



Bringing Home the Word +

First Sunday of Advent (A)
December 1, 2019

Get Ready to Encounter Jesus

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Staying awake is a frequent and important Advent theme. Jesus mentions being awake in today's Gospel and again in Matthew 25:13 and 26:38. In Jesus' time on earth, it was common to have a servant posted at the door to protect you through the night and to watch over the house in your absence.

We are to ready ourselves to encounter Jesus at our personal judgment and again in the Final Judgment. Like a

watchman who stands over the city or a guard who protects the entry gate, we are to be vigilant, "for you do not know on which day your Lord will come."

Begin your Advent preparations by receiving Christ in the Eucharist, "for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). Jesus is not far away but very near. He enters our hearts in the form of bread and wine. Are you ready, or will he catch you by surprise? +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 2:1-5

They shall beat their swords into plowshares / and their spears into pruning hooks.

Romans 13:11-14

Let us then throw off the works of darkness [and] put on the armor of light.

Matthew 24:37-44

[Jesus said,] "So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."



*Like a watchman
who stands over the city
or a guard who
protects the entry gate,
we are to be vigilant.*



A Word from Pope Francis

We can ask ourselves: Is this sacrament fulfilled in me? More concretely: Do I just like to be served at the Lord's table or do I get up to serve like the Lord?... And as a Church let us ask ourselves: After receiving Communion many times, have we become people of communion?

—Eucharistic concelebration,
April 20, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A graphic element for the Reflection Questions section, featuring the word "QUESTIONS" in a stylized, mirrored font within a dark rectangular box, with the word "REFLECTION" below it.

- What can I do to prepare myself and my family for Christ's coming on Christmas?
- How do I prepare for Christ's coming in the Eucharist, and at other times in my life?

Living the Liturgical Year

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

Our Catholic identity is shaped by the way we read the Bible. And we read Scripture in a special way: It's called the liturgical year, with today being the first Sunday of that new year.

This annual cycle of feasts and seasons is not primarily about decorations (when to display the poinsettias and the lilies). Nor is it simply a way to add variety to the Mass so that it isn't repetitive (some days the priest wears green, other days, purple). The liturgical year is about much more all-inclusive issues. The liturgical year enables us to celebrate the whole mystery of Christ.

The Bible is our living contact with the mystery of Christ. The way we Catholics officially read Scripture creates our liturgical year. For example, the day on which we read the resurrection account becomes Easter. The day when we proclaim Christ's birth becomes Christmas Day.

The original, most important Catholic feast day is Sunday—the Lord's day. Jews find identity in Sabbath rest; Muslims, in Jumu'ah, the Friday prayer. We Catholics find identity in the Sunday eucharistic assembly. The Bible emphasizes the bond between the Lord's day and the Lord's Supper. While our contemporary understanding of Sunday has incorporated elements of Sabbath



rest, Sunday retains its original meaning as a day of assembly. On the Lord's day we gather with fellow Catholics and celebrate his paschal victory, the Eucharist.

Biblical Tradition

At Mass on Sundays and holy days during years called A, B, and C, the Church proclaims some

500 passages of the Bible from each book of the Old and New Testaments. The Church year enables us to hear from all the books of Scripture.

There are two ways in which the Church decides which passages of the Bible to proclaim. Imagine one of your favorite novels, books of poetry, or inspirational essays. You might read from beginning to end. Or, especially after you are familiar with the book, you might pick out certain passages that correspond to a situation you are experiencing.

The Church reads the Bible in both of these ways. On some Sundays the Church selects the passages based on the theme. This manner of selection creates the liturgical seasons of Easter and Christmas. On the other Sundays the Church reads various books of the Bible from beginning to end.

The liturgy enables us to pass from our past-present-future timeframe to enter into God's time of salvation so that the grace and mystery proclaimed in the

Scripture readings are made present. An old spiritual asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Yes, I was there! Or, more accurately, I am there now! At the Easter Vigil we sing, "This is the night when Jesus Christ rose triumphant from the grave." We don't sing, "We remember the night long ago when...." We sing, "This is the night!"

Jesus: Alive Again

We Catholics today are not disappointed because all the wonderful events of Christ's life happened long ago. The liturgical year enables us to be present to those events now. The liturgical year makes the mysteries of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection present in a mysterious way so that Christians of every generation can come into contact with them and be enriched by their graces.

