard happening around them.

John's unique take on his times included his use of Isaiah's message of consolation. In the verses previous to what John quotes, God calls Isaiah saying: "Comfort, give comfort to my people" [see Isaiah 40].

John takes on the role of preparing the time and space for God and the people to encounter one another. Like Isaiah, John calls his people to level the slopes, straighten the curves and smooth the roads of their lives so that they can encounter God's saving power among them. How were they to do that? A thoroughgoing conversion and baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

John preached a radical message that is too tamely summarized as "repentance." Luke uses the word *metanoia* to describe it. *Metanoia* is a combination of the Greek words meaning "beyond" and "mind." This indicates that *metanoia* is far more than an intellectual affair — it is an experience of allowing ourselves to be lured beyond what we know, beyond our self-concepts, our theologies and our assessment of current affairs. It empowers us to see the hope lurking in the combination of current events, our own story and our faith. *Metanoia* is a turnaround — a revision — of everything we know. It carries us into a new vision of life.

John celebrated *metanoia* as an experience of being freed from guilt — forgiveness — and a ritual washing — baptism — that symbolized entering into a new life.

In essence, John invited people to experience what he had experienced — the freedom of knowing that God was about to do something great with them. In the words of Baruch, the people who went to John's baptism were symbolically removing their mourning clothes and outfitting themselves to take the road of transformation — of themselves and their history [Baruch 5:1-9].

That was then. What about now, during the papacy of Francis and all our concerns? Is the Gospel just a history lesson about some people enthralled by a message of hope, or does it have something to do with us?



This Advent put a wraparound smile on the face of John the Baptist. He sounds as though he needs some cheering-up.

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

HEAR THE VOICE OF THE LORD:

We live in an age of hashtags, sound bites, and blogs and in a world of competing viewpoints and clamoring voices. It can sometimes be difficult to discern what is really worthy of our attention. This is especially true in days when partisan politics dominates our newsfeeds, and we try to make sense of senseless acts of violence and terror on so many fronts. It's easy to place blame, make excuses, and dig into our ideological trenches, all too often losing sight of the many goods — and lives — that are sacrificed on the altars of partisanship and policy.

There is a real danger in all of this. If we settle for the mediocrity of sound bites and half-truths, without seeking to discern what is truly important, we run the risk of losing sight of the hopes and promises that can only find fulfillment in a life committed to Christ.

While we may not often think of it in this way, Advent is a season of discernment. We're reminded of this in St. Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi: "This is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" [Philippians 1:3-11].

Building on this theme, the words of the prophet Baruch [5:1-9] and the clarion call of John the Baptist [Luke 3:1-6] remind us of what it is we are called to be and do. The Baptist's cry to "prepare the way for the Lord" is a charge to discern the Lord's voice calling out to us in the midst of the noise and clamor that fills our daily lives and to persevere in the way of faith. This truth prompted the priest Origen to ask: "Is it not a way within ourselves that we have to prepare for the Lord? Is it not a straight and level highway in our hearts that we are to make ready? Surely this is the way by which the Word of God enters. Prepare a way for the Lord by living a good life and guard that way by good works. Let the Word of God move in you unhindered and give you a knowledge of his coming and of his mysteries."

Hearing the voice of the Lord in the distance demands action, but this isn't only an invitation to turn away from personal choices and sins that may limit or even prevent God's coming among us. John is also calling us to turn toward God's mercy. And this turning — conversion — isn't only about what we give up, it is really about accepting the gift that we are being offered. This is why Pope Francis has reflected: "Let us ask ourselves: is it true that in the various situations and circumstances of life, we have within us the same feelings that Jesus has? Is it true that we feel as Christ feels? We must always convert and have the sentiments that Jesus had."

These days of Advent demand our attention and intentionality. It is only by seeking the stillness and quiet — leaving behind the hashtags and sound bites — that we can discern the distant voice of the Coming One who brings the mercy and peace which our world so desperately needs.

—taken from the writings of Brother Silas Henderson, S.D.S., which appear on the internet

CHILDREN'S BULLETINS:

Each week, we are making available a **Children's Worship Bulletin**. There are **two editions: [3-6] and [7-12]**. They are available on the table as you leave. The Bulletin focuses on the readings for the week. These are wonderful tools for your children to learn more about the scripture readings for the week. We hope you will take them for your families or your grandchildren. Thanks.

