

Advent 2022

A Camino through Advent



An excellent accompaniment to this virtual Camino is 'AN ADVENT JOURNEY' by Michael T Winstanley SDB-available from Don Bosco Publications, Bolton BL1 6PQ

Gerry O'Shaughnessy SDB
Don Bosco Publications
Advent 2022

A Camino through Advent 2022



Most of us are well acquainted with the concept of a 'pilgrimage'; many of us will have been to Rome, Lourdes, or the Holy Land on pilgrimage. We go for more than just a holiday; we journey with others to a Holy Place. In the Middle Ages, the tomb of St James in the Spanish town of Compostela was a popular pilgrimage centre. With no modern transport links, the pilgrims would have to reach their destination on foot, often taking weeks to get there. However, it is in the journeying that the real spirit of pilgrimage is found; pilgrims would take off from various locations across Europe and follow the ancient way or CAMINO. As we journey towards Christmas 2022, in these uncertain economic and political times, we invite you to join us on the Advent Camino: each day we will offer a short reflection and prayer. We have learnt a lot about our families, friends, and ourselves over these past years of lockdown and the challenge of a global pandemic and the threat of a possible war. We have had to re-imagine what it is to be Church and community and, while it has not always been easy, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of others. As we make this Advent Camino together, let us continue to pray for each other, and please contact us here in Bolton if you want special intentions mentioned. In this Camino, more than ever before in modern times, we are walking towards the loving embrace of God, the true light who comes to us at Christmas in the form of a child with trust and wonder. Share that trust, share that wonder as we share this Advent Way together.

Sunday 27th November 2022 – First Sunday of Advent



As we begin our Advent journey and light this first candle, we are presented with the vision of hope this Sunday, so needed in the light of all we have been through. In the first reading today, Isaiah writes to encourage a people enslaved and not seeing much place for hope in their lives for they are worn down. The events of these past few years have hurt us and worn us down, some more than others. Like the Hebrew people, enslaved in Babylon, today more than ever we need to feel the loving presence of a God who cares and has not abandoned us because, like them:

We are the work of your hands (Isa 63:8)

The news of March 2020 filled us with dread and even fear, and it seems like not only the world is full of trepidation because of the onset of perhaps a more bleak future and a difficult future, a future where there could be lots of pain--we wonder what would happen to us. Jesus offers a 'wake-up call' in the Letter from the Romans today:

You know 'the time' has come you must wake up now: our salvation is even nearer. (Rom 13:11)

The danger is that we can walk this advent way and it makes no difference at all; we can be so caught up in our own worries and fears that our goal is fixed only on December 25th, 2022, and the respite it might offer us. Jesus is offering us a real challenge today: to find hope in TODAY!

What brings you hope this First Sunday of Advent?

Watch and reflect: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISSWcxjS0_0

Prayer (as you light the first candle):

"Let nothing disturb you,

nothing frighten you,

all things are passing,

God is unchanging.

Patience gains all;

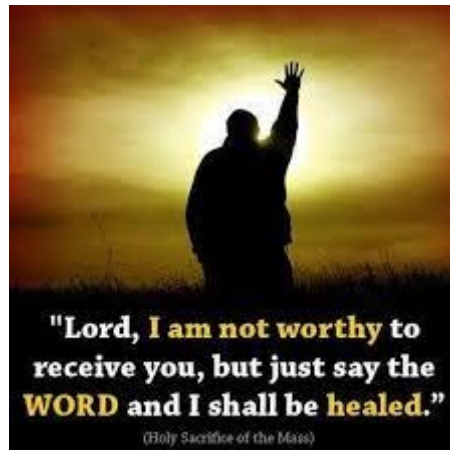
nothing is lacking to those who have God:

God alone is sufficient."

(St. Teresa of Ávila)

Monday 28th November 2022

Our gospel today presents us with a miracle of deep trust. Jesus is in his new hometown of Capernaum when he meets a Roman Centurion. On the face of it this man should be reviled because he belongs to the hated army of occupation. However, it is clear that he is a man of deep compassion, as he begs Jesus to cure his servant. Jesus is willing to go to the villa of this important man, but the Centurion is aware of the time pressure that Jesus faces. As a person of authority himself, he is well aware of the plate spinning that needs to take place in our lives. He proclaims those words that the Church has adapted every time we go to share Eucharist:



The faith of the Centurion is something we are asked to share today: have you got that utter trust and hope in Jesus that he had?

Today: perhaps try and get to Mass and share the words of the Centurion as you go to Holy Communion.

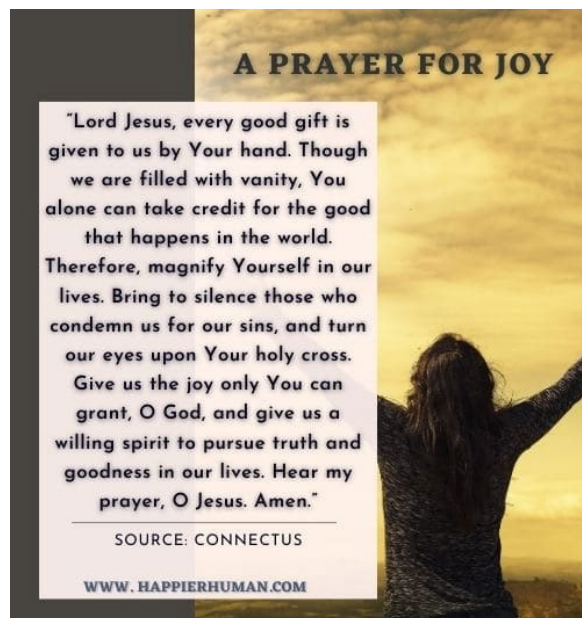


And now, see how a centurion begs Him and says to him: “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, suffering dreadfully.” Here is a new miracle indeed! The servant, whose limbs are paralysed leads his master to the Lord; the slaves’ sickness gives health to his owner. Seeking his servant’s healing, he finds our Lord and while he is seeking for his slave’s cure, he becomes Christ’s conquest!” – Basil of Seleucia, Fifth Century Archbishop (Homily 19 on the centurion)

Tuesday 29th November 2022

Today we see Jesus in close conversation with his chosen disciples—he is **‘filled with joy’** (Lk 10:21) as he shares his blessing. He talks of the close unity that exists in the family of the Trinity. He explains that is not about how many degrees you might have or how clever you might think you are; it is about a loving and joyful relationship with God

Today: share your joy with family and friends—be the reason that they are happy



Wednesday 30th November 2022 – St Andrew

It is wonderful to begin this Camino with a feast day; please celebrate feasts: get an ice cream or glass of something that cheers you up. Feast days can distract us from the mundane or that which drags us down. As we reflect on the fisherman Andrew, we remember his hard work and his dedication to Jesus. He is the first disciple mentioned by John in his Gospel and he was the one to introduce his brother, Simon to Jesus-- a chance meeting that was to change the history of humanity.

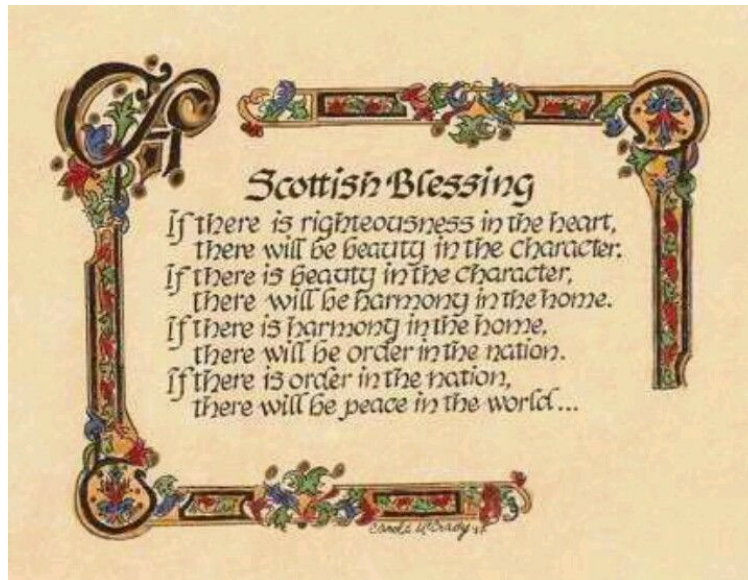
He saw two brothers, Simon, and Peter...follow me (Mt 4: 18-19)

We remember that, just like the others, he was asleep when Jesus needed him and that he ran and hid when Jesus suffered death and pain. Filled with hope in the Resurrection and strengthened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, it seems he went on to a preaching ministry, probably in modern Syria. Tradition has it that Scottish pilgrims brought bones of Andrew back with them and buried them in the place where the town of St Andrews now stands.



TODAY: can you be that person to introduce another to Jesus by what you do or say?

We pray for the people of Scotland on this their national feast day:



TODAY: make a virtual pilgrimage to the beautiful Scottish island of Iona:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gQoOYBRNj8>

Thursday 1st December 2022

Today we are presented with a heartfelt prayer of Jesus:

It is not those who say 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Matt 7:21)

Jesus reminds us of the need to base our lives on solid foundations—indeed we can only build a viable future for ourselves and our loved ones if we have that solid base on which we build our lives. Jesus tells the famous parable of the two houses: one built on sand, the other built on rock. Without those solid foundations, our lives will be ruined, especially in times of crisis and doubt.



TODAY: give thanks for all those who have helped to ground you in your faith: from your family and friends to your teachers and priests.

