

CLOSING PRAYER:

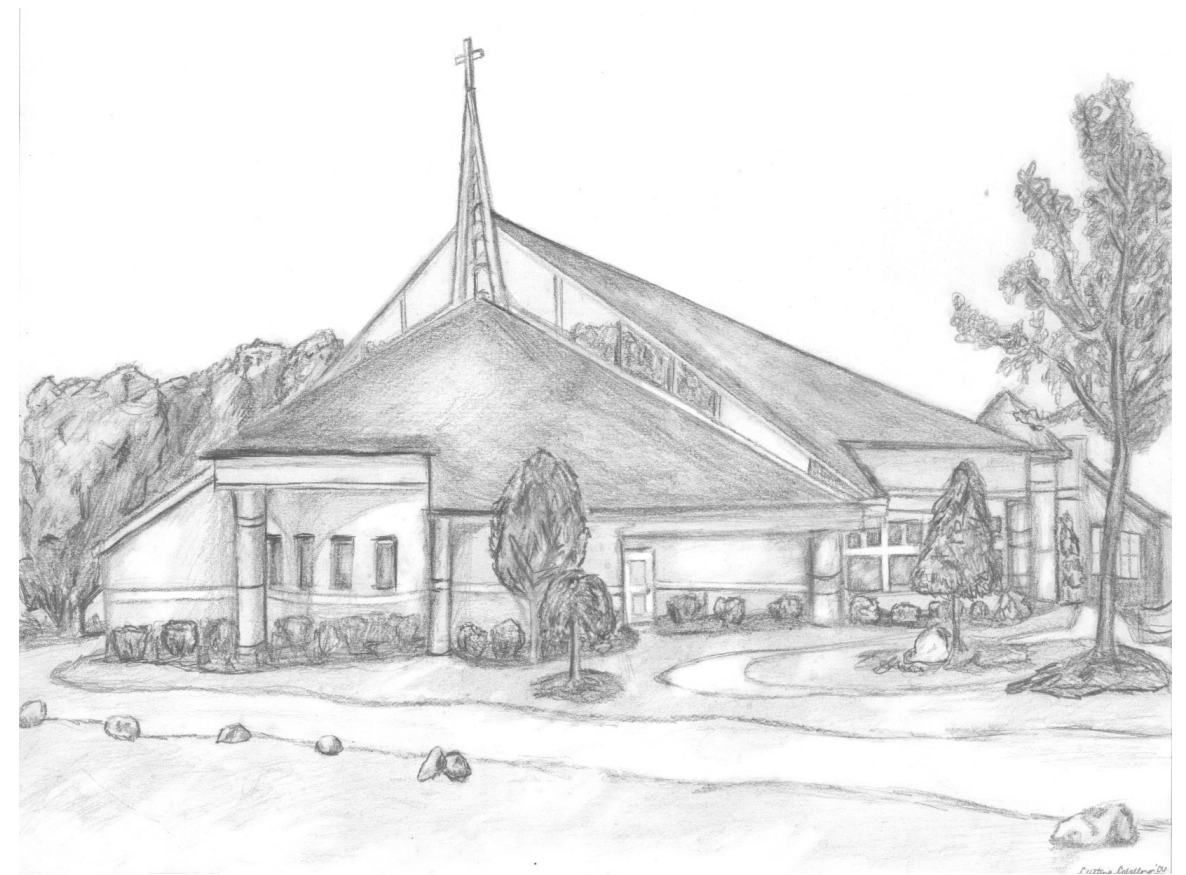
~ A Prayer for the second week in Advent ~

Lord Jesus,
Thank you for this special time together;
for many years
you prepared your people for your birth.
They longed for you to enter their world
with your healing
and redemptive presence.
Thank you for being with us,
for taking such good care of us,
and for letting us help
to prepare your way in our world.
Please keep our minds and hearts
open this week.
May we experience the warmth of love
and the openness of mind
to receive the truth
which your birth brings to the world.
Make us gentle and joyful
as we grow in your love.
May we work to make the world
a happier home
where all are welcome.
Amen.

CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.
phone: [440] 473-3560 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].

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.

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION — DEC. 9:

Sunday, December 8th, is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. But because the fast falls on the first Sunday of Advent, it is moved to Monday, December 9th. It REMAINS a holy day of obligation. This is an important feast day because Mary, under the title of her Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of the United States. This Feast is also at the heart of the Advent Season. We will not have a Vigil Mass on Sunday. We will have 3 Masses on Monday, December 9th — 9:00 AM [Lower School]; 10:25 AM [Middle School], and 5:30 PM. All Masses will take place in the chapel. We have much to pray for in our nation at this time. Please mark your calendars so that you will be able to join us for Mass on this important Feast Day.

**ADVENT PENANCE SERVICE:**

On Monday, December 16th, 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.

**THE GIVING TREE:**

Our Chapel Giving Tree will be up next weekend. We will have tags on the tree for items requested by Our Lady of Fatima Family Center, for the children & young people they serve. There will be a selection of toys and clothing for children from age 5 –12 years. Select a tag from the tree, purchase your gift, and bring it back to the Chapel UNWRAPPED, to place under the tree. Please attach your tag to your gift. Gifts need to be turned in by Monday, December 16th. Please call Patty at the Chapel Office [440-473-3560 or szaniszlop@gilmour.org] if you have any questions.

**“ADOPT A FAMILY”:**

For many years, Our Lady Chapel community has worked with St. Adalbert Parish in adopting families to help them celebrate the Christmas Season. St. Adalbert identifies families — most often single parent, below poverty-level families, in their school & parish. We are given the grade levels of the children & other family information. Since the pandemic, we have been limited to gift cards, but this year we are opening it up to gift cards or actual gifts.



So St. Adalbert has sent us their list of families whom they would like to serve this year. The need is greater than ever. In addition to gifts for family members, we also ask that you provide a Christmas meal for the family in the form of Gift Cards for Wal-Mart, Dave’s or Aldi [or purchase non-perishable items and place them in a basket].

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. Please call Patty at the Chapel Office [440-473-3560 or szaniszlop@gilmour.org] if you and your family would like to participate.

