

SECOND WEEK
OF ADVENT

Sunday, December 5

As we get ready for Christmas during this second week of Advent, we are working on growing in gratitude and appreciating the life God has given us. While ingratitude is incompatible with happiness, grateful people are happy people. Since all of us are on a happiness quest, it makes sense to grow in gratitude.

First, we need to see the blessings and gifts given to us. If we don't see them, then it is impossible to be grateful. Second, we need to turn our attention toward the giver of the gifts. Ultimately, God is the giver of all our blessings. So, to express gratitude, we must turn toward the source of our blessings and give God attention. In all of God's gifts, he wants to build a relationship with us.

Last, we need to express our gratitude. We need to do something in response to the gifts we are given and are grateful to have received. But sometimes this is hard to do. This week, we will be examining obstacles that get in our way of seeing God's blessings and responding to them in gratitude and action.

.....

Ask God today to help you see what gets in the way of recognizing his blessings and gifts. Pray for the grace to overcome these obstacles.

Monday, December 6

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

—Luke 21:25–26

Jesus speaks of a time when “people will die of fright.” This is hyperbole. We would say it this way: “I was scared to death” or “He was scared to death.” Jesus warns that people will be scared to death when the Temple is destroyed. The foundations of their faith will be shaken because the Temple was the foundation of their faith. It would be a disaster so large that people would be terrified.

We can lose sight of God’s blessings when we are facing big problems or going through major changes. We can focus all of our attention on those hardships, and they can come to dominate our thoughts and weigh down our hearts.

.....

What major problems or change are you facing now or fear will happen in the future? Confess it to God. Acknowledge it. Ask God for the grace to see beyond the problem and to trust in his mercy and grace.

Tuesday, December 7

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.

—Luke 21:27–28

Jesus describes a time of tribulation when the Temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed. Most people will be terrified, but Jesus says that his followers can have the opposite reaction. They are to stand firm and look toward him because their redemption is coming.

When big problems and major changes hit us, we don't have to be scared. We can instead be grateful and focus our attention on Jesus, who is the Son of Man. The name "Son of Man" communicates both Jesus' humanity and divinity. It means that Jesus knows firsthand our pain and struggles and also has the power to do something about them. Faith is thanking God in advance for working out all things for our good, despite and often through our biggest challenges.

.....

Thank God today that whatever major problems or issues you are facing; he is using them for your good.

Wednesday, December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise.

—Luke 21:34

Big problems can block us from seeing God's blessings, but so can little things. The day-to-day grind of balancing work life and home life, managing anxiety, accomplishing our daily tasks, dealing with frustrating people, and all our other challenges can rob us of gratitude.

Jesus wants us to not allow the daily anxieties of life to rob us of a grateful heart. Do not let these things be a trap. One way we can avoid the ingratitude trap is to remember the blessings behind the burdens. Thank God for both the material goods that make life easier and for the spiritual gifts of Mary, conceived without sin, and all the saints, who are our companions and guides.

.....

What are the daily anxieties that rob you of a grateful heart? Through the intercession of Mary, thank God today for the blessings behind the burdens.

Thursday, December 9

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

—1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Paul tells us clearly of God's will for us. In every single circumstance we are to rejoice, pray, and give thanks to God. God wants us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks because he knows that will give us a better life. If in every circumstance we rejoice, pray, and give thanks to God, we will live a life of value and purpose.

In all circumstances means that, even in our trials and tribulations and struggles, we are to thank God. We don't thank God for the circumstances. We thank God that he is at work in our circumstances.

.....

Pray today for the grace to give thanks to God regardless of your circumstances. Take a moment to memorize the verse above from 1 Thessalonians so that the next time the daily anxieties of life take over, the Holy Spirit can remind you to have an attitude of gratitude.

Friday, December 10

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:6–7

Paul tells us to have no anxiety about life. When our hearts become anxious, we can choose to worry or we can make a better choice. We can turn our attention to our problems, or we can turn our attention to God. We can ask God for help through prayer and petition. We can ask God to act, thanking him because he knows us and hears us and has our best interest in mind.

When we thank God in advance, Paul tells us that we will receive God's peace. It is a peace that surpasses understanding because it is based not on our circumstances but on God's goodness and faithfulness. It is a peace beyond understanding because it guards our hearts from future anxieties.

.....

What are you anxious about? Make your requests about the circumstances known to God. Thank God in advance for what he is going to do.

Saturday, December 11

Psalm 98:1–4

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
His right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his
justice.

He has remembered his kindness and his
faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands
break into song; sing praise.

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.