We can pray:

*We pray for children, who sneak an ice lolly before tea,
Who can never do their spelling homework right.
Who put shoes on the wrong feet.
We pray for children born in places we would not be seen dead in,
Whose home is a detention centre on the border,
Who never seem to listen to a word I say.*

*We pray for children who hug us and for those who reject our care.
Who do not have enough food today,
Who cannot sit still.
We pray for children who inspire us,
Who are rainbows in an otherwise dark and cold world.
Who follow Jesus in all they do and say.
Today, Lord we pray and thank God for children.*

(Inspired by “We pray children” Ina Hughes)

Friday 2nd December 2022

The first week is nearly at an end; even in these difficult times, Christmas lights shine brightly on our high streets as we are invited in to spend what cash we might have. Christmas, in a pandemic time, was certainly very different; we had to really open our eyes to see what is going on in our family, our parish, our town, our nation-our global community. In the Gospel today, Jesus heals two blind men who come clamouring to his door, ‘**Take pity on us, Son of David!**’ (Matt. 9.27). Jesus offers them both the gift of sight, on condition that they say nothing, but, true to human form, ‘**they talked about him all over the countryside.**’ (Matt 9: 31). With a new vision, they are now disciples of the Word themselves; those that are healed can now begin an exciting path of following Jesus too.

Today: try to look at your family in a new light and see something different in them

We can pray:

**Lord God, help me to see properly and well today.
Help me to notice those little things in life that I might normally ignore.
Like the smile of a stranger that I pass on the road,
The warm and welcoming glow of the lights when I arrive home.
The attention that my family and friends need today.
Help me to use my heart to see what is invisible to the eye. AMEN**



Saturday 3rd December 2022 – Feast of St Francis Xavier

Francis was a friend of Ignatius of Loyola, as they studied together in Paris. Together they founded the great Jesuit order, and it is fitting today that we pray for the ministry of Jesuits throughout the world, not forgetting a special prayer for the first Jesuit Pope, Pope Francis. After his ordination in 1537, Francis was sent to establish a mission in Goa--his missionary zeal took him to Japan and China and died on the island of Shangchuan. He was noted for his practical care of all and his stand for justice for native people, especially in the face of European domination. The Gospel today tells the parable of those wise people who build their homes on solid foundations and not the sand--their home will stand during any storm. As we move forward to the light of Christmas, we need that faith of St Francis Xavier: we need to base our lives firmly with Jesus.



TODAY: pray for the Church in China

We can pray:

O my Lord Jesus!

Teach me to be generous;

teach me to serve You as you deserve;

to give, and not to count the cost;

to fight and not to heed the wounds;

to toil and not to ask for rest;

to labour, seeking no reward,

save that of knowing that I do your will. AMEN.



(For children--or anyone who likes colouring in!)

Sunday 4th December 2022 – Second Sunday of Advent

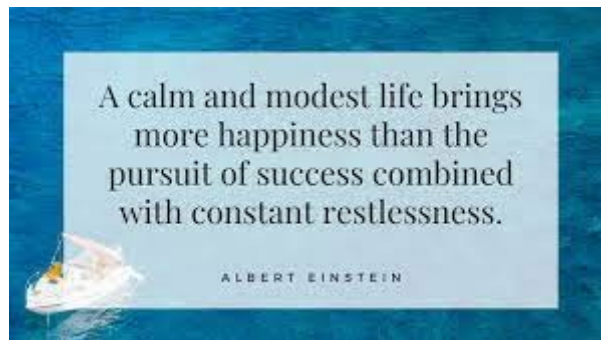


As we enter the second week of Advent, we are presented with the exciting and prophetic voice of John the Baptist; he stands in that strong line of Jewish prophets who are often **'a voice crying in the wilderness'** (Isa 40:3). Time and time again, God chose these men and women to act as mirrors to human society: they offered a vision that many found difficult to follow. Isaiah offers us an amazing vision, taken up by Matthew and the reconciliation ministry of John: The Messiah will make **'a straight highway for our God across the desert. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low...then the glory of God will be revealed, and all shall see it.'** (Isa 40 4-5). It has not been an easy path for all of us in these past few years: we have experienced all kinds of woes and problems—medical, economic, and global. John is given to us today as the enabler. He comes full of empathy and compassion to help us all move forward; Mark presents the crowds coming to him in the River Jordan for baptism: using water as a symbol of cleansing. Through this ritual the crowds: 'confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River (Matt 3:6). God wants to make things easy for us by making sure the paths are straight and I find it ironic that we, as Church, can make people jump through hoops and can make their path, their Camino so difficult. Albert Einstein, on being told that the United States Declaration of Independence was **"Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,"** he used to say the pursuit of happiness is for idiots. That seems a rather sweeping statement and I am sure that he did not want to disrespect the US Constitution, but what is it that makes us fully happy? Certainly, a global pandemic has taught us that our health is so important; Einstein could say with confidence:

"You should pursue truth. You should pursue beauty. Not running around trying to be happy, happy, happy, buying things, doing things that will make you happy, happy, happy. Because they are never going to make you happy."

Today John points to the one who will make you truly and fully happy. Like all good disciples, John points to a truth beyond himself: as those roads are straightened out and the valleys filled in, we have easy access to a God who loves us unconditionally and will be our source of happiness and joy. As you light that second candle and bask in the gift of peace you have been given, you can take stock of your life and point to the areas that bring you happiness-name those areas and show your gratitude.

Today: with Albert Einstein, reflect on what makes you happy



We can pray as we light the second candle:

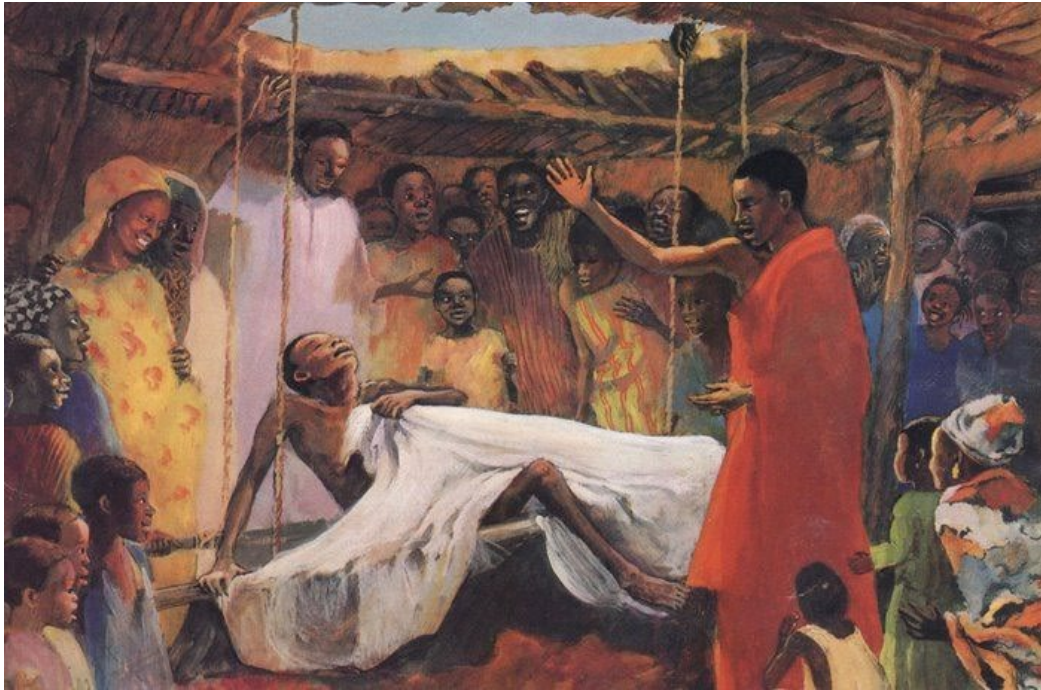
If you can listen to the musical adaptation of today's first reading from Isaiah, put to music by Handel, 'Come Ye/Every Valley' by Gramophone Chorus, Ghana

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83jCTO8N0K4>

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help me to hear your voice.
Touch me once again.
Give me the courage to be your beloved.
Give me courage to choose joy.
I need you now this Christmas.
Be born in me again. Today.
In Jesus' name, Amen.
(Bonnie Gray)

Monday 5th December 2022

Jesus was never fazed by difficulties, nor were those who NEEDED to see him. In today's Gospel, Luke recounts the men carrying their crippled friend on a stretcher; ***'but as the crowd made it impossible to find a way of getting him in, they went up onto the flat roof and lowered him and his stretcher down.'*** (Lk 5:19). These friends do everything they can to make sure that their troubled friend can meet Jesus and find healing—they do not care what it takes. They say that necessity is the mother of invention and we have certainly had to be inventive during the pandemic times: our patience was tried and tested, and we had to find new ways of getting close to Jesus and others, even when social distancing was in play. Of course, we need guidelines, rules, and regulations, but just like the friends of the sick man, we will sometimes have to put protocol to one side for the greater good—thank God for that little bit of 'rebel' that is in you.



Today: thank God for those friends who do anything to support us; those friends we can ring at 2:00am and not get shouted out; those friends who tell us the truth, especially when we do not want to hear it; those friends who will walk a Camino with us come rain, hail, snow, or sunshine. Thank God for real friends!

We can pray:

You have blessed us, O God, with the gift of friendship,
the bonding of people in a circle of love.