Children's Worship
Bulletin ☺

WHAT WOULD JESUS WANT FOR CHRISTMAS?

It seems to happen earlier each year — no sooner is Halloween over and the stores are filled with Christmas music and decorations. In a way you can't blame the merchants of our country, seeing that 80% of their annual sales take place during the last two months of the year. They refuse to pass by any opportunity to tell us what they have, what we want, and what we really need to buy. There are Christmas sales, Christmas hours, and Christmas specials. We are besieged by opportunities to expand our Christmas shopping list. What began as a simple feast to celebrate the birth of Jesus has become a consumer engine that drives our economy. It is no wonder that the spiritual meaning of Christmas — the voice of John the Baptist crying "Prepare the way of the Lord" [Luke 3:1-6] is drowned out by the noise of commercial jingles and the ring of well-oiled cash registers.

What is a believing Christian to do? How can we celebrate the spiritual meaning of Christmas in this consumer society? There are two possible options. As the old saying goes: "You can either fight them or join them." One can try to eliminate the consumerism of Christmas or choose to infiltrate it and shift its focus.

Eliminating the consumerism of Christmas seems doomed to failure. Gift giving is too pervasive within our society. Besides, exchanging gifts with people we love is a beautiful part of this season. Instead of trying to eliminate the consumerism of Christmas, it might be more productive to infiltrate it — to redirect the basic impulse to buy and to give. Rather than reducing your Christmas shopping list, why not enlarge it? There could be great benefit in adding one name. That name would be Jesus. Yes, I am suggesting you buy a gift for Jesus this Christmas.

Making this suggestion is not some trick or clever homiletic ploy. Think about it. There is something deeply personal about that dynamic of choosing the right gift for the person you love. You need to ask: "Who is this person to me? How close? How important? What would he or she like for Christmas?" Why not direct that personal dynamic to our relationship with the Lord? After all, it is a very religious question to ask: Who is Christ to me? What would Jesus want to receive from me?

What would Jesus want for Christmas? Not a new Lexus. Not the latest computer game. He does not go out for dinner; so a gift certificate wouldn't do. He does not need a new cashmere coat, or a Barbie doll. Cologne and jewelry would not be his style. Now we all know he would be delighted with world peace or the elimination of hunger or disease. But those gifts might be out of our price range. After all, the question is, what would Jesus want that I could give?

Perhaps, he would want a bit more patience on my part with my spouse, or the willingness to reach out to estranged members of my family to encourage reconciliation. I know he would be pleased if we could bring some joy into the life of that elderly person that lives alone in my neighborhood, or to someone who has recently lost a loved one in death. If I could identify a prejudice in my life against people of a different race, religion, or sexual orientation, and work against it, that would make Him smile. Whatever I could do to be more just, more generous, more thankful, that would be a big hit on Christmas morning.

You see it is a profoundly religious question to ask what would Jesus want from me this Christmas. In asking it, we reveal who we think Jesus is, who we are, and what is the relationship that binds us together. I would particularly encourage parents and grandparents to spend some with your children and grandchildren around this question. We are always asking them: "What do you want for Christmas?" In so doing we are encouraging the consumerism of our society. How much healthier it would be if we could ask them what they plan to give this Christmas, and particularly what they would give to Jesus. Spend some time with them. Come up with a few possibilities — three or four — and then let them



when he spoke to the Jews who were in exile in Babylon. These people knew that they had brought their suffering on themselves. Like Baruch we need to say to those who are hurting in the own self-inflicted pain: "Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever" [Baruch 5:1-9]. Perhaps, if we set our anger aside we can join John the Baptist in preparing the way for the Lord into someone's heart [see Luke 3:1-6].

There is nothing greater that we can give anyone than sincerely loving them as the Lord loves them. The love of the Lord is selfless, sacrificial, and complete.

His love is selfless. It is difficult to love in this way — being selfless. This type of love demands that we ignore what the other person thinks about us. We all have people in our lives who respond to our being kind and caring with something like: "So, what got into you?" or "Don't think that I'm going to forget the past just because you are being nice today." It is really difficult to take ourselves and our feelings out of the equation and just allow God to love through us. But we are not important — He is.