FULLNESS OF LIFE:

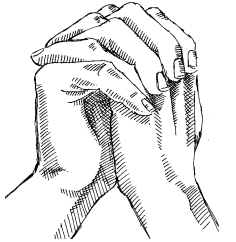
Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. —Melody Beattie

PRAYER REQUESTS:

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

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is seriously ill.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [*09], Rosa [*12] and Edwin [*17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For Debbie Langer, friend of Cindy Frimel, who was diagnosed with brain cancer.
- For Nada Kucmanic, who is seriously ill.
- For Josephine Fernando, who is seriously ill.
- For Father Ray Sutter, pastor emeritus of St. Matthias Parish, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Cathy Lough, friend of Cyndi Frimel, who is undergoing health struggles.
- For Dave & Elaine Tanaski, who are suffering with dementia and other health complications.
- For Nick Chiacchiarri, father of Mark Mark Chiacchiarri [*94], father-in-law of Michelle Chiacchiarri [*96], and grandfather of Aurelia [*28], and Olivia [*30] Chiacchiarri, who is recovering from open heart surgery.
- For Kip Apel, who is recovering from surgery.
- For Sabrina Kumar, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Margaret Thompson, friend of Joyce Toth, who is under the care of hospice.

**PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:**

- For George Klick, father of Linda Monitello, grandfather of Anthony [*17] and Angeline Monitello [*19] [anniversary]
- For Thomas Verdi, father of Gilmour Parent, Katie Impullitti, father-in-law of Nick Impullitti [*01], grandfather of Joey [*34], Jackson [*36], and Quinn [*39] Impullitti.
- For Peter Ducic
- For Patricia Smolik, grandmother of Faith Smolik [*22]
- For Arleen Turk, aunt of Upper School Science Teacher, Edward Turk, great aunt of Trinity [*22], Edward [*24] and Henry [*29] Turk.
- For Mary Chambers
- For Mary Grace Welch, grandmother of Holy Cross novice, James Welch
- For Joyce Balazs.
- For Nancy Schlotter, grandmother of Katelyn Schlotter [*18]
- For Chester Orlando, great uncle of Ashley [*26] and John [*28] Orlando.

A YOUNG ADULT GROUP:

The Young Adult group will be holding their next meeting at 11:45 AM on Sunday, December 1st in the Lennon Board Room. We will be making our Advent Wreaths, and then engaging in some discussion. Here is an opportunity to get together, share some time in faith, and also to support each other in life’s journey, as we continue to grow and become the people that God wants us to be. If you are interested and would like to be part of this new adventure, please join us at our next meeting, or contact Richard Jones, Stephanie Leonor, Joe Gurney, or Edwin Heryak. Of course, you can also contact Father John at the chapel if that would be easier for you. God bless you.



PRAYER REQUESTS:

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

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For an end to political polarization.
- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.
- For an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- For an end to violence as a means to resolve differences.
- 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.

LancerSGO — Back in 2024!

Gilmour Academy is once again participating in the State of Ohio *Scholarship Granting Organization* program. Ohio taxpayers who donate to the *LancerSGO* program may be eligible for a 100% tax credit on their State of Ohio income tax return for the year the contribution is made. *LancerSGO* donations are awarded as tuition assistance to Gilmour students.

Here’s how it works: The maximum credit amount is \$750 per individual; married couples that file a joint return can each claim this credit if both spouses make eligible donations [\$1,500 total]. Please note this is a non-refundable credit, which means that the amount of the credit cannot exceed the amount owed in state taxes. Just follow these three steps:

- STEP 1- Estimate your 2024 Ohio state tax liability.
- STEP 2- Make your donation to gilmour.org/sgo [designate GILMOUR ACADEMY].
- STEP 3- Claim your scholarship tax credit when you file your 2024 State of Ohio taxes.

Please visit gilmour.org/sgo to make an online contribution.

[PLEASE NOTE: This does not constitute income tax advice. Always consult with a tax professional for information on the impact of any charitable donation].

For more information, contact Ryan Ryzner at ryznerr@gilmour.org or (440) 473-8000 x4556.



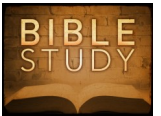
GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOURSELF:

It is good to remember that a part of you has always loved God. There is a part of you that has always said “yes”. There is a part of you that is Love itself — and that is what we must “fall into”, for it is already there. Once you move your identity to that level of deep inner contentment, you will realize that you are drawing upon a Life that is much larger than your own, and from a deeper abundance. Once you learn this, why would you ever again settle for scarcity in your life? — “I’m not enough!” “This is not enough!” “I do not have enough!” I am afraid this is the way culture trains you to think. It is a kind of learned helplessness. The Gospel message is just the opposite — inherent power. Thomas Merton said that the way we have structured our lives, we spend our whole life climbing up the ladder of supposed success, and when we get to the top of the ladder, we realize it is leaning against the wrong wall — and there is nothing at the top. To get back to the place of inherent abundance, you have to let go of all of the false agendas, unreal goals, and passing self-images. It is all about letting go. The spiritual life is more about “unlearning” than learning because the deepest you already knows [see 1 John 2:21].



NEXT BIBLE STUDY — THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19th:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Thursday, December 19th 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: The Jesse Tree

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 8: 2 nd Week in Advent	10:00 AM In-Person & Live Stream
Monday, December 9: Feast of the Immaculate Conception	10:20 AM 5:30 PM
Tuesday, December 10:	NO MASS
Wednesday, December 11:	1:15 PM
Thursday, December 12: Our Lady of Guadeloupe	NO MASS
Friday, December 13:	NO MASS
Saturday, December 14: 3 rd Week in Advent	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, December 15: 3 rd Week in Advent	10:00 AM In-Person & Live Stream

FAITH EDUCATION — DECEMBER and JANUARY DATES:

Faith Education is an important part of every person’s formation. Please make sure that you have not forgotten this important responsibility. Our Sessions go from 8:45—9:45 AM, on **Sunday mornings**, with the hope that our children would then **participate in our 10:00 AM Family Mass**. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility. **Meeting dates for December are: 8-15. For January: 12-26.**



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. This listing will begin with next week’s Bulletin.