No single celebration can do justice to the mystery of Christ. The liturgical year enables us to experience the events of Christ in a Catholic, all-embracing way so that we can enter into the mysteries and be enriched by God's saving love. +

PRAYER

Lord, give me the courage to disarm my heart from the feelings of anger, resentment, and revenge that foster so much pain and division in my life. Instill in me a spirit of gratitude and joy that I may become your instrument of peace and reconciliation whenever conflicts arise.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 2–7

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Is 4:2–6 / Mt 8:5–11

Tuesday, St. Francis Xavier:
Is 11:1–10 / Lk 10:21–24

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Is 25:6–10a / Mt 15:29–37

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Is 26:1–6 / Mt 7:21, 24–27

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Is 29:17–24 / Mt 9:27–31

Saturday, St. Ambrose:
Is 30:19–21, 23–26 / Mt 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6–8



Bringing Home the Word +

Second Sunday of Advent (A)
December 8, 2019

Preparing Ourselves

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

John the Baptist was a prophet who fully embraced his mission in Israel. He was so good at delivering his message that some people thought he was the Messiah. He preached with authority, and people traveled from all over Judea to hear his words.

His mission was to prepare the way, but not just for any man. As any pope, king, or president announces his intentions in advance so preparations can be made, John was sent to announce the coming of the Son of God and to tell the people how to prepare.

Jesus came into the world when he

was born in Bethlehem and walked the earth. He will come again at the end of time. And—importantly—he comes to us whenever we invite him in and always in the sacraments and liturgy. Preparing for his arrival is not a matter of fixing roads, painting houses, or organizing a parade. Our king desires a transformed spirit: “Not by appearance shall he judge (Isaiah 11:3). John warns that we cannot hide behind the faith of another; each one of us needs to show the fruits of our own faith. Yet we need not fear, for he who comes has every intention of saving us. He appears as Lord and invites us to accept his kingdom. He is also a teacher who shows us the way to the Father. Above all he is a friend who forgives unconditionally and accepts our sincere yet feeble efforts.

This week, reflect on the life of John the Baptist, heed his words, and imitate him: cry out for repentance, cleanse others of their sins, and prepare the way to God. +

John warns that we cannot hide behind another’s faith; we need to show the fruits of our own faith.

A Word from Pope Francis

It is the mystery of Christ’s flesh: one doesn’t understand love for thy neighbor, one doesn’t understand love for thy brother if one doesn’t understand this mystery of Incarnation. I love my brother because he too is Christ, is Christlike, is the flesh of Christ.

—Visit to Pentecostal Church of Reconciliation, July 28, 2014



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 11:1–10

He shall judge the poor with justice, and decide fairly for the land’s afflicted.

Romans 15:4–9

Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Matthew 3:1–12

[John the Baptist said,] “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does John the Baptist’s call to repentance challenge me?
- Where do I need to ask for God’s mercy?

A Christian Perspective on Time

By Jim and Susan Vogt

Have you ever: ...texted a coworker during the family meal? ...tried to drive while putting on makeup? ...raced out of the house and then remembered you forgot to turn off the iron? These are symptoms of our hurried lives.

The Bible passage Susan recalls when

tempted to pack too much into too little time is Jesus' "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part" (Luke 10:41–42). Mary had chosen presence—to sit with Jesus and attend to him.

The irony is the Church calendar asks us to slow down during Advent—the very time that cultural demands press us to hurry up and crowd more into Christmastime. Advent should be calm and reflective, not hectic and stressful. Jesus makes it clear that attentiveness to the person next to us always trumps Martha's to-do list.

So how do we sort it all out when our lives are filled with the expectation to do more and do it faster? Let's look at time through the prisms of saving, wasting, and ignoring.

Saving Time

Saving time sounds virtuous, especially when it frees us from mundane chores



in order to spend quality time with our family. Some examples: multitasking allows us to fold laundry while watching TV, catch up on kids' news while driving them to school, listen to a podcast while exercising. Timesaving technology allows us to skip commercials when watching a recorded TV

program or shorten time-consuming chores by using home appliances.

These things are good when they free us to do more important tasks, especially those that focus on those around us. But doing tasks faster and more efficiently can be like a hamster running around a wheel. Sometimes we don't really get anywhere.

Wasting Time

Wasting time sounds inherently bad, but consider these ways that it can enhance your life:

Time for reflection, prayer, or savoring a sunset may seem unproductive unless you realize that spending time with God isn't a waste. These times keep us centered on what is important, calming our weary and stressed-out spirits.