The Love of the Lord is sacrificial. It is also difficult to love in a sacrificial way. It is difficult to put someone before ourselves — particularly when that person scorns us. But that is what Jesus did on the cross. He put everyone before Himself — including those people who mocked and attacked him. He forgave those people who crucified Him — even the brutal executioners. When Jesus commanded us to take up our crosses and follow Him, He was telling us to love like He loved, even though this type of love — sacrificial love — carries a heavy cost.

And His love is complete. We cannot love partially or with conditions. We compromise our efforts to give the love of the Lord when we decide to qualify our love, or to demand a response of love. For example, if we were to say to an adult child: "I really want you to join us on Christmas, provided you prove that you want to be part of this family," we would be qualifying our love. Christ did not do that. He gave himself completely.

We cannot find any of this sort of negativity in Paul's gift to the Philippians. He doesn't care what they think about him. He doesn't care what loving them cost him. Nor does he demand anything from them for his love. He simply tells them that he loves them, and that God loves them, and that he prays that they will grow in the love of God every day of their lives.

What Paul writes to the Philippians, the Holy Spirit writes to us. We are loved by God who is working in our lives. How can we give anything more at Christmas than to let people know that they also are loved? They are loved by us, and they are loved by God. What greater gift can we give to others than our prayers that they may grow in the love of the Lord every day of their lives?

This is a wonderful time of year. More than any other time of year, we realize the great joy of Christianity: We live wrapped in the arms of our loving God, our God who calls us to join Him in loving

NOVENA TO BLESSED BASILE MOREAU:

Blessed Basile Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which Fr. John and the Brothers at Gilmour belong. We have two booklets with Novenas to Blessed Basile Moreau. One is used for a personal intention or healing; the other is used when praying for the intention or healing of someone other than yourself. The Novenas were composed by Father Thomas Looney, C.S.C. Many have received blessings and healings through the intercession of Blessed Basile Moreau, and now we want to extend this invitation to you and your family. Please see Father John and he will be glad to give you the booklets.



THE POWER OF LOVE:

The soul doesn't distinguish between good and bad as much as between what is nutritious and what isn't. Finding the right work is like discovering your own soul in the world. The heart that has truly loved never forgets, but as truly loves on to the close.

—St. Thomas More

THE GIFT THAT MATTERS:

We are in the heart of the gift purchasing season. I know some of you have finished your Christmas shopping, but the rest of us — probably most of us, still have a long way to go. Now, it occurs to me that there are various categories of gifts that we buy. First of all, we buy gifts for those people whom we love deeply and whom we want to express this love to on Christmas. People in our immediate families certainly fit into this category, as well as those who have enriched our lives with their presence. Then there are those people whom we don't see all that much but who we care enough about to want to give them a token of our love. And then there are those people whom we feel obligated to give something to — there is more obligation than desire here. I think we all have those people on our gift lists.

I had gift giving on my mind when I read St. Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi. Paul's words were a wonderful gift to the fledgling Christian community at Philippi. Here the great apostle Paul was writing to tell them how much he loved them and how much more — infinitely more — God loves them [Philippians 1:3-11].

Listen again to this message of Love: “My brothers and sisters: I thank God every time I remember you. In every prayer I utter, I rejoice as I pray for you. You have continually helped to promote the Gospel from the very first day until now. I am very confident of this much: that God who began a good work in you will carry it through to completion, right up until the day of Christ Jesus. All of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for each of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. My prayer is that your love may abound more and more, both in understanding and wealth of experience, so that with a clear conscience and blameless conduct, you may be able to discern and value the things that really matter. Until the day of Christ, may you be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.”

It is quite clear to me, that if we want to give someone a really great gift, what we should give them is what Paul gave the Philippians — the love of Christ.

A while ago one of our mothers sent me some thoughts that her daughter had collected when the girl was in high school. She's not in high school now, nor is she one of our young adults in college, but what she wrote at about 15 years old is full of truth and full of love. Some of the thoughts are from St. Francis of Assisi; others from other spiritual writers; and I think a few were her own thoughts. It makes no difference, she made them her thoughts. Here they are:

1. Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.
2. If God can work through me, he can work through anyone.
3. There are always two choices, two paths to take. One is easy. And it's only reward is that it is easy.
4. Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming it.
5. The more we know the better we forgive.
6. Whoever feels deeply, feels for all who live.