REFLECTION ON THIS WEEK'S THEME:

Christmas music and Christmas sales remind us of everything we must do to get ready for the 25th of December — decorating, preparing food, buying gifts, and sending cards. The list seems endless. Likewise, we may also feel that, spiritually, we must get ready for Christmas — how are we observing Advent, how are we preparing to welcome Jesus, how are we waiting for the Incarnation?

The Scripture Readings for this 2nd Week in Advent remind us that the emphasis on what we are doing is misplaced. God is constantly inviting us into a deeper and more loving relationship. God takes the initiative in our relationship. And so, God has already done all the heavy lifting: “God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low” and “God is leading Israel in joy” [Baruch 5:1-9]. And quoting the words of Psalm 126, “The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.” Paul, too, reminds us that “that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it” [Philippians 1:3-11].

God has already done everything; God's graces have already been gift wrapped and delivered to us with a bow on top. During this second week of Advent, we are invited to let go of all our planning, and to let God work in us. Consider everything that God has already done in your life. Consider all the graces you've already received in your lifetime. Consider all the people who have already helped shape and form you into the person you are today. Just as John the Baptist helped prepare the way for Jesus, consider those people, events, and circumstances in your life that have already helped you prepare for Jesus.

The child of God is called to prepare with openness, simplicity, and truth. We are called to prepare for each celebration of the Eucharist in the same manner as we prepare for Jesus' first coming. We need a Savior, and that Savior comes now-and-now-and-now again. The emptiness of our outstretched hand when approaching our reception of the Eucharist is an “Advent Gesture” of hope and fulfillment.

Throughout 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. God — through the prophet — offers us a new song [Baruch 5:1-9]. The song is filled with hope, and Jerusalem is the center or image of recovery and restoration. The great city — remembered by those now in captivity as beautiful — is now reduced to destruction; but in the “new song”, it is pictured with new glorious dressing. This prophetic poem addresses Jerusalem, not only as a city, but more importantly as the people who are to return and be adorned themselves with the glory of God. The promised return to Jerusalem is also the return of God's faithful love for all God's holy and redeemed people. They have been remembered by God. The way will be made clear, as will the mercy and justice of God.

The prophet might have been standing in the sun too long, or under the influence of some strange spirit. There he is in the midst of exile, and he begins — like a cheerleader to expand what sounds like a dream. In reality it is the Word of God meant to begin the return. The prophet's words are an advance-advertising, alerting the people for the coming of salvation and the rebuilding of the Great City. The question would arise about whether the people will believe in the midst of their shame and gloom.

In Luke's Gospel, a main Advent character arrives on stage — John the Baptist [Luke 3:1-6]. After quite a lengthy historical setting, Luke presents John as appearing prophetically announcing the coming of “the salvation of God.” John, as did Baruch, speaks of valleys and hills being made level, and the

**THE BALL IS IN OUR HANDS:**

Centuries before Charles Darwin boarded the Beagle, Paul of Tarsus knew about evolution — not the kind Darwin discovered in the Galapagos Islands, but the type of evolution with which every Christian has always been familiar. Being a disciple of Jesus isn't a static experience — it's something which constantly changes and evolves. Those who are committed to imitate Jesus are continually on the road to becoming Jesus — not the historical Jesus, but the risen Jesus. Our goal is to evolve into the same new creation which he himself became on Easter Sunday morning.

Many of us continue to confuse resurrection with resuscitation. Instead of believing in the resurrected Jesus, we believe in the resuscitated Jesus. In resuscitation, we're simply brought back to life after being clinically dead. In those instances, we're still the same basic person we were before we died. If we died a woman, we're resuscitated as a woman; if we died a Democrat, we're resuscitated as a Democrat. We still like the same food, and have the same physical characteristics we possessed before death. Technically, Jesus didn't raise Jarius' daughter, the widow of Nain's son, and his friend Lazarus from the dead — he resuscitated them. The three not only came back to life as they were before their deaths — they all eventually died again.

When one is raised from the dead, one never dies again. Death isn't part of a new creation's makeup. Paul pointedly described such a new creation in Galatians 3. Once raised, someone is just as much a free person as a slave, as much a Gentile as a Jew, and as much a woman as a man. The limits which restricted us before death are obliterated in resurrection.

In Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi [1:3-11], Paul is speaking to people who have risen with Jesus and have committed themselves to evolve into a new creation — “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it. My prayer is 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, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus the Christ.”

Those who are evolving on those levels look at things from a completely different perspective. When, for instance, they hear the words of Baruch [5:1-9] reflecting on the eventual return of all “diaspora” Jews to Jerusalem, they hear about their own call to bring “the peace of justice” to the whole earth. And when they reflect on the beginning of the Baptizer's ministry, they logically look at it as preceding and prefiguring Jesus' own “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” — a baptism which had removed their sins by the simple fact it had transformed them into new creations. They no longer were the people who had committed those sins. Yet they also realized that the transformation which forgave their sins, and turned them into peacemakers, was an ongoing process.

When the greatest theological proponent of evolution — Pierre Teilhard de Chardin — was asked when he expected Jesus to return in the Parousia, he simply answered: “When all of us eventually become one in Christ.” And just how long did he expect that process to take? “At least a million years!”

Of course, if we who are the new creations still haven't started to imitate the risen Jesus by becoming one with those around us, we'll have to add a couple of years to that million. It's up to us when Jesus returns because it's up to us to become other Christ's.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, 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].



Within hours, they are in bed with each other, triggering a love-affair that leaves them both sacramentally scarred for the rest of their lives.

What the viewer of the movie or reader of this book is asked to believe is that something truly sublime has taken place — a masterpiece of love has been painted, and a noble thing worth more than life itself has just occurred. But can this be so? Can anyone paint a masterpiece in a couple of hours? Can a doctoral thesis be completed in two hours? Can sex with someone you met just two hours before be sublime?