We thank you for such a blessing:

for friends who love us,
who share our sorrows,
who laugh with us in celebration,
who bear our pain,
who need us as we need them,
who cry as we cry,
who hold us when we need them,
and who give us the freedom to be ourselves.
Bless our friends with health and love. AMEN.



Tuesday 6th December 2022 – St Nicholas



The story of St. Nicholas, the bishop of Myra in Minor Asia, dates back to the fourth century. Legend has it that he, secretly, went around his town giving gifts to the poor. In European culture, this is the favourite holiday of all children – it's a gift-giving day. When evening comes, St. Nicholas, a reverend grey-haired figure with flowing beard, wearing gorgeous bishop's garments, gold embroidered cope, mitre, and pastoral staff, knocks on doors and asks about the behaviour of the children. The custom of examining the children, where they will cite a verse, sing, or otherwise show their skills, is still widespread in German-speaking countries. Each little one gets a gift for his performance.

In our gospel today, Jesus speaks about the Good Shepherd who goes in search of the one lost sheep: out of a flock of one hundred sheep, he is on the lookout for the one that is lost: **'if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.** (Matt 18:13-14). We are reminded, once again, of that unconditional love that God has for each of us



Today: try and connect with a lost friend or family member—a simple text message shows that you still care

We can pray:

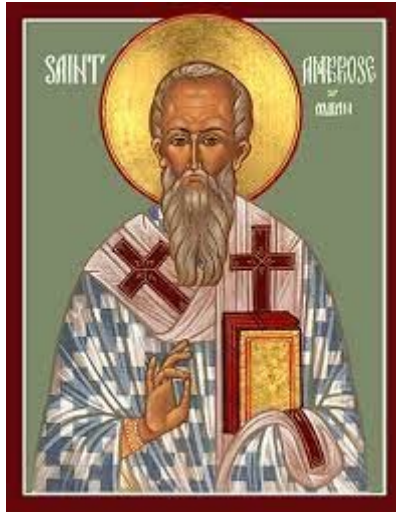
Lord Jesus Christ, who carries the lost sheep back into the fold in your arms, and deigns to hear the confession of the publican, graciously remit all my guilt and sin. Lord, who hears the penitent thief, who has set a heritage of mercy for your friends and has not withheld pardon from the sinner; hear the prayers of your servants according to your mercy.

(Wilhelm Löhe)

Wednesday 7th December 2022 – St Ambrose

There is no doubt that we have been overburdened during the difficult experiences of lives: from a global pandemic to the cost of living crisis: we have been scared, frightened, challenged, and reflective. It has brought out the best in us, but, if you are like me, there have been some teary wobbles too. In Matthew's Gospel today, Jesus urges his followers to **'come to me all you who labour and over-burdened, and I will give you rest... I am gentle... you will find rest'** (Mt 11: 28-29). Even in the best of times, we will find ourselves doing too much; we are all guilty of being 'too active' following the 'Martha school' rather than the 'Mary school'! Jesus wants us to be involved as fully as we can in apostolic ministry, but not at the expense of our well-being. The danger is that we feel that we must be so 'committed' to the Gospel that it leads to burnout and health breakdown. We all need to place our troubles and worries with the Lord and adopt the attitude and prayer of 'we can do this together, Lord.' In his recent encyclical letter, Pope Francis urges us all to support each other: the pandemic has proved that we can only get through difficult situations by working TOGETHER. We all need a sense of 'shalom' or inner peace and today we are reminded to find that quiet space (even if it is in our mind) and look for your needed rest time today. The saint of today, fourth century, Ambrose shows that all problems can be overcome. As a committed lay Christian, he wanted to support the Church in Milan that was experiencing all kinds of difficulties. The people wanted him as their Bishop—however, there was slight problem: he was not baptised! Within a week, he was baptised, ordained a priest, and installed as Bishop of Milan on 7th December 374. There is no problem that cannot be faced once we have that love of God.

Today: find time for YOURSELF, even if it is just five minutes and treat yourself to a favourite drink or treat-you deserve it.



We can pray:

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your gift of rest and support.

May we take advantage of quality time spent with you

May we offer that support and care to those who are struggling today

May we be gentle and humble of heart. AMEN

Thursday 8th December 2022 – The Immaculate Conception

Today we celebrate Mary of Nazareth, one of the central characters in the infancy narratives; the meaning of INCARNATION and Christmas is that God chose to be born fully and as a real, not pretend, human being. Thus, central to the story is Mary, but we must go back into her story and to her conception to find the origins of today's feast. Mary is that sinless one, yet she is as human as you or I. This is seen in today's Gospel that concentrates on the angel coming to announce the birth of the Messiah. Gabriel is that messenger chosen to bring good news to the obscure village of Nazareth and meet ***'a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary'*** (Lk 1: 27). I think that it is very interesting that Luke chooses to tell us where this virgin is from and who she is engaged to, before we discover her name. Our name identifies WHO we are, and we do well to remember God's voice to us, ***'I have called you by name, you are mine!'*** (Isa 40:3). Through Gabriel, God tells Mary that she must not be afraid even though he is asking the impossible: she, the virgin, is ***'to conceive and bear a son...Jesus. He will be called Son of the Most High'*** (Lk 1: 31-32). If we conquer fear, just as Mary did, great joy can be the result; in these difficult times, millions have feared the virus and what it might bring us. Good friends of mine were able to get away during the pandemic to the Mountains for a break and their teenage son freely admitted that the joy, space, and freedom that he found outside the inner-city lockdown, took away his fears. He was able to be a young person again and not have to worry. Far too many of our children and young people have had pressure put on them in these days; through the intercession of Mary of Nazareth, I ask God's blessing on these wonderful young people. Like Mary may they have a future that is fearless and hope-filled; like Mary may they be generous and loving; like Mary may they see the possible in the impossible. May we, as adults, have the courage to listen to what our young people are saying to us; as individual families and the great family of the Church, we need to really listen to their wisdom, especially in these times. Only in this way can we join with the young Mary and pray with her, ***'let what you have said be done to me'*** (Lk 1: 38)



Today: really listen to what your younger family members or friends are saying, what wisdom will you learn from the young today?

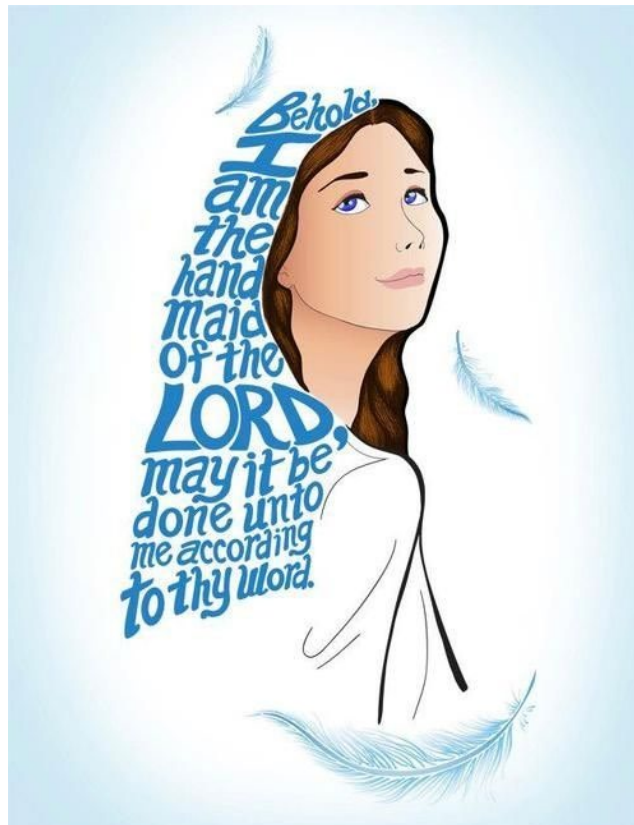
We can pray

Watch the Annunciation scene from Zeffirelli's TV series, 'Jesus of Nazareth' and reflect both on Mary's fear and her ultimate trust in God.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGKc23Nm8yw>

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him. (Nahum 1:7)

Don't forget today is a feast day, please, please, please, CELEBRATE



I think many of us can identify with the frustration that Jesus expresses in the gospel today: we are 'damned if we do and damned if we don't!' The children, in Jesus' word, cry out: **'we played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges and you wouldn't be mourners.'** (Mt 11: 17) You just cannot please some people and that is dangerous, especially as we attempt to come to a sense of a new normality in our Covid-19 world. We could have a feeling that we had better not do anything in case we upset someone; change is not easy and some cope with it better than others. However, we need to cope with change in all aspects of our life from work and schooling to sport and relaxation-life. Thankfully our experience of Advent 2022 is totally different to the lockdown Advent of 2020. We need to ensure that we all have a proper work-life balance and that the rest times, that Jesus called for, are put into our busy schedules: we are not **'possessed'** (Mt 11: 18), nor are we **'gluttons'** or **'drunkards'** (Mt 11: 19). All of us involved in pastoral ministry will know that we are not going to please all of the people all of the time, but we must not let the fear of making a mistake put us off. What do you do to encourage and build up? Do you pour cold water on any new initiative? Are you so selfish that you cannot open your heart to change and a different approach? Let us pray today for balance and a spirit of acceptance-it will go such a long way in these changing times.