Sabbath time. Sunday as a day of rest has become an American anomaly. Too often, Sunday is a catchup day, filled with shopping and household chores. At times, accomplishing these tasks reduces

stress. But a day of rest with focus on God and family refreshes our spirits, pulling us back into what's important.

Recreation. Yes, some people fritter away hours before the TV, at parties, or playing sports. Recreation, however, isn't only fun, but it's also a way to build marriage, parenting, and friendship bonds. Besides, it can double as networking and relationship time, which puts it in the category of multitasking.

Ignoring Time

Is ignoring time irresponsible? There are deadlines to meet, kids to feed, a dish to make for the potluck. But sometimes it's healthy to ignore time. Children often prompt us to ignore time when they interrupt us. Think of it as Jesus breaking into your life and saying, "Pay attention to me. I'm only here for a short time."

Which brings us back to Advent—the season of waiting. Sometimes it's good for the soul to wait—in line, for a birthday, for marriage, for Christmas. It's a pause that gives us a chance to take a deep breath and remember what's really important, to listen to Christ speaking in the silence. +



Lord, you have created me for goodness, love, compassion, and peace. Help me to make use of the gifts you have given me to make a difference where I am at this moment of my life.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 9–14

Monday, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Gn 3:9–15, 20 / Eph 1:3–6, 11–12 / Lk 1:26–38


Tuesday, Advent Weekday: Is 40:1–11 / Mt 18:12–14

Wednesday, Advent Weekday: Is 40:25–31 / Mt 11:28–30

Thursday, Our Lady of Guadalupe: Zec 2:14–17 or Rv 11:19a, 12:1–6a, 10ab / Lk 1:26–38 or Lk 1:39–47

Friday, St. Lucy: Is 48:17–19 / Mt 11:16–19

Saturday, St. John of the Cross: Sir 48:1–4, 9–11 / Mt 17:9a, 10–13

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Bringing Home the Word +

Third Sunday of Advent (A)
December 15, 2019

Be Strong and Fear Not

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

John came to announce a savior, but in his difficult imprisonment, he and his disciples began to wonder if the one he announced was truly the one. Even after months spent in the desert preparing himself as well as preaching conversion, John's heart is tempted to doubt. Yes, even saints struggle. It is easy to doubt when difficulty comes our way and life doesn't treat us as we think we deserve.

John sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah. It does us much good to bring our concerns and doubts to Jesus directly! Jesus responds as he often does. Rather than just answer, "I am

he"—which could easily be considered an empty claim—he invites them to look at the evidence. He fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5: "The eyes of the blind shall see, / and the ears of the deaf be opened; the poor shall find a new reason to hope.

Jesus' mission is to change lives and to save us from the blindness of egoism, the deafness of a hardened heart, and the closed mind that cannot accept the other. He is the savior of those who let themselves be saved.

Saint James' exhortation could have been meant for John the Baptist or anyone who finds it hard to persevere in trusting and following Jesus: "You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8). +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

Be strong, do not fear! / Here is your God, / he comes with vindication; / With divine recompense / he comes to save you.

James 5:7–10

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

Matthew 11:2–11

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"



*It is easy to doubt when
difficulty comes our way.
Yes, even saints struggle.*



A Word from Pope Francis

Your music and your song are a true instrument of evangelization insofar as you witness to the profoundness of the Word of God that touches the hearts of people, and allows a celebration of the sacraments, especially of the Holy Eucharist, which makes one sense the beauty of paradise.

—International meeting of choirs,
November 24, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What doubts about God arise in my heart?
- How do I deal with these moments of uncertainty?

“Who then Can Be Saved?”

By Thomas H. Groome

This is the rhetorical question the disciples asked Jesus after he declared “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24). Their concern couldn’t have been that they were rich; they were poor peasants.



Rather, they recognized that everyone needs salvation, that we cannot save ourselves, and that the camel is smaller to the needle’s eye than our sinful baggage is to eternal life. Jesus replied, “For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Those first disciples believed that God was saving the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They embraced faith in Jesus as God’s own Son and the Savior of all humanity, the divine intervention that redirected history toward God’s reign. They remembered Jesus stating his own sense of purpose as life “more abundantly” (John 10:10), and they began to search for ways to communicate what this means for humanity and creation.