To answer those questions, I suggest you watch another film which, ironically, was playing in theaters at nearly the same time. It's a version of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, and it tells the story of a young woman who has to carry a very painful tension — one that includes the same feelings found in *Bridges of Madison County* — for a long time. But unlike the characters in *Bridges of Madison County*, she doesn't move quickly to resolve it. Nobody is in bed with each other within a couple of hours. She carries the tension for a long time — years — and then finally when it is resolved, there is true sublimity. Why? Because something can only be sublime if first there has been some sublimation — and for more than two hours.

In essence, this expresses the meaning of Advent. For something to be sublime, there must first be sublimation; fasting is the necessary prelude to feasting; greatness of soul is contingent on first nobly carrying tension; great joy is not experienced if one is not first properly prepared; and what's truly divine can only appear after a certain kind of gestation. Advent is about proper waiting.

It should therefore not be confused with Lent. The crimson-purple of Advent is not the black-purple of Lent. The former symbolizes yearning and longing, the latter repentance. The spirituality of Advent is not about repentance, but about carrying tension without prematurely resolving it so that what's born in us and in our world does not short-circuit the fullness that comes from respecting love's rhythms.

What is the connection here? How does carrying tension help lead to the sublime? It does it by helping to produce the heat required for generativity. An image might be helpful here. John of the Cross, in his book, *The Living Flame of Love*, compares our pre-advent selves to green logs that have been thrown into a fire — the fire of love. Green logs, as we know, do not immediately burst into flame. Rather, being young and full of moisture, they sizzle for a long time before they reach kindling temperature, and can take into themselves the fire that is around them so as to participate in it. So, too, the rhythm of love — only the really mature can truly burst into flame within community. The rest of us are still too self-contained — too green, too selfish, too damp. We don't burst into flame when love surrounds us. Rather our dampness helps extinguish the communal flame.

What helps change this is precisely the tension in our lives. In carrying properly our unfulfilled desires, we sizzle and slowly let go of the dampness of selfishness. In carrying tension, we come to kindling temperature, and are made ready for love. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, as a scientist, noticed that sometimes when you put two chemicals into a test-tube, they do not automatically unite. They only merge at a higher temperature. They must first be heated to bring about unity. There's an entire anthropology and psychology of life in that image. In order to love, we must first be brought to a higher psychic temperature. What brings us there? — sizzling in tension, not resolving things prematurely, not sleeping with the bride before the wedding, not trying to have the complete symphony within two hours.

The sublime has to be waited for. Only when there is first enough heat will there be unity. To give birth to what's divine requires the slow patience of gestation. In short-hand, that's the algebra of Advent.

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



windy roads made straight.

John is preaching a baptism of repentance. Baptism itself is a purification ritual, and John is inviting people to be purified from the unholy hanging-on-to's in their lives. In his way, he is asking the people to check out what they are holding onto for their identities, and their securities. In short he is announcing that they will be asked to let go of the old and stale forms of relating with God, and prepare for something — a Some One who is coming to be held onto. The familiar is so comforting, and the Baptist is proclaiming the latest surprise in a long history of unusual revelations.

Jesus is not on stage yet, but the dramatic tension is rising. The people — and we as well — are called to trust the off-stageliness of the Promised One. The people who are in exile [Baruch], as well as the people listening to the Baptist [Luke], are all called to re-pent and return to our being held by the ever-loving and faithful God.

Our hearts have hands in a way, and we easily tend to reshape gifts into little gods, and those hands and grasp these gods for life-support. This is a wonderful time of year of preparing to give gifts, and receive as well. The people of Israel were in exile because they had forgotten the gift of their being God's holy people, and their city a holy place of God's presence. We need Advent to remember what's what and what's not. The "off-stage" voice of the One Who is to come is what will get things straight; it will fill in the empty valleys, and level our mountains of defensive fear. To allow this, we trust the call — the new of Jesus' coming. We need these Advent moments to check out our little heart-hands, and see if there is any room in those hands for our receiving the new Surprise.

Our Western World relaxes with the predictable — it loves to know causes and expects results. This makes trusting the unpredictable and surprising God a great leap. The leap by God from eternity to time-bound, flesh-bound finitude, is as unpredictable as God taking back the people of Jerusalem to their city of shame and glorifying it again with honor and fruitfulness. Advent can surprise us even more when we free ourselves from holding on to what we think we are entitled to — that is our security and control.

—taken from the writings of Fathers John Shea, S.J. and Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

EXPLANATION OF THE JUBILEE LOGO:

The logo shows four stylized figures, representing all of humanity, coming from the four corners of the earth. They embrace each other to indicate the solidarity and fraternity which should unite all peoples. The figure at the front is holding onto the cross. It is not only the sign of the faith which this lead figure embraces, but also of hope, which can never be abandoned, because we are always in need of hope, especially in our moments of greatest need. There are the rough waves under the figures, symbolizing the fact that life's pilgrimage does not always go smoothly in calm waters. Often the circumstances of daily life and events in the wider world require a greater call to hope. That's why we should pay special attention to the lower part of the cross which has been elongated and turned into the shape of an anchor which is let down into the waves. The anchor is well known as a symbol of hope. In maritime jargon the 'anchor of hope' refers to the reserve anchor used by vessels involved in emergency maneuvers to stabilize the ship during storms. It is worth noting that the image illustrates the pilgrim's journey not as an individual undertaking, but rather as something communal, marked by an increasing dynamism leading one ever closer to the cross. The cross in the logo is by no means static, but it is also dynamic. It bends down towards humanity, not leaving human beings alone, but stretching out to them to offer the certainty of its presence and the security of hope. At the bottom of the logo is the motto of the 2025 Jubilee Year: "Pilgrims of Hope", represented in green letters.



IT'S A MATTER OF CHOICE, NOT OF MOOD:

There is a hidden theme in the Liturgy for this 2nd Week in Advent that reverberates deep within us — a quality to the readings in this Mass that speaks to things at work deep within our hearts and souls. It is, I think, the vision that in a world filled with chaotic and terrible things there still exists the possibility of a good life, a life filled with justice, peace, goodness, wholesomeness, beauty and the things of God. Godliness is possible in a world where it seems to be almost impossible.