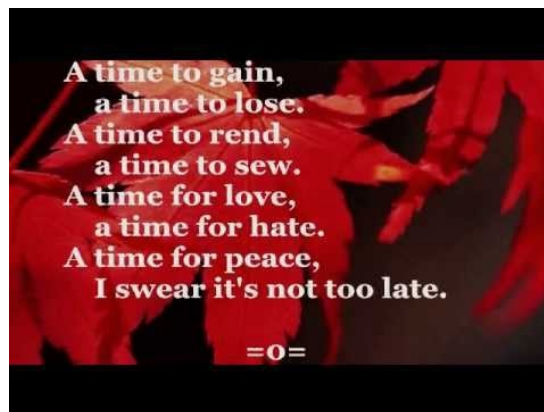
Today: take time to realise how you can make a difference in the lives of others, as there is a 'time for every purpose under heaven' (Pete Seeger's 'Turn, Turn, Turn')

Reflect on the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4983sAoLdM>

We can pray:

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. (Ecclesiastes 3)



Saturday 10th December 2022—Our Lady of Loreto

The scripture scholar Megan McKenna always insists that you read the context of any scripture passage, otherwise it is just an isolated or random reading—it may well inspire, but we need a grounding and context. I firmly believe that many of the world's problems could be sorted if we simply appreciated 'where people are coming from', as the popular saying has it. Today's Gospel reading comes in the context of the Transfiguration event (**Mt 17: 1-8**); Jesus has taken his inner circle of Peter, James, and John up the mountain. There, they experience the glory of radiant change as **'his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light'** (Mt 17: 2). This vision of glory is shared with the symbol of Jewish Law, Moses and the symbol of Jewish Prophecy, Elijah. In his usual reckless spontaneity, Peter wants to STAY there in this ideal world, but Jesus, ever the realist sees the need to 'come down from the mountain' (Mt 17: 9) and be fully incarnate in a real world – this is what Christmas is all about. In today's discussion with the disciples, Jesus sees the need to recognise the strength of prophetic witness; the prophets like John the Baptist and Elijah are faithful witnesses to God, often in the face of extreme opposition and death. The birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem is beautiful, and we can make it nice and cosy – however, the baby of the manger grows up to challenge and make demands of us. The true prophets of God know pain and hurt, and Jesus can see that the **'Son of Man will suffer similarly'** (Mt 17: 12).



(The Transfiguration painted by the nuns of Saint Demiana Monastery, Egypt)

Today: do something today that makes a real demand on you – you are acting like the prophets, going against the accepted cultural way

We can pray:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.

The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

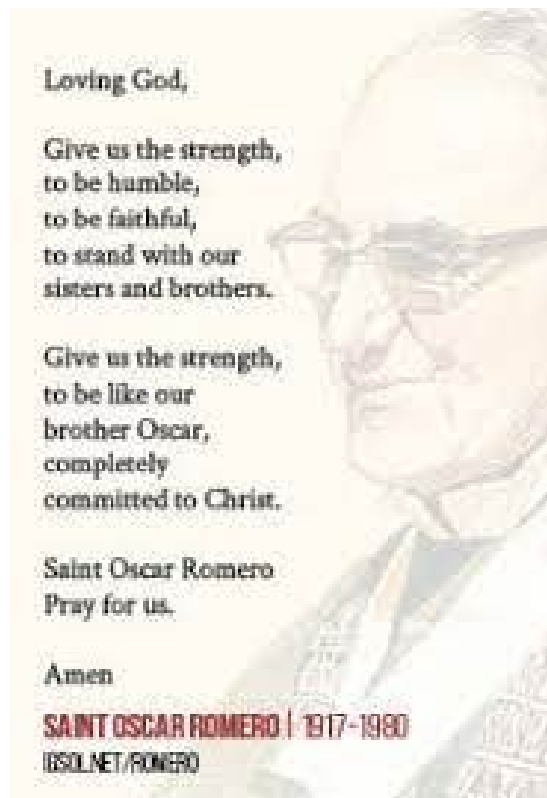
We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own

(‘The Romero Prayer’ from the ‘Romero Trust’)



For children:

S	M	E	S	S	E	N	G	E	R
T	S	L	A	D	N	A	S	E	E
S	T	E	M	S	I	T	P	A	B
U	R	W	N	S	P	E	S	R	O
C	A	F	A	R	N	I	E	E	O
O	P	I	S	T	E	T	R	V	K
L	A	T	A	N	E	D	E	I	A
H	O	N	E	Y	I	R	L	R	T
K	C	A	M	E	L	S	K	I	N
E	R	T	N	E	T	T	I	R	W



RIVER
ISAIAH
MESSENGER
WILDERNESS
BAPTISM
REPENTANCE
CAMELSKIN
LOCUSTS
HONEY
STRAP
SANDALS
SPIRIT





JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4

To colour in and enjoy

Sunday 11th December 2022--Third Sunday of Advent

Well, we are over halfway through our Camino, and the danger is that we can get so caught up with 25th December that we could miss out on the beauty that these next couple of weeks will bring us. Yes, there is shopping to be done, cards to be sent and gifts to be wrapped, but our Advent Camino is that chance to give something back to the Lord and to each other. Remember to send in prayer requests and they will be included in our daily mass here in Bolton. If you have a spare moment, please remember the Salesian Family in your own prayers and ask that others may follow in the footsteps of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello—we certainly need that generosity. In the Gospel today, once again John the Baptist is front and centre but, as always, he is pointing beyond himself to the person of Jesus. Even in his prison cell, John the Baptist is still searching for the Messiah: **when John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”** (Matt 11:2-3). Jesus points to his own actions that bring transformation; echoing the great prophecy of Isaiah, he can proclaim to John’s friends, **‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor’** (Mat 11:4-5). In the words and actions of Jesus, the reign of God has burst into world history—we are the best for it.

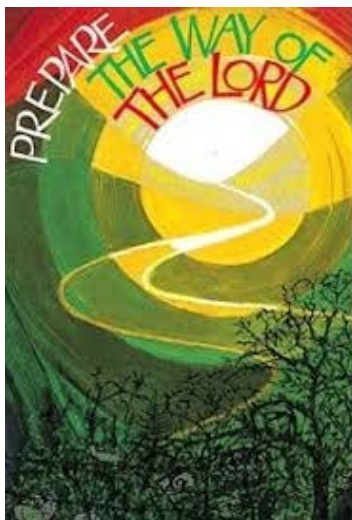
In the Gospel of John, in the great ‘Prologue’, we see a wonderful piece of poetry that echoes the beauty of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. John presents the Messiah as the LIGHT, **‘a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower’** (Jn 1: 5). In these dark, cold nights, the Christmas tree lights are a welcome distraction and should point to a deeper reality of faith: the light of Christ will make a difference, the light of Christ will see us through these times of hardship. A global pandemic, together with the threat of a European War and a failing economy, has brought a universal darkness as we have experienced, lockdown, shielding, unemployment, failure, pain, and death. However, our experience has also highlighted the light of the NHS, the care and consideration of family and friends and the lengths that some people have gone to keep in touch. Social distancing did not mean we have to be distant; we need not ignore each other or use it as an excuse to erase people from our lives. We all need those people in our lives who can cut through the drama and the problems and give us clear and straight guidance. The Messiah, the one John is preparing the way for, has the power and strength of the Holy Spirit to move us all forward.

As we reflect today, we can think of those we have met who pointed us towards Jesus; I think of my parents and family, I give thanks for those fellow Salesians who have given me an unselfish example of real care for the young. I praise God for the countless young people I have met over the years who have helped me to come closer to God. I am grateful to those families who have accepted me as another hungry guest at their home table; I appreciate those friends who have become part of our extended Salesian family and continue that inspirational mission and outreach to the young. God will come to you in the most unexpected ways this week; unexpected people, young or old, will help you to discover God’s will for you. As a Salesian of Don Bosco, I thank those young people who pointed the way—and still do. Be alert this week to see, hear and fully experience the wonder that God is calling you to share.

Today: listen to the voice of the children and young people in your life-- they have a wisdom beyond their years.

This may help you to reflect as you ‘Prepare a Way for the Lord’:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1SiaCV26aQ>



(The Benedictine Sisters of Turvey Abbey)

We can pray, as we light the third candle:

Thanks be to you, my lord, Jesus Christ,
For all the benefits that you have given me;
For all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
O, most merciful redeemer, friend, and brother,
May I know you more clearly;
Love you more dearly;
And follow you more nearly day by day.

(St Richard of Chichester)

Monday 12th December 2022—Our Lady of Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe first introduced herself as the mother of God and the mother of all humanity when she appeared on the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico in 1531. A local Aztec farmer and convert to Christianity, Juan Diego, saw a glowing figure on the hill. After she had identified herself to him, Our Lady asked that Juan build her a shrine in that same spot, for her to show and share her love and compassion with all those who believe. Afterwards, Juan Diego visited Juan de Zumárraga, who was Archbishop of what is now Mexico City. Zumárraga dismissed him in disbelief and asked that the future Saint provide proof of his story and proof of the Lady's identity. Although it was winter and nothing should have been in bloom, Juan Diego found an abundance of flowers of a type he had never seen before. The Virgin bundled the flowers into Juan's cloak, known as a 'tilma'. When Juan Diego presented the tilma of exotic flowers to Zumárraga, the flowers fell out and he recognised them as Castilian roses, which are not found in Mexico. This actual tilma, preserved since that date and showing the familiar image of the Virgin Mary with her head bowed and hands together in prayer, represents the Virgin of Guadalupe. It remains perhaps the most sacred object in all of Mexico. What was even more significant, however, was that the tilma had been miraculously imprinted with a colourful image of the Virgin herself.