It is easy to be hard and cold towards people, even at Christmas time. We can give gifts that say nothing more than: “I am fulfilling an obligation.” We can stew in our anger and our upset over what has happened in the past. Or we can give the gift of the Lord's love. If we continue to love someone — even if that person has hurt us, even if that person does not respond to our love — we will give a lasting gift. Maybe the person will remain determined to refuse our love, but God's love is powerful. The person who has experienced the love of God cannot help but recognize it. This is how we are called to love. This is the gift we are called to give.

Perhaps, if we swallow our pride and allow ourselves to love others we can join the prophet Baruch

choose which one they will give him. I think you will be edified to see how that question reveals who they think Jesus is and what they think he would want from them. The question is not limited to any age level. All of us can ask it, and profit from it. For this question has the possibility of infiltrating the commercialism of our culture and refocusing the spiritual meaning of the season.

What does Jesus want from you this Christmas? There is no better question for us to carry through the Advent season than this. I know we are all busy in the upcoming weeks. There are only 19 days left before Christmas. And the last thing any of us want is another name on our shopping list. But I would encourage you not to leave Jesus' name off. For the gift that you buy for him might truly be the highlight of your holiday season. Whatever else you do, make sure that there is something for him under the tree this year. After all, Christmas is his birthday.

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga, which appear on the internet

BEING CALLED TO MORE:

As we enter this 2nd Week in Advent, we read from Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi — a Roman colony in northern Greece. Paul expresses his deep affection for his converts, who formed the first Christian church in Europe, and have, over time, established a reputation for fidelity to the Gospel of Christ. He goes on to express his confidence that God will help them to continue to grow as Christians until the day when Christ returns to complete his saving mission — the culminating event that Christians expected fairly soon. The Apostle then offers a prayer for the Philippians that “your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” [Philippians 1:3-11].

Let us reflect on Paul's advice “to discern what is of value.” We can hear this as an invitation to a personal prayerful self-examination — what is important to me, what attracts my attention, what moves me to action, what inspires me, what gives me hope, what prompts me to make personal sacrifices, what is at the top of my priority list, what determines my spending habits? Christian faith claims that there is a hierarchy of values that provides a theological framework for clarifying our values and moral perspectives for judging our values.

There are various ways of articulating fundamental Christian values. In general, biblical faith values love. God loves all human beings unconditionally. Divine love enlightens our minds and guides our decisions. Drawing on the Hebrew scriptures, Christ instructs us to love God wholeheartedly and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Furthermore, he taught the essential connection between love of God and love of neighbor. His followers understood the essential deceit in claiming to love God while hating neighbors. By the same token, loving our neighbors implies love of God. Christian love can provide an evaluative framework for individuals to reorder their values.

A hard-working advertising executive could decide to put more time and effort into improving her deteriorating marriage. A man who has been consumed with anger at his older sister who cheated him out of his proper share of their parents' estate could forgive her, and concentrate on becoming a more spiritually mature person. A happily married woman with three wonderful children who is constantly frustrated and hurt by her parents' criticism of her husband could stop seeking their approval and enjoy the great blessing of a loving husband. A retired business man who spent years accumulating wealth only to discover he was spiritually bankrupt could find genuine fulfillment by devoting himself and his money to empowering the poor and less fortunate.

What reordering of your values would be most beneficial for your spiritual development?

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



AN OPEN LETTER TO BRENT ON THE POWER OF WORDS:

Dear Brent,

My first year at Life Teen I was the awkward freshman in the corner of the room, trying to go unnoticed; so I understand if you didn't see me. I saw you, though. You were a confident senior and the center of attention. It seemed like everyone admired you, and with good reason. I would learn that you had a great heart, were a man of deep prayer, and were a skilled wrestler — all things I aspired to be in high school. Since we were in such a large youth group, we didn't have opportunities to interact all that much, until our annual winter retreat.

That whole weekend you gave me a living example of what it meant to be a man of prayer and integrity. I remember how you and your twin brother helped the Core Team with the retreat, and were an incredible witness to all of the young men there. You showed us that it was possible to be an athletic, smart, popular young man and still be a man after God's heart.