At a time when the Jews were being held in captivity far distant from their homeland — Jerusalem — we hear the Prophet Baruch proclaim: “Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children gathered from the east and West at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that they are remembered by God. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be leveled. The windings shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth.” [Baruch 5:1-9]. All of this applies to us as well. It tells us of all of the things that shall be and must be done in order that humankind can, with God’s good graces, make its way back to God.

Much of our religious life depends primarily upon our willingness — not on the willingness of God. God’s willingness is already available to us. He is already for us; we don’t need any new version of His willingness. What is needed is willingness on our parts. What is needed is a belief in the possible rather than our surrender to the seemingly impossible. If we believe that something is possible then it can come true. If, however, we believe that something is impossible, then it will remain impossible for us and never come true. Repentance and conversion is a process of attitudinal change so that what is seen through our eyes to be impossible is now seen through the eyes of God as possible.

John the Baptist went about the region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance which led to the forgiveness of sins, crying: “Make, ready the way of the Lord; clear him a straight path” [Luke 3:1-6]. Hearing John’s cry, people were able to fill the valleys of their dark despair with the light of hope. Their new-found converted faith was able to move away mountains of seeming impossibilities. A life that was filled with crookedness was straightened out and a life that appeared to be terribly rough was made smooth.



We too are beset with the valleys and mountains of moods. We build mountains out of the mole-hills in our moods. People we know don’t attend Mass because they don’t feel like it. Some stay away from Church because they feel that it’s filled with hypocrites. We let our moods, our feelings, and our emotions block the way of the Lord, and we refuse repentance and conversion toward a new attitude and a new version in life.

Willingness is the key to religion — it’s a matter of the will. It’s an act of choice; it’s like love. Love is something you choose to do. Affection is something you feel. Religion and seeking the Lord are something that you choose to do. Religious sentiment is something that you feel.

In our country, we are beset by a mood of gloom — an all-pervasive sense of corruption filters into our senses. People feel as if they are in an impossible situation — the lights are going out in a world they once knew. Justice is bought and sold. And we feel captives in our own freedoms. We feel powerless and weak. Amidst it all, there is the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Look to God and what is impossible can be changed into what is possible. Your motivations and the motivations of others can be changed. You can make a better world. Valleys of despair can be filled up. Mountains of materialism can be moved with enough faith; all that is crooked can be straightened out. A life that is terribly rough can be made smooth. If you believe with God, then with God all things are possible. Power can replace your powerlessness. It’s all a question, however, of the willingness of humankind — not the mood of

beyond our puny mindsets into a grand experience of living in unanticipated joy.

This week we will celebrate both the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Immaculate Conception reminds us that humanity is made for God. Guadalupe gives witness that Christianity belongs to every culture. Both feasts celebrate the human potential to collaborate with God’s ongoing offers of grace and thus change history.

Let’s celebrate this week with John, who believed in the joy of metanoia and with Mary who rejoiced when invited to live its promise.

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

EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS:

We are currently discerning a new group of Eucharistic Ministers who would undergo training within the next month. If you feel that the Lord is calling you to this ministry, we would be delighted to include you in that ministry here at Our Lady Chapel. Both adults and teens [must be a Senior in High School] are welcome to participate in this very special ministry. We are in need of ministers for both our Saturday evening and Sunday morning Masses. **Contact Father John or the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you feel called to this ministry.** We are always in need of Eucharistic Ministers.

**LIVING LIFE FULLY:**

To live fully in the present requires having an understanding of the big picture — a transcendent view, an eternal perspective. That infuses each and every moment with meaning and purpose, peace and joy. Instead of merely enjoying one empty pleasure after another, each day is full of new opportunities to grow and give.

—Teresa Tomeo

READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Monday: Genesis 3:9-20, Ephesians 1:3-12, Luke 1:26-38

Tuesday: Isaiah 40:1-11, Matthew 18:12-14

Wednesday: Isaiah 40:35-41, Matthew 11:28-30

Thursday: Zechariah 2:14-17, Revelation 11:19-12:10, Luke 1:26-38

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

ADVENT — PREPARING FOR THE SUBLIME:

A couple of years ago, Robert Waller published a book that because a runaway best seller, and an immensely popular movie. Entitled, *The Bridges of Madison County*, it stirred the romantic imagination in a way that few other stories have in recent times — especially as it was played out in its film version by Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep. The story runs this way: A photographer for *National Geographic* magazine is sent out to photograph a series of old bridges in Madison county. Lost, he stops at a farm house to ask for directions. As chance would have it, the man of the house has just left for a cattle show. His wife is home alone, and she and the photographer instantly sense a deep connection and fall violently in love. Karma, soul mates, mysticism — whatever — they experience a rare and powerful affinity.

A CALL TO METANOIA:

Years ago, I used to take care of my “Irish twin” nephews. One day, spring had finally triumphed over winter, the snow had disappeared and made way for that velvety-soft first growth of grass. One of the boys broke through the front door and did a belly dive to the ground yelling: “GRASS!” Once landed, he remained for about a minute, contemplating what looked like a fresh forest of green when observed at ground level. His joy and fascination were so complete that I had to get down and see what had captured his attention. Indeed, it was glorious!

I remembered that as I read the Scripture Readings for this 2nd Week in Advent. Both Baruch and Paul emphasize themes of joy. We don’t often hear from Baruch. He’s about as famous for being Jeremiah’s scribe as for the book that bears his name [see Jeremiah 32:12-16]. Today, we hear him echo Jeremiah’s promise of the restoration of the Chosen People [Baruch 5:1-9].

As in last week’s Scriptures, the people who hear God’s good news are the exiles who had languished in a foreign land for a little more than 40 years. That was plenty of time to lose their traditions and give up on the God of Israel. Except that they didn’t. Prophets helped them understand what was happening and inspired visions of joy and the hope and for what would come from the hand of God.