In our Gospel today Jesus is challenged by the **‘chief priests and elders of the people’** (Matt 21: 23) on his authority. The challenge of the Gospel today is that we do not get caught into this trap of controlling others: we are given a freedom as daughters and sons of a loving God. No one has the right to take that joy from you even if they are a partner, a friend, or a boss! You have a dignity that is God’s gift to you alone—cherish it and celebrate it. For those experiencing darkness today, please look to the Christmas lights, remember the good times, and celebrate the gift you are.

Today: pray for the Church in Latin America

We can pray:

Holy Mary, who under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe are invoked as Mother by the men and women of Mexico and of Latin America, encouraged by the love that you inspire in us, we once again place our life in your motherly hands.

May you, who are present in these Vatican Gardens, hold sway in the hearts of all the mothers of the world and in our own heart. With great hope, we turn to you and trust in you.

Hail Mary, full of grace.....

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Pray for us.

(Prayer of Benedict XVI 2005)

Tuesday 13th December 2022 – St Lucy

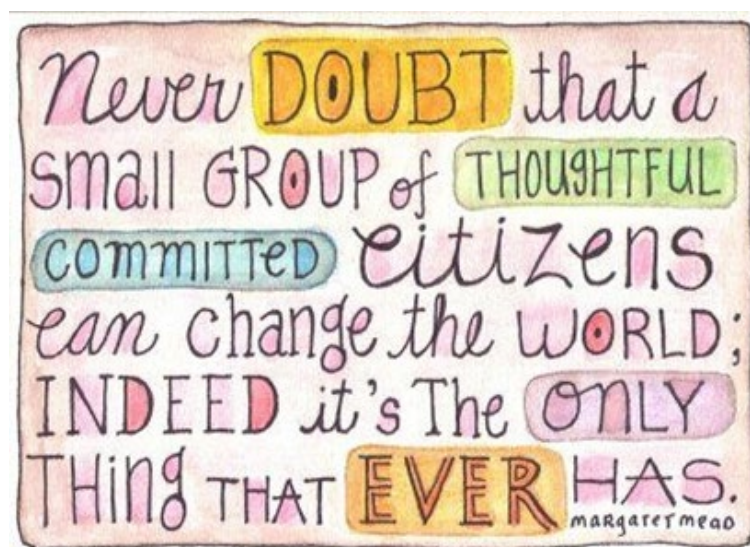
Lucy's history has been lost and all we really know for certain is that this brave woman who lived in Syracuse lost her life during the persecution of Christians in the early fourth century. Her veneration spread to Rome so that by the sixth century the whole Church recognized her courage in defence of the faith. Lucy, whose name can mean "light" or "lucid," is the patron saint of the blind. She is often seen with the emblem of eyes on a cup or plate. In paintings, she is often depicted with a golden plate holding her eyes and often holds a palm branch, which is a symbol of victory over evil. It is traditional in the Nordic countries for young girls to carry candles, even on the heads, in memory of this martyr.



I do hope that some of you can remember the comedy show, the 'Vicar of Dibley' with the talented Dawn French playing the part of an all too human village vicar with a fondness for fine malt and 'curly whirly's'. What made the show such a success, in my opinion, was the amazing ensemble cast: among such acting greats as Liz Smith, James Fleet and Emma Chambers. A firm favourite of mine was Trevor Peacock who played the lovable 'Jim Trott' who said 'YES' when he meant 'no' and 'NO' when he meant 'yes'-it led to some great scenes of comic misunderstanding. Today's Gospel presents the parable of 'YES & NO'; Jesus is still speaking to the elders, those who should know how to faithfully follow God, but they have given mixed messages so much so that Jesus affirms, **"I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way on the kingdom of God before you"** (Matt 21: 31). Jesus implies that the leaders are the ones who have rejected their covenant relationship with God, while those on the fringes of society, the socially unacceptable are the ones who respond positively to the call of John to repentance.

Today is a call not to be like 'Jim Trott' and to say exactly what we mean; today is a call to identify fully with the Gospel and to take it to heart. Today we journey with those sinners to the embrace of a God of forgiveness, as John the Baptist preached. Please do not go through motions of faith today: say a firm and positive 'YES' to what is asked of you today; do not procrastinate, rather act with confidence and trust in God and in others.

Today: respond positively to the cry for help from a family member or friend.



We can pray:

We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Wednesday 14th December 2020 – St John of the Cross

Today the Church gives us a sixteenth century Spanish Carmelite friar to reflect on; in this time of Advent, we are given another 'prophet' to think about; St. Teresa of Avila persuaded John to work with her on the REFORM of the Carmelites: together they wanted to return to a stricter way of life, envisaged by their founders, with more regulated prayer times, fasting and style of the religious habit. As with all change, some can adapt and cope, while others fight it—the Carmelites had their own 'civil war' with John being eventually imprisoned by his fellow friars. During this time of 'lockdown' he composed some of his most amazing works, as he experienced 'the dark night of the soul'. For John this was the journey of the soul from its bodily home to union with God. It happens during the "dark", which represents the hardships and difficulties that we all must face so that we can reach the light of the union with the Creator. Without a doubt these past few years have been a 'dark night' for many of us as we were without the support and the human touch of loved ones who could not be included in our 'social bubble' due to distance or the need to shield. The pandemic has made us scared and suspicious: can we meet up? Who do I include in my group? Should we go out? As that wartime poster famously reminded us, "is your journey REALLY necessary?"

We will all have to face problems, crises and hurt during life—sometimes, just like John, the problems come from those we live with, those we are close to and those who know us best. I feel that it was this betrayal that hurt John the most: to be let down by family and friends is so difficult to come to terms with. In this Camino we are striving to achieve a peace and unity that Christ offers us, but please be conscious of those for whom Christmas will only drag up painful memories. For some, Christmas Day is the loneliest day of the year. It can be so difficult to enter the festive mood when you are wounded and broken; as we experience the darkness, let us look to the light—a pot that is cracked can let the light in!

In an obscure night

Fevered with love's anxiety

(O hapless, happy plight!)

I went, none seeing me

Forth from my house, where all things quiet be

(‘Dark Night of the Soul’)

Today: if you know of a family member or friend experiencing problems and going through a ‘dark night’ reach out to them in friendship and warmth.



(Loving Them Quotes 2012)

We can pray:

In these 'physically distanced' times, we do not need to be 'socially distanced' too! In your heart and mind, reach out to those hurting today and pray with them so that they might soon experience light

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clihbLOPxrU>

Lord, in these days help me to reach out to those in need.

Help me to listen, help me to use the right words in speaking to them.

As we face the problems of life together, may this time of Advent keep us open to your light, strength, hope and love.

May we walk this Advent Camino together in your peace and understanding. AMEN

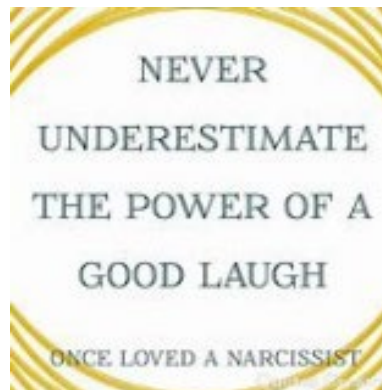
Thursday 15th December 2022

Once again, we are presented with the character of John the Baptist, who is seen as the messenger: **'Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you'** (Lk 7:27). Jesus sees him clearly as 'among those born of women none is greater than John' (Lk 7:28). However, Jesus counters this by saying, **'yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he'** (Lk 7:28). This fits in with Jesus' understanding of true leadership—servant leadership. We are not to be defined by our titles: headteacher, parish priest, Right Reverend, or Monsignor; rather we should serve God and humanity with true humility.

Today: pray for those who choose to be defined by their title, rather than their true acceptance of God and others in their lives.

We can pray:

All-Powerful Father, I pray for those who are battling narcissism in their lives. Help them overcome, by the power of the cross, their prideful focus on themselves. Help them to see that there is so much more this world has to offer than just caring about themselves. Help them to understand that they are not putting God first in their lives. When Your Son called the crowd to Him with his disciples, He said that if anyone would come after Him, let them deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him. Speak to them, Father, and show them that there is more to gain in following You than in seeking what this world has to offer. Only You can reveal the ultimate good that can free them, Lord. Please help them now. Amen.



We are now invited to enter into a very solemn part of our Camino through Advent; it is a time to get ready, with minds and hearts open to the impending message, However, if you are like me, these last few days, leading up to December 25th are hectic: school carol services, parties to go to, shopping to get, cards to send and gifts to wrap and churches to get ready. In these times, perhaps there is not the same intensity, and we

might be able to focus a little more closely on the meaning of Christmas. In a strange way, the pandemic may have given us the gift of 'time and reflection.' I urge you to use it wisely and well! I invite you to join us as we pray the Christmas Novena over these next nine days; the Novena is a traditional Catholic prayer. Those who practice recite a series of prayers for nine days with a purpose – or for a particular request – in the common thought of praising God.