Saved From, Saved For

Two key ideas emerged in Western Christianity—redemption and salvation—portraying Jesus as our Redeemer and Savior. From the Latin

“to buy back,” *redemption* connotes that Jesus paid the price for our sins. From the Latin “to make safe,” *salvation* means Jesus ensures our safety for eternal life. Both imply a negative condition from which we’ve been rescued and a positive possibility for which we are empowered.

Christians have faith that Jesus has saved us from the powers of sin and evil. He has saved us for living as his disciples, modeling “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Through faithful discipleship, our salvation begins now and is completed in God’s eternal presence. By our baptism into union with Christ we access God’s saving work in Jesus, and the Church is now God’s “universal sacrament of salvation” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 48).

All who have faith in Christ and are baptized into union with him can be saved. Catholicism also emphasizes that Christian faith demands “good works,” that we live the faith we profess. With the help of God’s grace, we are accountable to follow “the way” that Jesus modeled. Apparently, God’s final judgment will focus on our practical love, especially toward those in need (Matthew 25:31–46). Though discipleship is demanding, we take hope in the fact that Jesus has heightened God’s mercy toward us.

“Many Dwelling Places”

As Christians, we are confident of God’s saving work in Christ. But then, if we are really Christians for whom neighbor knows no limits, we should be concerned about all those who don’t come to faith in Jesus, for whatever reason. Can people of every religion (or no religion) be saved?

First, we firmly believe there is one mediator between God and the human race: Jesus. Yet we also remember Jesus saying that God’s house has “many dwelling places” (John 14:2). In this light, Catholicism has consistently held that anyone can be saved by Christ through “baptism of desire.” This means that all people who do God’s will—as best they know it—have a virtual desire for baptism and thus are saved by their implicit faith in Jesus.

When explaining how all people are saved by Jesus and “associated with this paschal mystery,” the Second Vatican Council simply said that the Holy Spirit brings this about “in a manner known only to God” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [*Gaudium et Spes*], 22). Or, as Jesus himself said, “for God, all things are possible.” +



Lord, you are patient with me and give me time to correct my faults and become a better person. Help me to be more patient and loving toward others.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 16–21

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Nm 24:2–7, 15–17a / Mt 21:23–27

Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Jer 23:5–8 / Mt 1:18–25

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a / Lk 1:5–25

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Is 7:10–14 / Lk 1:26–38

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
Sg 2:8–14 or Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45

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Bringing Home the Word +

Fourth Sunday of Advent (A)
December 22, 2019

Focusing on God

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

A painting by Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Nativity*, shows the figures set in a golden, eternal background. Details are missing: no landscape, cave, stable, or cattle. Ghirlandaio, Michelangelo's teacher, focuses on the people. The Gospel also refrains from external details and focuses only on the main actors: Mary and Joseph and what is going on in their hearts and minds.

Joseph has to decide how to handle surprising news: His wife is with child and he isn't the father. She claims it was by divine intervention. He had every intention of protecting her while at the same time respecting the law.

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 7:10–14

The Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel.

Romans 1:1–7

Through him we have received the grace of apostleship.

Matthew 1:18–24

"Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."

Luckily his open and honest heart hears indications from an angel. He is to do the unthinkable—take her to himself—because the unimaginable has happened: "It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived" (Matthew 1:20).

The artist paints Joseph sleeping peacefully because he is the just man who silences his troubled heart in order to hear God's voice. He, like Mary, reflects on things profoundly and grapples with God's will and the amazing vocation placed before him. His struggle in prayer leads him to have faith and trust. Following God's plan will mean pilgrimage, thus the walking stick, water jug, and knapsack.

We are all tempted to flee from the challenges of discipleship. Yet today Joseph shows us how to "man up." He assumes his role as a servant leader, teacher, and example. His dozing is not one of laziness but of silent self-control that leads to attentiveness and obedience to God's voice. +

*We are all tempted to flee
from the challenges
of discipleship.*

*Yet today Joseph shows us
how to "man up."*

A Word from Pope Francis

We need, then, to open our hearts to the true light, Jesus Christ. He is the light that can illumine life and turn our darkness into light; the light of goodness that conquers evil; the light of the love that overcomes hatred; the light of the life that triumphs over death.

—Address to Vatican Curia,
December 21, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS
REFLECTION

- Am I listening for Jesus' call in everyday life experiences?
- How do I face the challenges of following Jesus?

Home for the Holidays

By Alice Camille

I always get the creeps from Currier and Ives. It's not that I don't have my sentimental streak. I save old Christmas cards and the caps from champagne bottles. And my heart quivers at the sight of Rudolph being spurned by the other reindeer.