As Baruch pledges that God will help, he tells “daughter Jerusalem” to abandon mourning and misery and dress up like a bishop or high priest with a tall mitre displaying God’s own name. Baruch sums up his message with his last line: “God is leading you in joy, God’s glory brightens your way, and you are on the road to a community of justice and mercy.”

Luke’s Gospel brings us back to John the Baptist [Luke 3:1-6]. It might seem strange to talk about that ascetic, bellowing prophet as a herald of joy, but it’s true. First of all, Luke is careful to tell us when and where John lived. He told his readers that John was a real person who had lived in the desert in reasonably recent history.

When Luke says: “The word of God came to John,” Luke indicates that Earth was being permeated by heaven. John’s time was no ordinary time; just as in the days when God led the people by divine light, John and friends lived in what the Scriptures call a “Kairos” — an opportune time, a time when heaven and Earth are in synch, a time when something entirely new can happen. Recall that we pray this each time we say the Lord’s Prayer — “on earth as it is in heaven.”

What word of God, what “Kairos” time did John talk about? First of all, he announced the forgiveness of sin. The past had no more hold on people. No one need be defined by where they had been, but by where they were going.

John invited others to assume a new mindset — “metanoia”, translated here as “repentance.” In Greek, metanoia comes from the combination of words meaning “beyond” and “mind”. Metanoia is not as simple as repentance. Metanoia transforms our minds and spirituality, our social awareness, our world vision, and our relationships. Metanoia is an ongoing process of being willingly captivated by the possibilities God holds out for the world. Flattening mountains and straightening roads are minutiae in comparison with the promise — “All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” They will see it in those who are living metanoia.

We need to remember that we do not choose metanoia — it is a grace, an offer we can accept or refuse. Paul says this when he writes to the Church at Philippi with his promise: “The One who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus” [Philippians 1:3-11]. God inspires metanoia, God continues working within and among us to “complete” it.

Metanoia was the experience that Mary had in the Annunciation, the same grace that led disciples to leave everything behind to follow Jesus. Metanoia involves the sacrifice of setting off on an enticing adventure that colors and reevaluates everything else in our lives. It becomes a communal adventure, joining people together in joyful anticipation, in action and in union with God. Metanoia propels us

humankind.

Repentance and conversion are conscious acts of our wills. They are free choices made with deliberation. They are not religious feelings or moods. They are not nice, warm, glowing, mystical feelings which come upon us before flickering candles in our churches. Repentance and conversion are conscious will-acts made in the cold light of reality and in the hard choices of our everyday lives. To separate religion and religious choices and values from our day-to-day choices is to remove religion from reality. Repentance and conversion are made out in the open, not in private.

“John went about the entire region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance which led to the forgiveness of sins, crying: ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path’”. I wonder how many of us really believe in the forgiveness of sins? How many really believe in confession, repentance, and conversion? I daresay that, if hard put, some would assert that we don’t need to be converted, that we’re on the way to salvation, and that forgiveness of sins is only for those who are weak. Forgiveness of sins? “Oh, that’s just old Catholic Church stuff,” some say.

Far too many of us live in a schizophrenic value world. Far too many of us believe that our society is in bad shape while at the same time asserting that our personal lives are in good shape. Far too many are quick to point out that others need conversion and repentance, and yet they themselves need not confess their sins and repent. My friends, we will not be able to sustain such a schizophrenic and sick culture very much longer. Living with such split vision is not living at all.

It is, after all, a question of vision. The difference between a Christian and a good secular humanist is not a matter of differing behavior patterns. Being nice and kind and good and behaving well will not distinguish the Christian from the secular humanist. What does distinguish between them is their vision of life, their vision of its purposefulness and its finality. The Christian seeks the power and the possibilities of God. The humanist is left with the resources of humankind. The Christian stands with John the Baptist and says: “After every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be leveled... after the windings shall be made straight and the rough ways smoothed, then all mankind shall see the salvation of God.”

Are we willing to take a look? To acquire that vision? It’s all a matter of choosing. It’s never just a matter of feeling like it. It’s all a matter of conversion and repentance. It’s not up to God; it’s up to us.

—taken from the writings of Father Charles Irvin, which appear on the internet.

SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — DECEMBER 21st:

Our Savior Lutheran Church — across the street from the Chapel — has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on **the third Saturday of each month**. They welcome volunteers. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help unloading the trailers and setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry serves clients 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 join us for a great experience.

Please let us know in the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you would like more information or if you would like to help. This is a wonderful way to serve others. Please consider this opportunity.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE :

To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek Him the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest human achievement.

—St. Augustine



LIVE ADVENT:

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 seventeen days, we shall salute the feast when heaven came to earth as a Child. As a fitting preparation for that feast — during this second week of Advent — why don’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 this very thing. She makes barely above a minimum wage at her job. Her employer gives her neither medical coverage, nor retirement pension. Yet, despite my words of caution, she mailed a check for \$200 to the Red Cross for the victims of hurricane Helene. 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 [25:34-37] as a yardstick, I wager Jesus will never forget it. And as Jesus promises in Matthew 19:29, He will return the gift to her a thousand-fold. The Master will not be outdone in generosity.

Certainly the monk of the opening story would say to that valiant woman: “While the hurricane damage 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. This woman 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 tells us in his Gospel that John went about the whole Jordan district preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins [Luke 3:1-6]. We like to think that the Baptizer was speaking to hardened sinners. But, as William Bausch points out, John was doing nothing of the sort. The record shows that he was preaching not to criminals, but to the Pharisees, Scribes, and Publicans — these were, as we like to say, good church-going folk.

In a word, John was denouncing people who are stand-ins for our own selves. Bausch’s insight [Baruch 5:1-9] brings us up short, for most of us privately look 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 [1:7-8], the Baptizer is on the record saying to the same audience as well as ourselves: “You vipers’ brood! Prove your repentance by the fruit that it bears.” Certainly one of the few he might exempt from his indictment would be the woman mentioned above who gave the \$200 to the hurricane’s victims. But the rest of us could expect to receive a hot tongue, and a cold shoulder from him. John the Baptizer is certainly no man to mess around with. John — our decidedly unamused mentor for this season — demands for us to “prove our repentance by the fruit that it bears.”

