

First Sunday of Advent

WOKEN UP BY HOPE!

Therefore, **stay awake!**

For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

—Matthew 24:42

Undoubtedly, you've already encountered a lot of Christmas. Between Black Friday sales, Hallmark movies, and Christmas music playing everywhere and all the time, it is possible that you could already be sick and tired of Christmas. Wherever you fall on the secular getting-ready-for-Christmas continuum, this is a phenomenon from which you may find it nearly impossible to escape during the next month. It is incredibly easy to have our senses dulled by all of the hustle and bustle.

Yet the Church gives us the season of Advent to help us resist the onslaught of consumerism that leads us away from deeper meanings of the season. Advent is our great gift and opportunity to retreat to quiet places, to reflect, and most importantly to stay awake, watching and waiting for the One who is coming.

The belief behind Advent is that while we celebrate at Christmas the birth of the child Jesus in Bethlehem long ago, the Lord is already here, born anew each day within our hearts if we but let him in. We are meant to be on the lookout for his arrival—to be anticipating, with hope and excitement, the Lord who is already with us, even as we await his coming in glory at the end of time.

What if you make this Advent season about more than just lighting Advent wreath candles and wishing the days away until the twenty-fifth? What if you made it about becoming more aware of Christ's presence in your life, your family, your friends, and your school? Christ has a gift to give you, but you must be awake to receive it.

Pick a Challenge

- Wake up a fifteen to thirty minutes early every morning this week to help your family get ready for their day, whether by helping with

breakfast, by helping your younger siblings get ready for school, or just to share a quick conversation with your parents.

- Make a list of the five people in your life that you want to make more time for this Advent season. What is one way you can be more *awake* to their needs in the coming week?
- Spend ten minutes in prayer before bed, thinking about moments throughout your day when you were awake to God's nudges.

Feel Ambitious?

Read the story of the Annunciation, from the Gospel of Luke (1:26–38). Think about these questions:

- If an angel were to appear to you and give you good news, how would you respond?
- If an angel were to appear to you and ask you to do something for God, what would you say?

Prayer

*Jesus, help me pay attention
to the ways you are trying to wake me up.
Help me hear your voice and respond with trust in you.
Amen.*

First Monday of Advent

For the sake of my brothers and friends I say,

“Peace be with you.”

—Psalm 122:8

Family life can be messy. While the holidays are billed as a fairytale scene of happy families, the reality is that the stress of the season can drive families apart. It is important to get this right at the beginning so that our Advent journey is one that we take together, as a family of faith in our Church and as a loving community within our own homes. Whatever the mess looks like in your life, take time today to bring peace.

Pray with the psalm this morning, and then put that peace into practice. Forgive your sister, apologize to your dad, do that chore you’ve been putting off for weeks. If peace is within us, then the warmth of Christmas will be something we live.

Grow Your Soul

Try to go to confession this week. Let Jesus forgive and heal you, then extend his peace to others. If you haven’t been to confession in a while, ask the priest, a trusted friend, or a mentor to remind you how to approach the sacrament.

Feel Ambitious?

Have you caused any lingering harm in your family? Work to find healing by asking forgiveness. Consider journaling about the relationship first; figure out what you’d like to see happen here.

Prayer

*Jesus, my heart is often filled with worry
and my mind is flooded with stress.*

Give me your peace, in every corner of my life.

Amen.

First Tuesday of Advent

The calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with **a little child to guide them.**

—Isaiah 11:6b

In the middle of an argument has someone ever lobbed an accusation at you that made you push back harshly, defending yourself to later realize they maybe had a legit complaint? It's hard to be confronted with the truth about ourselves or how our actions affect others.

Advent, in many ways, is a microcosm of discipleship. It is a journey from self-deception to self-awareness. Today's verse from Isaiah is part of a longer passage that illustrates the mass of contradictions that exist within the human heart. We are lions, lambs, wolves, calves, oxen, and vipers. This chaotic menagerie seems awfully problematic, but when we humble ourselves enough to let a little child lead us and save us, then we will begin to instead become a harmony of love.

Grow Your Soul

Make your Christmas list for Jesus. What do you want or need to receive from Jesus, and what can you give him?

Feel Ambitious?

Read through Isaiah 11, and identify the animal analogy that describes the battle within your own heart. How might that battle might end in peace with Jesus on your side?

Prayer

*Jesus, sometimes I do and say things
that make me not recognize myself.
Teach me how all the parts of my soul
are meant to exist in harmony
to bring glory to your name.
Amen.*

First Wednesday of Advent

The Lord GOD will **wipe away the tears** from all faces.
—Isaiah 25:8b

Advent helps us anticipate the joy of Christmas. But for many people this time of year is hard. Some people don't want to slow down. They don't want to prepare for Christmas, because if they stay busy, then they won't dwell on the memory of a lost loved one, the reminder of a broken relationship, or the fact that they're alone, stressed out, depressed.

