

## A Camino through Advent 2020 ...



### December 6, 2020 – 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”** (Mk 1:3). 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 Mark 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).

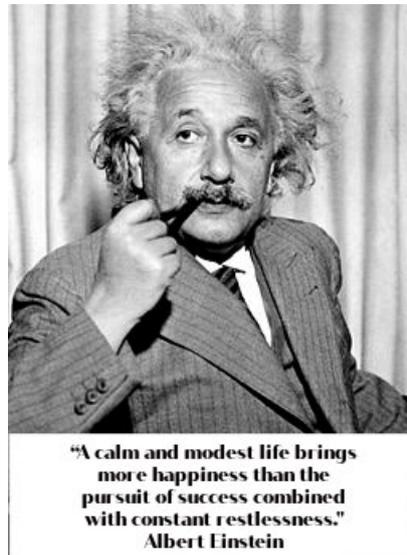
It has not been an easy path for all of us in these past few months: we have experienced all kinds of woes and problems, but John is given to us today as the enabler. He comes full of empathy and compassion to help us all move forward; Mark presents the crowds coming to him in the River Jordan for baptism, using water as a symbol of cleansing. Through this ritual, the crowds: **“ALL of Judea and ALL the people of Jerusalem...confessed their sins”** (Mk 1:5–6). 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.

When he was told that the Declaration of Independence in America was **‘Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness’**, Albert Einstein used to say that 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 fully happy? These past few months have 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—the one he was not worth **“to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals”** (Mk 1:7). Like all good disciples, John points to a truth beyond himself; as those roads are straightened out and the valleys filled in, we have an easy access to a God who loves us unconditionally and will be our source of happiness and joy. This year, your various Christmas ‘do’s’ may have been cancelled, the ski trip to Austria might have to be on hold and the frantic round of visits to family and friends may have to be conducted over Zoom. However, with the time you have gained, why not 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.**



*Image of Einstein: Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons*

**We can pray as we light the second candle:**

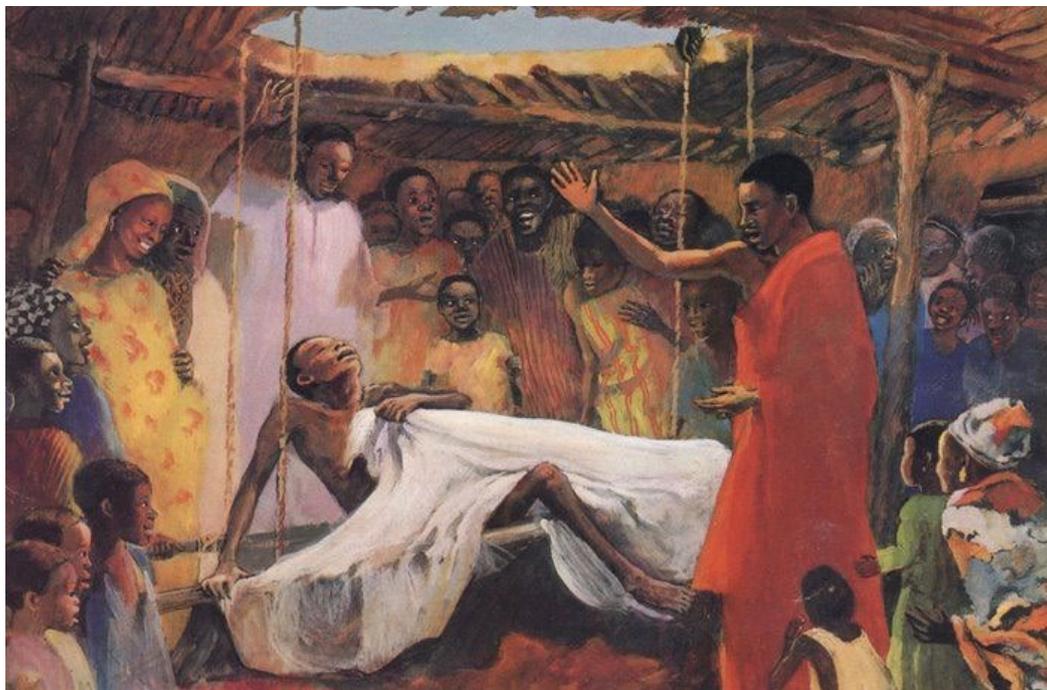
**If you can, listen to the musical adaptation of today’s first reading from Isaiah, put to music by Handel, ‘Come Ye/Every Valley’ by Gramophone Chorus, Ghana**

<https://youtu.be/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)**

## December 7, 2020—Monday of the Second Week

Although today is the feast of St Ambrose of Milan, I would like to concentrate on the readings of Advent. Ambrose is a remarkable saint from the early Church: a member of the civil service of the Roman Empire, he found himself appointed the Bishop of Milan, even though he was not an ordained priest—in fact, he was not baptised! Within a week he was baptised, ordained priest, and then ordained Bishop on this day in 374CE. In these times when we need creativity and 'out-of-the-box' thinking, perhaps St Ambrose could be our patron as we move the Church forward? Jesus was not 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. It is said that 'necessity is the mother of invention' and we have certainly had to be inventive during these pandemic days: our patience has been tried and tested and we have found ways of getting close to Jesus and others, even if SOCIAL DISTANCING is in play. Of course we need guidelines, rules and regulations, but like Ambrose and 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.