Christmas novena 2022: the prayers

The first day is dedicated to the invocation of Baby Jesus. The whole New Testament is based on the expectation of Christ that we continue to wait every year as if it were the first. The first prayer is “Come, Baby Jesus “

On the second day, the heart rejoices because God announces the future salvation to people. This announcement is a cause of great joy because it means that after death, reconciliation and communion with Jesus will be possible. The prayer of the second day is “Jesus, hear us”

On the third day of Novena, we prepare the ways for the Lord. The reference prayer is “Send your Spirit, O Lord”

The fourth day is dedicated to bearing witness to Christ. At the time it was the mission of John the Baptist, and he accomplished it in truth and in humility, exhorting to conversion and pointing to Jesus as the Saviour. The prayers are accompanied by “Listen to us, O Lord”

The fifth day is dedicated to God’s plan of salvation which meets the will and collaboration of Joseph and Mary. Even the fifth day prayers are guided by “Listen to us, oh Lord”

The sixth day is addressed to the handmaid of the Lord. After the announcement to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel, God begins to give life to the ancient promises about the coming of the Messiah. The prayer is “We thank you, O Jesus”

On the seventh day a sign of salvation appears, the miraculous birth of Emmanuel, the son of a virgin. In this event the Evangelist reconnects the prophecy of the birth of Jesus: now God is really with us. By becoming a man, he came to live among us and continues to remain among us today, in the church and in the Eucharist. The prayer is “Honour and glory to You, Lord Jesus”

The eighth day the emphasis is placed on the saving power of love. This love is good, tenderness, mercy and presents itself despite the sins and weakness of men. The prayer is “Show us, Lord, your Mercy”

Finally, the ninth day is that of Christmas Eve and is dedicated to the journey into darkness until the reach of God. On the ninth day the prayers are guided by “Listen, oh Lord”



Friday 16th December 2022

Today's Gospel from Luke shows how our history of salvation is rooted in the ordinary and the human. John the Baptist, now a prisoner of Herod, sees himself preparing the road for the Messiah, but who is this Messiah, this Saviour? He sends two friends to Jesus to ask, ***"are you the one who is to come our must we wait for someone else?"*** (Lk 7: 19). After our experience yesterday, you could expect a simple 'Yes' or 'No' from Jesus; Jesus rather points to what is going on-he points to his actions. What do you expect a Messiah or Saviour to be? If it is leading an army of rebellion against the Roman, then the answer is a firm 'NO'! if you are looking for a wise detached academic at home with his library of books, then again, the answer is 'NO'! However, if you are looking for healing and restoration, then there is light at the end of your search, there is a 'YES' for ***"the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the Good News is proclaimed to the poor"*** (Lk 7: 22). Jesus is living out the 'mission statement' that he proclaimed back home in Nazareth when he used Isaiah (see Isa 61:1-2) to kick-start his ministry: "he has sent me to bring Good News to the poor" (Lk 4: 18). John's disciples can see with their own eyes what Jesus has done; they can experience that inclusive ministry of care for themselves. As we see in the great parable of Last Judgement (Matt 25: 31-46), Christianity is a call to be active and involved and not sitting around on the side-lines. John is searching for a Messiah and Jesus wants to present a Messiah who is not distant and out of reach. We are called to experience God in the ordinary of life today; it is wonderful to get to a Church or Cathedral to pray, but today we can pray on the top deck of the bus, in the car, on the way to school and even in the chaos of the school run. God always walks with us; can you walk with God this day?

Today: what Good News can you share at home, work, or school?



We can pray:

Lord, make me responsive to the needs of others.

May I be a source of GOOD NEWS today and not fake news!

May we share your light as we become more involved in our world this day. AMEN

Saturday 17th December 2022



Without a doubt one of the most popular programmes on British TV is “Who do You Think You are?”: it is a very simple format where a celebrity delves into their family history and discovers all kinds of interesting, sometime salacious, material on their ancestors. Through Church and civic records, they can go right back and discover their origins and genealogy. My cousin, John Healy has done my own family a great service by recording our history and he discovered a great, great, great uncle recorded in the 1901 census as an ‘imbecile’; he may have been a little different or slow, but we have no memories or other records of this hidden ‘Uncle Patrick’--not even an account of his death, but I pray that he is happy with the Lord. Matthew today presents the genealogy of Jesus; conscious of his Jewish audience, he begins with Abraham and ends with Jesus, while a more inclusive Luke begins his family tree with Jesus and traces him back to “...son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God” (Lk 3:38). Our Gospel today is taken from the very beginning of Matthew’s account: he is proclaiming who Jesus is. ‘**Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham**’ (Matt 1: 1). I must be honest, in my last parish where I worked with two fine Deacons, I was always praying that Deacon Michael or Deacon Fidelis would be able to proclaim the gospel on 17th December as some of the Hebrew names are real tongue twisters! However, more importantly this opening chapter grounds Jesus in a human reality. Unusually, Mathew mentions five women in the lineage—some of whom were involved in irregular relationships, as were many of the men in the list. The family tree of Jesus is complicated and real. We are not called to judge, rather we embrace the good and bad that gave us the gift of Jesus, our Wisdom; Jesus was part of a family that embraced the very good and those we would rather hide away and

forget. When you read the stories of the first four women—and of the men on the list—we do not focus on their sin, but on the grace of God. The hero of this story is God. His grace shines through the blackest of human sin as he chooses flawed men and women and places them in Jesus' family tree.

Today: tell a story from your childhood to a younger family member or friend

We can pray:

Lord, I thank you for my heritage and my family history. Bless all my family, living and dead; may I play my full part and never discredit my family name. Today, Lord, bless us especially with your wisdom. AMEN

Advent Word Search Puzzle



See if you can find the Advent words in the puzzle below!

s	b	c	v	c	a	d	v	e	n	t	g
h	n	a	c	a	r	o	l	s	z	z	u
o	n	r	b	a	x	g	i	f	t	s	r
p	i	d	u	e	l	s	q	v	b	c	d
p	s	s	d	d	l	e	a	u	m	v	e
i	c	t	k	l	u	l	n	n	y	e	c
n	c	o	o	k	i	e	s	d	t	h	o
g	c	o	o	k	i	n	g	m	a	a	r
x	y	l	i	g	h	t	s	m	v	r	a
f	r	i	e	n	d	s	y	q	l	x	t
s	n	o	w	m	a	n	t	r	e	e	e
h	i	c	h	r	i	s	t	m	a	s	h

advent	christmas	gifts	calendar
decorate	cards	shopping	cooking
cookies	friends	snowman	santa
tree	lights	bells	carols

www.ActivityVillage.co.uk - Keeping Kids Busy



Sunday 18th December 2022—Fourth Sunday of Advent



On this final Sunday of our Camino through Advent, we are presented with the reality of the Incarnation from the perspective of Joseph—often seen as the silent, yet powerful, partner in the Christmas story. He is faced with the real-life dilemma of his girlfriend being pregnant and he is not the father! Far from being a plot line in a popular TV soap, there is a reality check here for Joseph: the religious leaders would want to punish Mary severely for this ‘crime’. It is through the power of dream that Joseph is re-assured to **‘take Mary home.’** In this all-too-common situation, that couples across the globe must face: Mary and Joseph present both the radical and challenging nature of childbirth, along with the ordinariness of the gift of new life.

It is in those ordinary and simple things that we can find salvation. There is a lovely story told of the teenage saint, Dominic Savio: he took to Don Bosco’s exhortation that his pupils could become saints;

Dominic started to follow the example of the aesthetic saints he had read about. He filled his bed with stones so that he could not sleep properly and took to fasting for long periods; with lack of food and sleep, his health deteriorated badly, and Don Bosco was deeply concerned. When Dominic told his mentor what he was doing to achieve sanctity, Bosco reminded him that we become saints not by doing the extraordinary but by doing the ordinary, extraordinarily well.

Recently another fifteen-year-old, Carlo Acutis was beatified; he can rightly be called the saint of Facebook and Twitter. He is a modern saint who, while dressed in jeans and a tracksuit top, pointed to the need for the Eucharist in our lives. A modern saint who was at home with the internet and recognised its power in our lives; his mother Antonia spoke to reporters prior to the ceremony, **“I must say that the internet is incredible. It’s a gift. Of course, the internet has a dark side”** when misused for pornography, bullying, and selling drugs, but Carlo showed the good side of internet. And we know that the light is stronger than the darkness.” Obviously, she is biased but she sees her eldest child, a victim of leukaemia, as a prophet for our times: **“because, of course, a saint is somebody who goes a little bit against the mainstream, the mentality of most people.”** Don Bosco, Dominic Savio and Carlo could be seen as rebels’ as they offer values that sometimes we would like to hide. Carlo spoke of the cult of the superstar that is all too obvious in our society today, as a quick look into any tabloid newspaper will show; he would comment:

You see queues in front of a football match or an actor or rock singer, but you don’t see a queue for the tabernacle where there is the real presence of God, God that lives among us



(Blessed Carlo Acutis 1991-2006)

Personally, I am drawn to Carlo’s wisdom when he said, **“we are all born original, but many die as photocopies.”** Today we see God blessing the original gift to the world that is Mary; Blessed Carlo wants each of us to make our own contribution to the life of the world, it is a contribution that only YOU can make. While Carlo was strongly attached to the Eucharist, his prayer life, and working in his local soup kitchen, he enjoyed physical activity, playing with his many friends and living the life of a normal teenager- others sought him out when they had problems; he was a real friend to those in need. Carlo's friendly face was a common sight in his neighbourhood. He befriended everybody, including the gatekeepers, janitors, and other domestic servants that worked around his area. These workers were often non-Europeans with

Muslim and Hindu backgrounds. Carlo told everybody about his love for Christ, and people couldn't help but listen and share in his joy. Another recent saint, Cardinal Newman powerfully reminds us of our uniqueness; I pray that today you do not follow the crowd, but that you are prepared to make a difference:

God has created me to do him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission; I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

(St John Henry Newman)

Mary had found that level of sanctity and was chosen to be the 'SHEKINAH' or place of encounter with God. God's Shekinah is assuming flesh and blood in the womb of history, within the womb of a Davidic descendent, Mary, who dares to say, ***"I am the handmaid of God, be it done to me according to your word"*** (Lk 1: 38). It is Mary's faith that makes the incarnation possible; it is our faith that makes the incarnation possible in our own world. It brings new meaning to our families, to grow with us, to be with us. And it is through the goodness of our own faith, one with him, that the love of God is to be radiated out into the whole world. Today we can follow the example of Mary and see great things happen with just a little love, mixed with a little faith; Christmas is not something that happened to other people many, many centuries ago. Christmas can happen every day when we bring our faith together and say to God, ***"Take my life. Be it done to you and be it done to me according to Your word."***

Today: follow the example of Blessed Carlo and use the internet to bring goodness-even a positive tweet could help someone

We can pray as we light the fourth candle:

Lord, we thank you for the gift of Mary in the life of our Church-may we follow her example of faith, hope and love. Like her may we see God's hand in all we do and say today.