William Bausch offers some suggestions as to how we might accommodate the Baptizer. “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. Tithe — 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.”

Sally Koch reminds us that great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day. It takes only a minute to be kind, but the prophet reminds us the end result can remain forever and a day.

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



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.” Perhaps, if we set our anger aside, we can join John the Baptist in preparing the way for the Lord into someone’s heart.

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. **God’s 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 to just allow God to love through us. But we are not important — He is.

The Love of God 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. 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 — necessitates a heavy cost.

Finally, **God’s love is complete.** We can’t love partially or with conditions. We compromise our efforts to give the love of the Lord when we decide to qualify our love — 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 can’t 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 — 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 in wrapped in the arms of our loving God — our God who calls us to join Him in loving His people.

—taken from the writings for Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino, which appear on the internet.

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.

**WEEKLY OFFERING:**

Baskets are located on the pillars just inside the center door when you enter the chapel. Please place your offering in the basket. Baskets will not be passed during the offertory time. Your offering will help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, you can request a printout of your offerings for the year to submit to the IRS. God bless you.

Total Offerings: Saturday [11/30/24] ————— \$ 240.00
Total Offerings: Saturday [12/1/24] ————— \$ 521.00

THE GIFT THAT MATTERS:

We are in the heart of the gift purchasing season. I know some of you finished your Christmas shopping on Black Friday, 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 to 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 to whom we feel obligated to give something. There is more obligation than desire here. I think we all have those people on our gift lists.

It's easy to think of gift-giving when your look at the opening part of Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi [1:3-11]. Paul's words were a wonderful gift to a fledgling Christian community — Paul writes to tell how much he loves them, and how much more — infinitely more — God loves them. Reflect with these words that Paul writes — “Brothers and sisters: I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And 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, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.”

If you want to give someone a really great gift, then give 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 — and she has even moved beyond college — but what she wrote when she was 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 some are her own thoughts. It makes no difference, she made them her thoughts:

- Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.
- If God can work through me, he can work through anyone.
- There are always two choices, two paths to take. One is easy. And it's only reward is that it is easy.
- Although the world is full of suffering it is also full of the overcoming it.
- The more we know, the better we forgive. 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 will experience the joy that the prophet Baruch speaks about [Baruch 5:1-9]. He spoke to the Jews who were in exile in Babylon.

**THE SOFTER VOICE OF ADVENT:**

John the Baptist is the voice of Advent. We hear him in Luke's Gospel today crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord [Luke 3:1-6]. John's message is cosmic and powerful, and it is a message of hope. But the voice of John is not the only voice of Advent. There are other quieter strains that echo throughout this season, and I think it would serve us well today to consider one of them.

The voice to which I refer is the voice of Paul. If John speaks as a prophet, Paul speaks as a pastor. If John challenges his hearers to prepare for the coming of the Lord, Paul encourages his hearers to trust that God will be faithful. The particular line which I have in mind is one of my favorites in all of the scriptures. Paul says to the Philippians: “God who has begun the good work among you will bring it to completion” [Philippians 1:3-11]. Paul is saying is that when God begins something, God finishes it. God does not love us and then decide to abandon us. God does not bless us and then decide to change direction. Both God's plan and God's intention for us are constant. How we need to hear this admonishment of Paul! How we need to believe that Paul's words are true. Because if we could believe those words, we could live with greater confidence, we could live in greater peace.

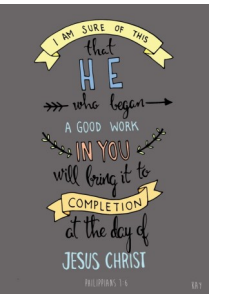
What are the things about which we worry? What are the things that disturb our peace? Are they not fears about what the future might bring, what we will have to deal with in the days ahead? We worry about our children and our grandchildren. Will they find a good job? Will they discover someone who will really love them and with whom they can build a happy life? Will they win the battle against addiction and all the other temptations that are present in society? We cannot see what is coming, we cannot control the future. So we worry, and our heart churns within us. Paul says: “What are you thinking? Who is it that gave you that child or that grandchild? Was not his or her life a creation of God? Is it not a gift from God? Why would God create a life and then walk away from it? Why would God give you that sign of love and then abandon it? No,” Paul says, “that is not the way God is. God who has begun the good work among you will bring it to completion.”

We worry about what we will become — what we will do when we get out of school? Will we find a job which we enjoy? Will we find someone with whom we can share our life? Will we be able to be a good mother or father? We do not know how the future will play out. We cannot control it. So we worry. Paul says: “Don't go there. Where do you think your life comes from? Where do you think your dreams and desires originate? What is the origin of your health and your energy? Do not all these things come from a God who has made you and loves you? Would God so bless you with life and all of these dreams and aspirations and then decide it is a mistake? Will God who has shown you such love forget you when you have to face the future? No,” says Paul, “God who has begun the good work within you will bring it to completion.”

We worry about growing old; we worry about losing our energy, losing our memory facing the inevitable battles with sickness, watching our senses deteriorate. We dread the upcoming struggle with death — a struggle none of us can win. Because we cannot control the future, because we do not know the particular twists and turns by which this aging process will unfold, we worry. Gradually we can lose enthusiasm for life and the hope of the future. Paul says: “What are you thinking? Where do you think your life came from? The blessings you have in your life — your family, your friends, your achievements, all the opportunities you never thought would be yours — where do you think those came from? Are all these things the result of your own cleverness and industry? Could all these blessings that so surround you be the result of your own wisdom and effectiveness? All of these things come from a God who has blessed you time and again. Now why would God who so loves you forget you? Why would God who gave you so much leave you out in the desert to die? No,” says Paul, “God who has begun the good work within you will bring it to completion.”

John calls out in the wilderness: “The kingdom of God is coming!” Paul whispers in our hearts: “God will always be faithful.” If we can hear the voice of John, we must also believe the words of Paul. God does not begin something and then give up. What is begun will be finished. God has made us and God has blessed us. That good work will not be abandoned. It will be brought to completion.