*JESUS MAFA. Jesus heals a paralyzed man, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48306>*

**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**



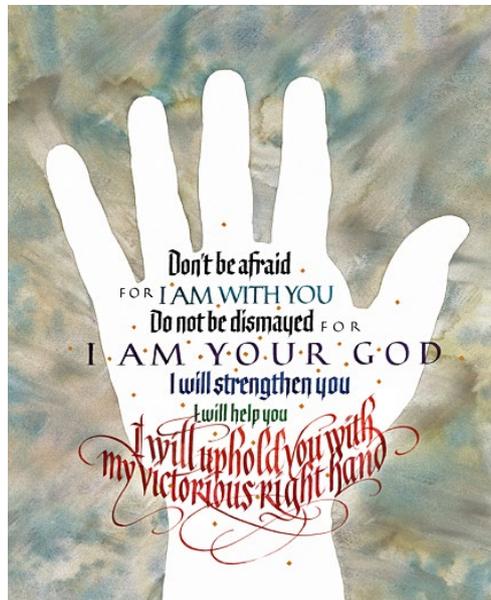
*Photo: by Sasin Tipchai from Pixabay*

## **December 8, 2020— the Feast of 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 the 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 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://youtu.be/LAxUk093ZK0>

**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!**

## December 9, 2020—Wednesday of second week

There is no doubt that we have been overburdened during this experience of the pandemic: 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 overburdened, and I will give you rest...I am gentle...you will find rest"*** (Matt 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.

**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:**



*"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,  
for I am gentle and humble of heart."*

**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**

## December 10, 2020—Thursday of the Second Week

A central Advent figure features in the Gospel today as Jesus proclaims: ***“Of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen”*** (Matt 11:11). John is seen as the great prophet whose job is not to tell the future like some biblical ‘Mystic Meg’; the prophet has a much harder and meaningful task than to suggest what the lottery numbers might be next week! The prophets are sent by God to see how the people of Israel were LIVING the Covenant; God promises that he will be true to his chosen ones, but they must remain true to him. Time and time again, these chosen ones went their own selfish way and ignored the Covenant, but God remained faithful. Prophets, like John, did not have an easy life as they had to constantly remind people to be true and faithful to God. Many of them never got to enjoy retirement or to use their ‘bus pass’ because, like John, their message was uncomfortable, and the establishment got rid of them. We remember the gift of John the Baptist and his ministry of reconciliation; he is the one who points to that total love that Jesus has for you today and always:

***I will take you to be my people and I will be your God*** (Exod 6:7).



*‘Baptism of Jesus by John’ by John Nava, designed for the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles*

**TODAY: Try to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation; if it is impossible give yourself time to be open to the loving, unconditional forgiveness of God in your life.**

**We can pray:**

**Today I look for your loving forgiveness  
I regret my selfishness and my lack of thought  
Help me to do better and to try again**

**May I do, today, something that will make the world a better and kinder place.**

**AMEN**

## December 11 2020—Friday of the Second Week

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's word picture, cry out: **"We played the pipes for you and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges and you wouldn't be mourners"** (Mat 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, as the pandemic has shown us, we need to cope with change in all aspects of our life from work and schooling to sport and relaxation—life in December 2020 has changed from our experience of Advent in 2019. 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"** (Matt 11:18), nor are we **"gluttons"** or **"drunkards"** (Matt 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.

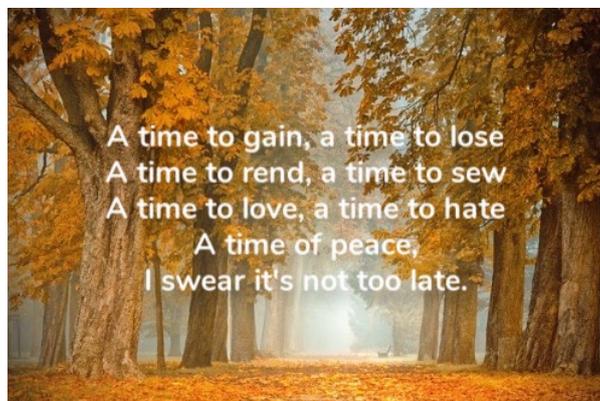
**TODAY: Take time to realise how you can make a difference in the lives of others, as there is a "time for every purpose under heaven" (Pete Seeger's 'Turn, Turn, Turn').**

Reflect on the song: <https://youtu.be/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 (see Eccl 3).**



*Photo by Peggy Choucair from Pixabay*

## December 12, 2020—Saturday of the Second Week

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 (Matt 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" (Matt 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" (Matt 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" (Matt 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		RIVER
T	S	L	A	D	N	A	S	E	E		ISAIAH
S	T	E	M	S	I	T	P	A	B		MESSENGER
U	R	W	N	S	P	E	S	R	O		WILDERNESS
C	A	F	A	R	N	I	E	E	O		BAPTISM
O	P	I	S	T	E	T	R	V	K		REPENTANCE
L	A	T	A	N	E	D	E	I	A		CAMELSKIN
H	O	N	E	Y	I	R	L	R	T		LOCUSTS
K	C	A	M	E	L	S	K	I	N		HONEY
E	R	T	N	E	T	T	I	R	W		STRAP
										SANDALS	
										SPIRIT	

From Resources for Catholic Educators <http://www.4catholiceducators.com/gospel-mark-1-a.htm>



From Ministry to Children <https://ministry-to-children.com/john-baptizing-jesus-cartoon-coloring-page/>



## JOHN THE BAPTIST

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

From NetArt <https://netart.us/cartoon-of-john-the-baptist-coloring-page/>