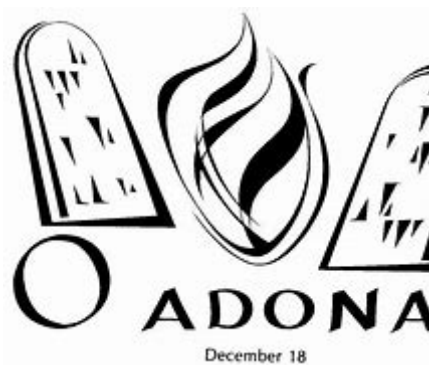
We thank you for the gifts of Dominic Savio and Carlo Acutis; they are role models for our young as they remind us that we can all be happy and have good times following the Gospel.

As adults, may we always give good example and be open to learning from our young people: they can teach us so much if our ears and hearts are open to them.

As we light this fourth candle and complete a circle of light, may we share that light with those we meet this week; may that light guide us through the hectic few days ahead and may we enjoy the eternal light of Jesus on Christmas Day itself. AMEN



(from Aleteia website)



Monday 19th December 2022



Birth of John the Baptist is proclaimed in the most unusual of ways: we meet Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth. Luke tells us that both came from fine families and that he is a Temple Priest. More importantly, they **'were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly'** (Lk 5:6). Sadly, both were **'getting on in years'** (Lk 5:7) and desperately wanted a child. It is while Zachariah is completing his holiest of priestly tasks that the Angel Gabriel, the messenger of God, appears to him. Once again, the message from God is clear, **'do not be afraid!'** (Lk 5:13), and he is told that Elizabeth will have a son, **'and you must name him John'** (Lk 5:13). With God the impossible is possible: this child will not only bring **'joy'** to his family (Lk 5:14), but John **'will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God'** (Lk 5:16). Just like Mary of Nazareth in the Annunciation story we will hear tomorrow, Zachariah has his doubts, **'how can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years'** (Lk 5:18).

It may seem cruel, but Zachariah was silenced by God for refusing to listen to this glorious message—despite his best efforts, he could only make ‘**signs to them**’, the worshippers in the Temple, and ‘**remained unable to speak**’ (Lk 5:22). Was God punishing him for his lack of faith? Was God allowing him time, space, and silence to allow this news to sink in? Sometimes we need to take a step back and enjoy the peace and quiet; sometimes we need space to process important news and events; sometimes we need to just shut up and allow God to speak to us. The good news is that Elizabeth did become pregnant and gave birth to a prophet who was to change the lives of so many people.

Today: in this busy week leading up to Christmas Day, allow yourself the gift of silence

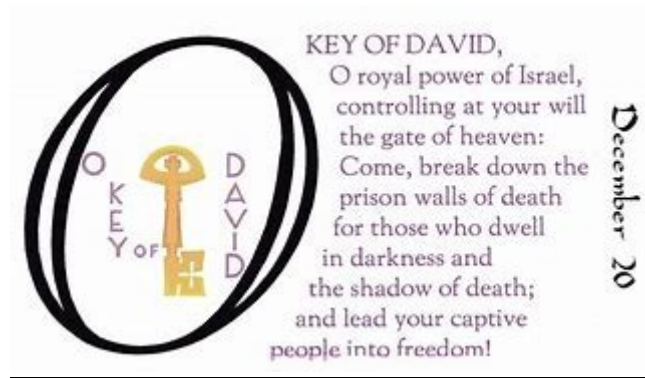
We can pray the wonderful prayer of Zechariah, as he greeted the arrival of his new baby, John:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them...
...You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Prayer of Saint Zechariah

Dear Lord,
we ask you to help us to lead a holy and a righteous life,
so that our behaviour help others get to know about you.
We ask you to teach us how to be kind to each other,
and we also ask you to keep guiding in the way of peace.
Amen.





We shared today's reading from Luke some weeks ago on the feast on the Immaculate Conception. However, reading it again, with only days before the great celebration of Christmas, the story of Annunciation seems more poignant and special. Once again, we are presented with the Angel proclaiming the impossible: a virgin will conceive! Mary is seen to be **'highly favoured!'** because **'the Lord is with'** her (Lk 1:28). Again, we hear that eternal promise of God: **'do not be afraid!'** (Lk 1:30). As the saying goes, the rest is history—a divine history of God becoming part of our world. A God who is so concerned about the welfare of humanity, that the Divine become one just **'like us in all things but sin'** (Heb 4:15).

In the Annunciation dialogue, we see the reality of the situation: fear, concern, doubt and, eventually, trust with Mary's beautiful words, **'I am the Lord's servant, may your word to me be fulfilled'** (Lk 1:38). I am sure that there have been times when you have shared the emotions of Mary at Annunciation: demands are made of you that you cannot hope to fulfil; you are expected to make a leap of faith; you learn to trust in the Lord. The Swedish sensation, 'Abba' have song that perfectly fits today—faith demands that we take a chance!

Today: make a leap of faith and take that chance on God



We can pray:

O most holy Virgin Mary,
to whom God sent the Angel Gabriel
to announce that you should be the mother of His Only Begotten Son,
pray for us who have recourse to you.

Holy, lovely Mary
We give our all to you
What is past and present,
And the future, too.
Blessed be the holy and Immaculate Conception
of the most blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

Wednesday 21st December 2022



O dawn of the east, brightness of light eternal, and sun of justice: come, and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

One of the things I love about Mary of Nazareth is her decisive action; she does not appear much in the Gospels, but she is always seen as helping and supportive from Bethlehem to Cana to Calvary to the early Christian lockdown in the Upper Room. On hearing that she is to be the mother of God she does not sit back and bask in her chosen status; nor does she figuratively flick through the pages of an early 'Mothercare' catalogue to pick items for the nursery. Luke presents her going on a difficult journey south to **'the hill country of Judea'** (Lk 1: 39) so that she could be with Elizabeth, the older woman who was having a child for the first time. Mary was her help, and support-she was the help to the couple at Cana; she supported Jesus to the very end on Calvary, and she was that needed point of care to the early disciples after Resurrection when they feared for their lives. Just to see Mary's smiling face coming around the corner must have brought great comfort; we need those friends and family members who cause the same reaction in our lives too. Be thankful today for those who offer that support; for those who cause you to smile and feel good just thinking about them-they are true friends.



‘The Visitation’—a sculpture in the piazza outside the Church of Visitation

In the courtyard of the Church of the Visitation in the village Ein Karem, outside Jerusalem is the statue of the ‘Visitation’ depicting the momentous meeting of the two pregnant women. Elizabeth is filled with that indescribable joy when she meets Mary and exclaims in the style of Judith and Jael, ***“Of all women you are the most blessed and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”*** (Lk 1: 42). Elizabeth gives praise to God who makes a promise that is kept: both women will bring children into the world-children that will transform the world. Elizabeth proclaims that they are truly BLESSED, and I am reminded on that incident in the Gospel who sees that the womb he came from is blessed, the breasts that suckled him are blessed. Jesus’ reply is simple and to the point, ***“More blessed still are those who HEAR the word of God and KEEP it”*** (Lk 11: 28). Mary and Elizabeth are those faithful disciples who hear and keep God’s word; not only do they ‘talk the talk’, which is relatively easy to do, they ‘walk the walk’-much harder to achieve but the sign of a true disciple. Like Mary, you will be carrying Jesus with you today; how you respond to situations and people will define your very being today. Be kind, listen and give praise and thanks who help you along the Camino today: may your day move from grey to gold.

Today: smile more-share a joke and laugh heartily (just like a six-year-old)

We can pray:

May you find a gift this morning
Laid out for you in the sky.
A beautiful reminder
That sets your hope in flight.

May you notice birds above you
That soar and ride the winds.
And know that as you lift your prayer
God lifts your heart and sings.

May you hear the sweet birds chirping
May you smell the fresh cool air
And know that God's love is all around
Holding you so dear.