But I find myself in resistance mode about this time, when the Currier-and-Ives-style holiday seems jammed down my throat. Sleigh scenes and chubby Santas aside, not every Christmastime has been a memory of roaring fires, hot chocolate, and close-knit family. Some Christmases in my memory were three-alarm disasters that can awaken me in a cold sweat.

Paradoxically, part of the trouble with the holidays is that it's homecoming season. Traveling can be a bear, but it's not only slogging airports and highways in bad weather that bugs me. It's what I might have to navigate when I reach my destination that's the real worry.

My family is fairly well-behaved. We have no serial killers or deviants, and much of the time we can be counted on to be normal about festive gatherings and their religious and cultural significance.

But we do have prodigal members, those who have gone certifiably astray by the usual markers and whose presence or absence at every holiday is an issue. I



don't know which I mind more: the years when a disruptive arrival leads to shouting and tears, or the times when a quiet boycott makes us retell the old stories about what went wrong and why someone is unwelcome. I anticipate those conflicts with dread.

Universal Message

This story is common and probably why Jesus included a prodigal parable in his repertoire. A son turns out to be a disappointment to his father and a source of shame to his brother. The son who does everything wrong disappears for years. The son who plays it by the book remains at home, working in the family business. Then one day, guess who returns? And guess what the anxious parent and furious stay-at-home sibling do next?

The point of the parable—variously called the parable of the Prodigal Son or the story of the forgiving father—is aimed at neither the son who was lost, nor the father who finds it in his heart to embrace him again. It's the third party in this tale, the obedient brother, who receives the moral lesson. Jesus, remember, is addressing the Pharisees, who can be self-righteous about how obedient they are, like the older brother in the story. The parable affirms that sinners will sin and that God, who is

absolute mercy, will forgive. That much is unquestioned.

But how do average Christians react to this news? Does understanding God's mercy comfort or offend us?

God's Justice

Most of us are not villains, but law-abiding people with a few peccadilloes. Our wrongdoing is minor and run-of-the-mill—the kind of thing easily swept under the rug of our conscience. And because we toe the line, we greatly appreciate it if others do, too. If they don't, we would prefer that they pay the consequences. But what if God lets them off scot-free? Where's the justice in that?

Divine compassion often offends our sense of justice. After all, people shouldn't be able to do anything they want! That's certainly true—but God's mercy doesn't imply that they can. Sin is still a bad idea that leads to heartache. But God chooses to respond to the wayward child with open arms and not a door slammed in the face. If we're part of this family, we'd better make room for that notion. +

PRAYER

*Lord, you are Emmanuel,
"God with us." Open the eyes and
ears of my heart that I may see
your presence in every person
I meet, and hear your voice
in the cry of the poor.*

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day
of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 23–28

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Mal 3:1–4, 23–24 / Lk 1:57–66


Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Sir 35:1–12 / Mk 10:28–31

Wednesday, Christmas: Is 52:7–10 /
Heb 1:1–6 / Jn 1:1–18 or Jn 1:1–5, 9–14

Thursday, St. Stephen:
Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59 / Mt 10:17–22

Friday, St. John: 1 Jn 1:1–4 /
Jn 20:1a and 2–8

Saturday, The Holy Innocents:
1 Jn 1:5–2:2 / Mt 2:13–18

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Bringing Home the Word

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (A)

December 29, 2019

The Formula for a Holy Family

By Mary Katharine Deeley

At our wedding, my husband and I promised to love and honor each other, to welcome children, and to welcome everyone they knew. Friends came and went, always finding a warm welcome and a bowl of fruit salad. It didn't matter that our house was small—our love was great. We grew together in the understanding that we couldn't do anything we wanted individually; we had to consider each other as we made major decisions.

It wasn't always convenient. Without the grace of God, we might have found

the promise difficult, but we submitted ourselves to God and each other—and found strength in the process. Thirty-plus years later, we're still growing deeper in love and in willingness to put the other first.

What makes for a holy family? We celebrate Mary, Joseph, and Jesus because they—individually and together—submitted their lives to God and grew closer to one another. Today, that's still the formula. It requires every item on Paul's list in Colossians: compassion, kindness, humility, and patience—with a good measure of gratitude and love thrown in.

Is it always easy? No. We will—occasionally, and sometimes suddenly—have to move, change jobs, or deal with emergencies. But the grace of family is a peculiar thing. It gets us through the rough times and makes us appreciate the easy ones.

