

Friday, December 4

Iron is sharpened by iron;
one person sharpens another.

—Proverbs 27:17

Proverbs speaks about how people sharpen each other by using a play on words in the original Hebrew: iron sharpens the “face” (the Hebrew word *panim* here means “surface” or “edge”) of iron, and a person sharpens the “face” (the Hebrew word *panim* here means “face” or “words”) of another. Humans learn and grow in wisdom as they interact and talk with each other. This is God’s vision for his children: that they would be constantly giving to one another.

In addition to the seven corporal acts of mercy, there are also the seven spiritual acts of mercy that show specific ways to give to others: instruct the uninformed, counsel the doubtful, be patient with those who wrong us, forgive offenses, correct the sinner, comfort the afflicted, and pray for the living and the dead. These acts are both how we sharpen and give to each other.

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Look at the seven corporal acts of mercy. Pray for the strength and courage to seize the next opportunities to live them.

Saturday, December 5

Daniel 3:82–87

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

“You sons of men, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.”

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

“O Israel, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.”

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

“Priests of the Lord, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.”

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

“Servants of the Lord, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.”

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

“Spirits and souls of the just, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.”

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

“Holy men of humble heart, bless the Lord;
praise and exalt him above all forever.”

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

SECOND WEEK
OF ADVENT

Sunday, December 6

When you get to the core of Christmas, it is all about giving. This is why we call it the season of giving. At Christmas God gave us his greatest gift. John 3:16 tells us, “God so loved the world, he gave his only Son.” God loves so God gives. God gives his Son, and then Jesus gives his life that we might have life.

God gives, and so if we are growing to be more like him, we will grow in our giving and generosity. While this includes giving financially, being a generous person is not just about giving money but also giving anything we have to others. We can be generous by giving our time, sharing a contact, or offering encouragement or wisdom to others.

Giving makes us more like God, and we benefit from it as well. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). And in the end it is the givers and generous people who will inherit eternal life.

This week, look at giving the gift of presence. One of the most frequent promises God makes to his people and to the heroes of the Bible is “I will be with you.” The story of the Bible isn’t about people’s search for God, but God’s desire to be with his people.

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Thank God today that he wants to be with you and for you to know his presence.

Monday, December 7

You, LORD, are our father,
our redeemer you are named from of old.
Why do you make us wander, LORD, from your
ways,
and harden our hearts so that we do not fear
you?

—Isaiah 63:16b–17a

Isaiah recognizes the special relationship the people of Israel have with God. God is a father and a redeemer to them. God saves his people from their problems, even the problems they have created for themselves.

It sounds as if Isaiah is blaming God for when his people wander away from him, but his question is rhetorical. God is a father and a redeemer and so good to us, and yet we wander away from him. We walk away from his presence. Here, Isaiah acknowledges the problem of free will.

God allows his people, allows us, to wander from him. God allows us to harden our hearts so that we become indifferent to his presence. This is not God's will, but he allows it. Isaiah sees clearly the repercussions of ignoring God. It has led to disaster and the multiplication of all kinds of societal problems for the Israelites.

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Are you wandering away from God in some way? Are you hardening your heart to something he wants to tell you? If so, acknowledge it and return to him. Invite him into your heart now. Thank your heavenly Father that he wants to be with you.

Tuesday, December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

You, LORD, are our father,
our redeemer you are named from of old.
Too long have we been like those you do not rule,
on whom your name is not invoked.

—Isaiah 63:16b, 19a

Isaiah recognizes the root problem of the nation of Israel: they have acted like atheists, like people who do not know God. They have not allowed God to rule over their lives and guide their behavior. Now that they have lived apart from God, they struggle to go back to him. Their sin has colored their perception of God.

When we sin, we darken our perception of God's presence. Do you notice that when you sin against someone, you are uncomfortable in their presence? For example, there is that awkward occasion of talking about someone, maybe gossiping about them, and then they walk into the room. The last thing you wanted was their presence.

This is what it is like with God. When we are sinning against God we do not want his presence. The book of Genesis tells us that after Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. The Immaculate Conception of Mary, the new Eve, begins the work of restoring us to his presence.

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Pray through the intercession of Mary that you will know the joy of God's presence this Christmas.

Wednesday, December 9

Why do you make us wander, LORD, from your
ways,
and harden our hearts so that we do not fear
you? . . .

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come
down,
with the mountains quaking before you.

—Isaiah 63:17a, 19b

The people are running from God, so Isaiah cries out to God to make his presence known, to come down and be with his people, rending the veil that separates heaven from earth.

Christmas is the partial fulfillment of this prayer. At Christmas God ripped open the heavens and sent his Son into the world. But he did so quietly. It was a silent night. No one noticed that God had made his physical presence known in a little baby.

Christmas is the partial fulfillment of this prayer because it is not until Jesus' death that it is completely fulfilled. After Jesus died on the Cross, the veil of the Temple's Holy of Holies, which represented our distance from God, was torn in two. Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection mean that God is always with us.

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Pray that your celebration of Christmas this year may daily draw you closer to the living Lord.

Thursday, December 10

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened, that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith, yours and mine.

—Romans 1:11–12

Christmas reminds us that God gave the gift of himself, the gift of his presence. Even though his people had ignored God over and over again, God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

God generously gave himself. Our first job as Christ's followers is to accept and appreciate the gift of God's presence.

Our second job is to give the gift of our presence to others. Paul tells the Romans that he longs to see them and be with them. Being in their presence is valuable to him. Your presence is perhaps the best gift you can give to people. It is a gift that no one else can give. It is an incredibly precious gift because your presence is limited to one place.

When you are making decisions about your commitments this Christmas and throughout your life, ask "Who will most value my presence?" Give the gift of your presence first of all to people who value it the most.

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Ask the Holy Spirit to show you who values your presence the most. Pray for the grace to be present with people who most value your presence.

Friday, December 11

Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me."

—Matthew 25:34–36

When Jesus described the corporal works of mercy in this passage, two of them were about giving the gift of presence to people who were burdened and alone. He said, "I was sick and you cared for me" and "I was imprisoned and you visited me."

Your presence is a valuable gift to people because it demonstrates support for them. Look to give the gift of your presence when people need your support in facing a challenge or difficulty. Maybe you know people this Christmas who will be going through a tough time because it is the first one they will face without a spouse, child, or another family member. Support them with the gift of your presence.

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Your presence is a valuable gift because it relieves people's loneliness. There are people who are lonely because they live alone or feel alone. Your presence can help relieve that loneliness. Who are people you know who are imprisoned, feel imprisoned, or are in an assisted care facility who you should go visit? Ask God for the grace to know who they are and to set aside a time to visit.