In the Gospel today, we have Mary's response to Elizabeth's greeting – a response that we have come to love in the Magnificat prayer. It is a prayer rooted in the Hebrew hymn of praise tradition and it is something we could perhaps use as a guide for our own prayer today. Mary gives a reason for her praise ***"because he has looked upon on his lowly handmaid"*** (Lk 1: 47); she joins with women such as Hannah and Leah in offering fulsome praise of God: ***"What happiness! Women will call me happy!"*** (Gen 30: 13). In full charismatic flow, Mary proclaims God to be:

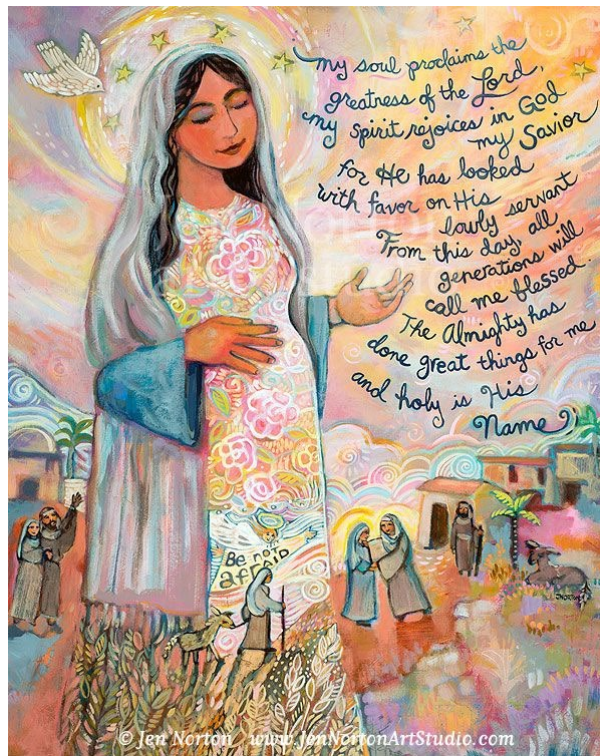
- **The mighty one**-God saves the people; for the Hebrew people this is centred on Exodus, their freedom from slavery and commemorated annually at Passover.
- **The holy one**-Mary carries the holy one who will show the world what it means to be truly HOLY. It does not involve 'chewing down the altar rails' as the wise women of St James Parish in Bootle would often remind me!
- **The merciful one**-time and time again, God has offered his people yet another chance. God continues that quality in the ministry of both John and Jesus; we need to continue that quality in our forgiving and caring relationships.

As the prayer progresses, we see Mary echo Jesus' concern for those on the margins; the reign of God is for all, not just the lucky few. Please never limit the grace of God to a special group that happen to go to your Church or who think just like you or pray just like you. We belong to a very broad Church as Mary reminds us, ***"he has routed the proud of heart, he has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has fed with good things, the rich sent empty away."*** (Lk 1: 52-53). Gospel values are not always what society wants and this time of pandemic and enforced lockdown has forced many to look at their lives and see where priorities should lie. As the prayer ends Mary reminds us of the covenant bond that God has with all of us. ***"Mindful of his mercy—according to the promise he made to our ancestors—of his mercy to Abraham and his descendants for ever"*** (Lk 1: 54-55). Unlike many of us, God makes a promise that will never be abandoned or conveniently forgotten; Mary is all too aware of the personal promise that God made to her at the Annunciation. In staying with Elizabeth for ***'about three months'*** (Lk 1: 56), Mary honours that promise in her care for Elizabeth: we cannot say we are close to God and ignore our neighbour in need. The letter of John puts it very well, ***'If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars. For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen.'*** (1 Jn 4:12)

Today: offer help without having to be asked

We can pray:

Today we pray with Mary and offer our full praise and thanks to God; concentrate on the good that you have received and offer those bad memories and experiences to a God who is walking with you today



(Jen Norton)

Friday 23rd December 2022



O EMMANUEL, God with us, our King and Lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Saviour: come to save us, O Lord our God

Today the focus of our Gospel is once again John the Baptist: friends and family gather with Elizabeth to **'share her joy'** (Lk 1: 58) in the birth of this unexpected son. At his naming ceremony they assume that he will be named after his father, Zechariah who made it quite explicit as he wrote **'his name is John'** (Lk 1: 63)-this very fitting as the name means 'God's gracious gift.' In that simple act of submission to the will of God, the pride and arrogance of Zachariah is freed, and he can talk again. In regaining the gift of speech **'he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judea'** (Lk 1: 64-65). When we NAME somebody, the relationship becomes

very special: I will always remember the time when a friend called me 'Gerry' for the first time instead of using my title, 'Father'; it may seem a little thing, but it was so special and made me realise that we were now friends and could dispense with anything that could get in the way of that true friendship. In our Gospel today, Zachariah realises his lack of faith and trust in God, while Elizabeth simply lives it; their tiny infant will grow up to challenge and to prepare the world for the Emmanuel, to help us to realise that God is indeed with us. As you walk this Advent Camino today, with Christmas Day just around the corner, I pray that your faith and trust be like that of Elizabeth: you CAN do great things today because the **'hand of God'** (Lk 1: 66) is with you too.

Today: bring your family and friends before God and NAME each one of them-perhaps you can light a candle for them

We can pray:

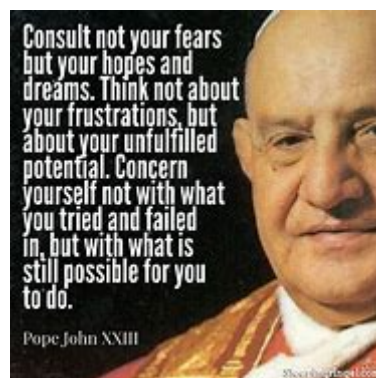
Lord, thank you for the goodness in my life and for giving me my name. When I wake each morning, I praise Your name! You have given me life that is filled with beauty, and the breath in my lungs is a gift from You. I pray that You will fill my day with love and sustenance. And may I remember at the end of each of my days, to thank you for all that has been placed in my life

Saturday 24th December 2022-Christmas Eve



Our Camino is nearly at an end--there is something so special about Christmas Eve: the shops are shut and, if you have not got that 'must have gift', then you will have to wait until the January sales and save yourself a fortune. I remember, with great affection, the traditions of other families that I have been privileged to share: some years ago, before the pandemic hit, Christmas Eve I joined a family from eastern Europe as we

shared their traditional carp; due to commitments in the parish I could not stay to enjoy the whole twelve courses (in honour of the 12 Apostles of Jesus), but I did feel well and truly blessed. The Gospel of our day mass echoes that sensation as Zachariah, now free and a father for the first time, can pray his own prayer of blessing, what we now know as the ‘Benedictus’ As the Hebrew people could give thanks to a saving God after the Exodus event, so praise now fills the mouth of the once silent Zechariah, **“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel for he has visited his people, he has come to their rescue.”** (Lk 1: 68). In a few short hours we will celebrate that saving God who comes to visit us in the form of a child, innocent and full of wonder. We are saved by a God who first comes to us as a child! In his adult ministry Jesus saw the importance of children, as he welcomed and encouraged them. We are called, as a Church, to ensure that our children are always safe and well; like Jesus we are invited to learn from them. In the prayer, the father blesses his child, John who will grow up to be the Baptist **‘to go before the Lord, to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sin.’** (Lk 1: 76-77). As the night draws in tonight, we are buoyed up by the lights of our Christmas Trees and the simple carols that we sing together that give us hope. I hope that this Advent Camino has brought you light in these difficult times. I urge to go to Midnight Mass if you can but remember it will be on your television screens later this evening-even the BBC and ITV acknowledge the sacred in these secular times-we will be providing an on-line service to welcome the light. On this most sacred of nights, we remember that the Risen Lord will **‘visit us to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace’** (Lk 1: 79). Please send in any prayer requests that will be placed in the crib here in Bolton tonight; I hope that Christmas 2022 will be remembered for the right reasons. I hope that this holiday season will give you respite from being weighed down by the fear of economic hardship, the threat of the Ukrainian War escalating, and even Covid-19. I pray that the darkness brought to us by these fears, will be blown away by Christmas light. As the good Pope St. John XXIII reminded us sixty years ago:



I hope that you have a wonderful family Christmas, surrounded by those you love and who love you-even though they might not be physically present with you. Keep safe and well; may you have a very happy and blessed Christmas. While our Advent Camino, might end tonight I pray that we might be able to walk together again during Lent. As the great parable of Final Judgement tells us we do not go to the Lord on our own-our actions and attitude towards others go with us. Jesus reminds us. **“As long as you did it for the least of these my sisters or brothers, you did it for me.”** (Matt 25: 40).

Today: see if anyone needs help in the kitchen; if you are in the kitchen then don't be afraid to ask for help! Enjoy your feast.

We pray as you light the Christmas Candle

May the Lord bless you and keep you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzqrWae5IK4>

Let us be still in the darkness of our sacred space,
And listen to the quiet around us.
For even in the quiet, there is the gentle being with others.
Let us feel the warmth of our community,
Knowing we are not alone.
For in the quiet shadow is the glow of life within all.
Let us know in the darkness the gift each candle bears,
A small flame, a diminutive light—
Yet the wondrous gift to kindle another's glow.
Let us be in awe at this moment as we each take up the flame
And the light envelopes this room,
As hope for peace and goodwill fill this night.
So may it be.

(Lisa Rubin)

Sunday 25th December 2022--Christmas Day

As you open your gifts and cards today, remember just how much you are loved and respected; love your family and friends who are with you, think of those loved ones unable to share this day. Our virtual Camino has joined us together over these past four weeks and we are closer than ever today. May you have a truly blessed and wonderful Christmas.



(by Taiche)

Today: be with your loved ones

We pray:

Fill our world with your peace. AMEN



Children, make this a day for all your family.