We're part of God's family. The more we practice the fruits of love, the closer we come to the holiness and example of that First Family. +

*The grace of family gets us
through the rough times
and makes us appreciate
the easy ones.*

A Word from Pope Francis

Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod's implacable violence. This last was an experience that, sad to say, continues to afflict the many refugee families who in our day feel rejected and helpless.

—On Love in the Family (*Amoris Laetitia*),
March 19, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Do I strive to make home a welcoming refuge for family and friends?
- Do I reach out to support my extended family as well as my core family?

Sunday Readings

Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

Those who respect their father will live a long life; / those who obey the Lord honor their mother.

Colossians 3:12–21 or 3:12–17

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt."

Honoring Our Parents

By Kathy Coffey

“Honor your father and mother.”
—Exodus 20:12

What nugget of wisdom does the Fourth Commandment teach us? Today some parents and children are estranged; others wish their parents were alive to honor them. But the following story shows how delightfully some children still honor their parents.

Jan celebrated her sixtieth birthday with friends, far from her children, who lived in five different states. “No gifts,” she had told her kids. “All I need are memories of you.” Then the postal service delivered a special box. Within it were sixty slips of paper on which Jan’s children had written sixty special memories. She read and cherished each one, mixing laughter and tears.

Why honor our parents? In the world of the Bible and in good homes today, parents provide images of trust, hope, and serenity that enable the young to face formidable obstacles. To their children they convey the message, spoken or unspoken, “You are loved. You are wonderful.”

All humans are constantly making the passage from the known to the unknown. Parents who have endured disappointment, even tragedy, can help their offspring travel that passage with dignity. “We’ve made mistakes,” they



say. “We’ve lost jobs, health, or our dearest loves. But it didn’t kill us. Something in people endures, continues to trust, and moves forward in confidence.”

Related Roles

Furthermore, parents are memory keepers. When their children hit snags, they remind them what

glorious people they are. And if humor, perspective, or packages from home can lighten the load, they give those, too.

The wisest parents honor their children in turn. They count on their children’s good sense to pilot them through difficulties, so they restrain the “free advice.” They clarify the boundaries of their role: providing safe harbors, but holding the ropes loosely. They encourage children to explore God’s beautiful world, not burdening them with unnecessary anxiety. They recognize the arenas where the young have more expertise, inviting them to shine there.

Many parents struggle with handing on their faith to a generation that seems unenthusiastic at best. There, too, honor comes in. Realizing that the gift of faith, no matter how important, can’t be coerced or controlled, parents can follow the advice of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Agonizing over her sons’ shenanigans, she once said, “What’s a mother to do but pray and dote, pray and dote?”

If the roles of parent and child seem too idealized, we need only look to Jesus and his mother for role models. (Unfortunately, Scripture records little of Jesus’ relationship with Joseph.)

Learning from Jesus and Mary

The wedding at Cana provides the perfect example of their honoring each other. Mary wisely tells Jesus of the need: “They have no wine.” Then she backs off. She trusts his instincts to resolve the crisis.

Despite his reservations (“My hour has not yet come”), Jesus in turn honors his mother. Whether he was responding to her, or to the couple’s dire need, we may never know. Despite the exhaustion and pain of his passion, Jesus continues to honor Mary, making sure even from the cross that his beloved disciple would continue to care for her (John 19:26–27).

In Jesus’ day, women with no son or husband for protection often became desperate beggars. Knowing that sad reality, Jesus makes sure that John will take her into his own home. Saint Ignatius imagined that the first appearance of Jesus after the resurrection, although not recorded in Scripture, must surely have been to Mary.

As parents and children who follow Jesus, we are called to do likewise. +

PRAYER

Lord, you teach me the importance of family life. Keep my family in peace and deepen my love, respect, and appreciation for all the members of my family.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 30–January 4

Monday, Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas: 1 Jn 2:12–17 / Lk 2:36–40

Tuesday, Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas: 1 Jn 2:18–21 / Jn 1:1–18

Wednesday, Solemnity of Mary: Nm 6:22–27 / Gal 4:4–7 / Lk 2:16–21

Thursday, Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen: 1 Jn 2:22–28 / Jn 1:19–28

Friday, Christmas Weekday: 1 Jn 2:29–3:6 / Jn 1:29–34

Saturday, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton: 1 Jn 3:7–10 / Jn 1:35–42