On Sunday morning, we had Eucharistic Adoration that continued through lunch. You and I were the last two teens that stayed in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and we left at the same time. I had just given my entire life over to Christ; I don't know what you were praying about, but both of us had tears in our eyes. We walked toward the dining hall together, and you looked at me and said: "You know, it is crazy — like, I barely know you. I see you here every week, but I don't know you. But right now, I know we are brothers. It feels like we are brothers in Christ."

And that was it. It was so empowering to me. I wasn't alone in my walk of faith — I had a brother. Even though we didn't know each other well I knew I was supported, I wasn't alone, and that I had a companion.

Brent, you need to know that those words changed me. I respected you tremendously, so to hear them coming from you left a lasting impact throughout high school and that continues today. As adults, we went our separate ways — I began to serve in ministry and you served our country as a Marine.

And then you taught me another lesson — that love gives everything, including life itself. I couldn't believe when I heard the news that an explosion had taken your life during *Operation Iraqi Freedom* in December, 2004.

I went to your funeral — everyone did. The church was overflowing with people you had impacted and loved. They shared stories of the great things you had done — as a soldier, a brother, a son, and a teenager. You were a living example of the positive power of words, encouragement, and presence. You were an example to young men at our parish to be men of faith, action, integrity, and courage.

I haven't forgotten it.

I still work in ministry, and I see the incredible potential that teenagers have to change lives, if they allow Christ to change theirs. I watch seniors in high school, like you, reach out to freshmen and mentor them. You would be so amazed at this generation.

Brent, I never had a chance to say it — but thank you.

Thank you for your words of encouragement, your brotherhood, your sacrifice, and the example you gave to me. I have no doubt that while we mourned your loss here, Christ welcomed you gladly into His kingdom. Pray for these young men and women, Brent. They are going to do great things.

Your brother in Christ,
Joel Stepanek

—written by Joe Stepanek, a Vice President of Life Teen

WISE WORDS:

Ask the experienced rather than the learned.

—Arab Proverb

LIFE TEEN and EDGE:

Our Life Teen and EDGE youth group is meeting in-person again. We will meet for an hour beginning at 11:30 AM following our 10 AM Sunday Mass in the Lennon Board Room. If you are unable to join us, there are many resources available for you on the Life Teen website — lifeteen.com. There are numerous blogs and videos for you to connect with. The Life Teen national office continues to release many new programs. **Please contact Father John for more information. And please join us each Sunday for our Mass at 10 AM — in person or live-streamed, and then come to our Life Teen/EDGE gathering after Mass.** And above all, let us continue to join each other in prayer. **Father John is available for you. Please contact him [cell: 216-570-9276].**

**READINGS FOR THE WEEK:**

Monday:	Isaiah 35:1-10, Luke 5:17-26
Tuesday:	Isaiah 40:1-11, Matthew 18:12-14
Wednesday:	Genesis 3:9-15,20, Ephesians 1:3-12, Luke 1:26-38
Thursday:	Isaiah 41:13-20, Matthew 11:11-15
Friday:	Isaiah 48:17-19, Matthew 11:16-19
Saturday:	Sirach 48:1-11, Matthew 17:9-13

3rd Week in Advent: Zephaniah 3:14-18, Philippians 4:4-7, Luke 3:10-18

SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — DECEMBER 18th:

Our Savior Lutheran Church, across the street from Gilmour, has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on **the third Saturday of each month**. They welcome volunteers. If you want to volunteer, they have instituted some **new procedures** because of the Coronavirus. **Thus they help pre-pack nonperishables in bags on Thursday evening beginning at 5 PM.** They continue this prepacking on Friday if needed. Check with Elina Gurney on this. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help putting items from the foodbank into the prepacked bags.** Only volunteers will be allowed in the Church building, so you will be protected against the virus. Clients will remain outside in their cars. **The food pantry is then open from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.**

Our Savior Lutheran's Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank.

Please let Elina Gurney know if you would like to help. You can do this through the chapel office [440-473-3560] or by emailing Elina Gurney at gurney.oh@gmail.com. In this critical time, this is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

ADVENT:

Advent invites us to a commitment to vigilance, looking beyond ourselves, expanding our mind and heart in order to open ourselves up to the needs of people, of brothers and sisters, and to the desire for a new world.

—Pope Francis