Those may seem like good-enough reasons to just plow through to Christmas, but in fact the hard things in life are *why* we need to slow down and pray. God wants to wipe the tears from our eyes, to be with us when we're sad, suffering, lonely, and afraid. God comes to us and heals us. God is with us. Christmas is the celebration of just that amazing reality. Advent, especially these first few days, gives us the chance to think about and gather all those tears we want our God to wipe away.

Grow Your Soul

Reflect on a time this year when you felt scared, sad, angry, or alone. Who was there for you during this time of suffering? How did you feel your tears being wiped away?

Feel Ambitious?

Ask your parish priest if there is a wake service or Rosary being prayed for someone who has died in your parish. Go and pray with those who mourn. Help wipe away their tears, just by being present there.

Prayer

Jesus, this time of year can be a time of great sorrow.

Help me bring your light and love to those in need.

Help me wipe away their tears

and bring them the hope of Christmas.

Amen.

First Thursday of Advent

With firm purpose you maintain peace;
in peace, because of our trust in you.

Trust in the LORD forever!

For the LORD is an eternal Rock.

—Isaiah 26:3–4

Life is hard. In the midst of this Advent journey, you may find that you keep stumbling over the same difficulties in your effort to get closer to Jesus. But don't forget: Jesus came to be with us, even as we make mistakes. Read that again. He came to be with all of you, good and bad. He came to be *with you* and with all of us, even when we're angry, weak, lustful, selfish, mean, or distrusting. In fact he wants to be with us *especially* then, when we need him most.

Jesus is the eternal Rock on which we can rest secure. You just have to trust him and be at peace as you allow his work, his presence, to take root and grow in your life.

Grow Your Soul

Before going to bed tonight think and maybe write about in what parts of your life you'd like to trust the Lord more. Ask, "What will I do about this?"

Feel Ambitious?

Have lunch with or start a conversation with someone at school or at home who might be feeling alone or downhearted. How can you become less caught up in your own struggles and more present to others?

Prayer

*Jesus, your ways are not my ways,
and yet I want to make them my ways.
Help me to trust you more, so that I may love you more.
Amen.*

First Friday of Advent

The LORD is my life's refuge;

of whom should I be afraid?

—Psalm 27:1

We'd be making a huge mistake if we didn't tell you that the real project of this book, the real task, is for you to grow to have a deep and abundant trust in the goodness and love of God, who has nothing but the very best plans for you. If we don't trust in the One for whom we are waiting, then we won't be able to fully receive all the good gifts he has to give us when he arrives. That's what we want for you.

Do you believe this King is here for you to give you refuge? Do you find security in all the Lord has to give you? The Lord, our refuge, wants all of us to hand over our suffering, brokenness, doubt, worry, and fear so that we can make a home in him, and never be afraid again.

Grow Your Soul

Reflect on the following, and fill in the blanks:

Jesus, I trust in you, but I really don't want you to ask me to _____.

Jesus, I trust in you, but what about _____?

Jesus, I trust in you, but I'm scared of _____.

Feel Ambitious?

Pray a Divine Mercy Chaplet or the Litany of Trust. A quick online search will take you to these awesome prayers.

Prayer

Jesus, I trust you.

Jesus, I love you.

Jesus, I trust you.

Amen.

First Saturday of Advent

No longer will your Teacher hide himself,
but **with your own eyes you shall** see your Teacher.
—Isaiah 30:20b

It's easy to lose track of Christ this holiday season. We're easily lulled to sleep by the glitz and glitter, and hectic pace that surrounds us. It's totally normal to feel that you're over the whole Christmas thing. You've done this all before, and it can all seem rather boring now. The magic is gone, and you're not yet making things magical for others yet. You like getting gifts, but sometimes it's hard to afford giving to others or knowing what to give. The songs, shows, and decorations may seem cheesy now. You are rather stuck between the childhood wonder of Christmas and a deeper celebration that will come with adulthood. But we hope this week has begun to awaken you to seeing Christmas—when we celebrate the mystery of God becoming human—as the big deal that it truly is. We hope you're coming to see that the Lord wants to draw near and dwell with us forever. Our Teacher is not hidden—we only have to open our eyes and hearts and welcome him in. Christ continues to dwell among us, even now.

This Week's Wins

- Where did you notice yourself waking up to God's presence in your life?

- Have you begun to make room in your heart and mind to trust God more?

- Name a few times when you were more present to the people around you.

Feel Ambitious?

Invite your family to pray with you tonight, before dinner. Maybe you already have an Advent wreath, but if not, you can find simple instructions online about how to make one. Create one with your family, light the first purple candle, for hope, and ask everyone in your family to name one thing they're hopeful about this Advent season. If your family isn't willing or able to gather, invite some friends to do this with you.

Prayer

Jesus, I am grateful for your presence in my life.

I love you, and I want to love you more.

Help me to share you with this world, and trust you as I do.

Amen.