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



ADVENT — HISTORY AND NOW:

Although we would expect the liturgy during this Advent time to be pointing towards the birth of Christ — and so to the city of Bethlehem — it actually points us not to Bethlehem, but to Jerusalem. The prophet, Baruch gives us a beautiful poem about the restoration of the people of Israel to Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon Baruch [5:1-9]. The idea of Jerusalem gazing towards the east in anticipation of the return of the people from exile is truly marvelous, and it fits in perfectly with the idea of the Church watching and waiting for the second coming of Christ.

This theme of waiting for Christ is also the focus of Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi, where Paul urges the community to increase their love for each other so that they will be ready to meet Christ when he comes in glory [Philippians 1:3-11].

And finally, Luke's Gospel anticipates the coming of Jesus with the appearance of John the Baptist [Luke 3:1-6]. Luke is very careful to locate John in both secular history and salvation history. Luke places John in secular history — he is very precise about the secular dates and gives all the important persons, both major and minor, as reference points as one did in those days to make sure that there was no confusion as to who we are talking about.

Luke also locates John in salvation history. John is presented to us as the final prophet of the Old Testament — the one foretold by Isaiah as “the voice crying in the wilderness”. Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke is not concerned with John's dietary habits — “locusts and wild honey” — or how he dressed — in camel's skin — Luke solely focuses on John's preaching of repentance. Neither does Luke tell us very much about John's ministry of baptism. It gets a mention, but only in passing — even Jesus' baptism is almost as an afterthought in the gospel of Luke.

Once Jesus is firmly on the scene, John does not make another appearance in Luke's Gospel — John bows out. Thus, for Luke, John is the last and most important of the Old Testament prophets. His task is to announce the impending arrival of Jesus. Quoting Isaiah, John proclaims: “All humankind shall see the salvation of our God” —in other words: “Salvation is at hand, Jesus is here, repent and get ready.”

So, although we are in our preparation for Christmas and Christ's first coming, we are directed also to his second coming as judge and Savior, and the end of time. Yes, during Advent, we look to Bethlehem, but more importantly, we look also to Jerusalem — to Jerusalem as the place where our salvation was brought about on the hill of Calvary, and out of the tomb in the hillside; but also to Jerusalem — the heavenly city — the fulfillment of all that we have longed for.

It is important for us to always remember that there are historical and spiritual facts that make up the story of our salvation. The events leading to our salvation take place in specific places and at certain times and particular persons are involved — Abraham, Moses, David, Mary, John the Baptist, etc.

The preoccupation with dates and times and places is important — “in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea” and “John went through the whole Jordan district.” The facts are important because we are talking about actual events that happened in historical time and in a particular place. God didn't create humankind and then leave us alone to get on with things. No, God intervened. He intervened in history. He intervened with Noah; He intervened with Abraham; He intervened with Moses; He intervened with David, with Mary and with John the Baptist. All these interventions were part of the greatest intervention of all — the sending of Jesus, his Son, into our world to bring us salvation. Although all of this might sound obvious, it is all too easy to let go of it — it is all too easy to fail to recognize just what has happened.

And it is much easier — and so many people do it — to slip into thinking that we don't actually

need to be saved. It is easy to believe that what we have been talking about are nice Bible stories suitable for children or naïve people, but whatever we need to do we can do for ourselves. It is all too easy to hear one's self thinking that if there is a God, and I come before Him for judgment, He will surely give me top marks. After all, none of the sins I've committed has been very serious; and even the bad ones are perfectly explainable. Surely God will give me nine out of ten without me having to trouble myself at all.

This is very easy to do — and we all do it frequently, if not daily. Think of the number of times that you have said: “God will understand” when making a decision. And that's the problem — we really do think that God will understand — instead of the other way around — we need to understand God. But it only goes to show how easy it is to excuse oneself, to be the judge in your own case, to avoid thinking that you are in sin.

The problem is that even when we do acknowledge our “few” sins, we also think that we can win our own salvation; we think we can accomplish all that is important in life by ourselves. We think that, on the whole, we are quite good, and that God would be better off busying himself with the bad people down the road.

The only problem is — that isn't what God thinks. He thinks you and I certainly do need some intervention. He thinks that the only thing that will save us is for us to accept the teaching of his Son. He thinks that we had better shape up. He thinks that we had better learn a few things.

His lessons are not harsh — far from it. But we had better learn them. And what is it that he tells us? — that we need to experience more deeply the love of God; that we need to acknowledge our dependence on him; that we need to turn to him for moments of intimate communion all through the day; that we need to come together with other Christians more and more often to celebrate the sacraments — the channels of his love “par excellence”. He tells us that we need to get to know Jesus, and realize the depth of the salvation he won for us.

The first lesson of the season of Advent is that God actually has intervened in human history. The second lesson of Advent is that God hasn't stopped intervening in human history — and He hasn't stopped intervening in the history of the human beings that are you and me — and that we ought to realize this and co-operate with his plans for us.

There are past, present and future dimensions to this. We know Christ came on that first Christmas day, and we know he will come at the end of time. But what we often fail to acknowledge is that he is coming into our lives right now. As it says in Scripture: “today is the day of salvation” [2 Corinthians 6:2].

And just as God intervened in the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, Mary, John the Baptist, so he is intervening in our lives. Your presence in this town, and in this chapel, and in this family, and in this moment, is not by any accident — it is in the eternal plan of God.

Advent is about expectation — about expecting the first and second comings of Christ. One is far in the past, and the other is far in the future — or so we tend to hope — but what about the here and now? Should we not expect Christ to come into our hearts right now?

Yes, of course we should! So let us echo the prayer of the early Church and make it our own — “Come, Lord Jesus, come”. Yes, Lord, come into our hearts right this minute, come and bring us your healing and salvation. Come and fill us with your joy and hope. Come into our lives and make us perfect followers of your word. Come and save us, come and be with us. And in the words of Paul: “Come Lord and increase our love, help us to be pure and blameless, help us to reach your perfect goodness so we may give glory and praise to God” [Philippians 1:3-11].

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

PRAYER:

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.

— St. Therese of Lisieux

