



4609 Martin Street South, Cropwell, AL 35054
Office: 205-525-5161 Fax: 205-525-5162
www.ollpellcity.com parish@ollpellcity.com

Rev. William P. Lucas, Pastor

Deacon Terrence Rumore

Deacon Serge Brazzolotto

Deacon E. Lee Robinson

**Director of Religious Education
Music Director
Parish Secretary**

**Jim Mathis
Charmaine Welch
Shelly Hamman**

MASS SCHEDULE

**Saturday : 5:00 p.m. Sunday: 8:30 a.m. & 11:15 a.m.
Weekdays: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 9:00 a.m.
Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.**

OFFICE HOURS: Monday—Thursday 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

CONFESSIONS:

Saturday 4:00 p.m. - 4:50 p.m. or
by appointment.

MARRIAGES:

Must be scheduled with the Priest
at least 6 months in advance.

MORNING ROSARY:

8:30 a.m. before Mass.

MONDAYS:

Miraculous Medal Novena following Mass.

EVERY FIRST FRIDAY:

Novena To The Sacred Heart
of Jesus - before 9 a.m. Mass.
Eucharistic Adoration 9:30 a.m.-10:30 a.m.

HOLY HOUR OF ADORATION:

Third Sunday of every month at 7:00 p.m.
Second Wednesday of every month— 7:30 p.m.
Exposición del Santísimo el segundo Miércoles
de cada mes @ 7:30 p.m.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

August through May. Ages 3 yrs. through
High School.

Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church

Saturday, November 13, 2021
Mass 5:00 pm

Sunday, November 14, 2021
Masses 8:30 am & 11:15 am



Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 14 2021

*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words
will not pass away. —Mark 13:31*



Nov 15 - Nov 21

- Monday:** Rosemary Mateer by the Brazzolottos †
Tuesday: Ramon Amaya by James & Gloria Raynor †
Wednesday: Fr. John Reynolds by Fr. William Lucas †
Thursday: Diane Stubblefield by Madelyn Guald †
Friday: Charles Manning by the Brazzolottos †
Saturday: Pete & Marie Battaglia by Paul & Parma Boyle †
Sunday: John Crapet by the Brazzolottos †
For the People

Please pray for the ill and shut-ins:

Paul Boyle, Jacky Johnson, Peggy Gessler,
Ron & Diana Markevich, Walton Smith,
Juanita Crowson, Toni James, Bob Walsh, Sarah
Svetlay, Fred Brown, Silvia Moten, Mary
& Wayne Adams, Herb Kuntz, Bill & Loretta
Frost, David & Audrey Springer, Christine Jaks,
Jeanie Reid, Ruth Stanley, Jackie Thoma, Cathy
Funderburg Parker, Rosemary Barnwell, Frank
Troncalli, Angela Ledlow, Michael Brayman,
Shannon Ray, Mark Boyle, Lee Walser,
Judy Marston, Geri Bunt, Jay Benson

Please pray for all our loved ones who are ill and our shut-ins.
To add a name, call the church office; or to add to the Prayer
Hot Line please email Sharon Stice at
sharonstice46@gmail.com or call 205-613-1053.

Weekly Readings November 15—November 21

- Monday:** 1 Mc 1:10-15, 41-43, 54-57, 62-63; Ps 119:53, 61, 134, 150, 155, 158; Lk 18:35-43
- Tuesday:** 2 Mc 6:18-31; Ps 3:2-7; Lk 19:1-10
- Wednesday:** 2 Mc 7:1, 20-31; Ps 17:1bcd, 5-6, 8b, 15; Lk 19:11-28
- Thursday:** 1 Mc 2:15-29; Ps 50:1b-2, 5-6, 14-15; Lk 19:41-44
- Friday:** 1 Mc 4:36-37, 52-59; 1 Chr 29:10bcd, 11-12; Lk 19:45-48
- Saturday:** 1 Mc 6:1-13; Ps 9:2-4, 6, 16, 19; Lk 20:27-40
- Sunday:** Dn 7:13-14; Ps 93:1-2, 5; Rv 1:5-8; Jn 18:33b-37

Today's Readings



First Reading — Those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever (Daniel 12:1-3).

Psalm — You are my inheritance, O Lord! (Psalm 16).

Second Reading — Where there is forgiveness, there is no longer offering for sin (Hebrews 10:11-14, 18).

Gospel — Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Mark 13:24-32).

The English translation of the Psalm Responses from *Lectionary for Mass* © 1969, 1981, 1997, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation. All rights reserved.

WHAT IS A SYNOD?

A synod is another name for a meeting. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a synod is, "A meeting of bishops to discuss doctrinal or pastoral needs of the church. A *diocesan* synod is an assembly of priests and other members of Christ's faithful who assist the bishop by offering advice about the needs of the diocese and by proposing legislation for him to enact." (Glossary)

The bishops of the world will be meeting in a General Synod with Pope Francis in October of 2023. Before then, Pope Francis wants the bishops to meet with their clergy and faithful to gain insight into the needs of the Church. This is not about changing doctrine, but rather applying doctrine to the current needs of the Church and the world.

Bishop Raica will have 4 regional meetings with the clergy and faithful of the Diocese during the months of January and February. Those dates and times have yet to be scheduled. In addition, there will be meetings here in our parish during those months to get input from the faithful and clergy here. That information will be passed on to the bishop to include with what he gleans from the in-person meetings.

As I wrote last week, prayer comes first. We need to listen to the Holy Spirit before we speak about the needs of the Church. We also need to listen to each other. Other people have important insights about faith that we can all learn from. This part of the synod process is about learning from the faith experience of others. All the baptized have received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through all the members of the Church, though in different ways depending on their status.

Pope Francis and Bishop Raica want to know how the faith is being lived out in Our Lady of the Lake Parish and how we might do a better job of being Missionary Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Offertory Collection

July 2021 — June 2022

	Actual	Needed weekly
Nov 7 Offertory	\$6,894	\$6,500
Year to Date	\$125,515	\$123,500

Building Fund Collection

July 2021 — June 2022

	Actual	Needed monthly
November 7 Building Fund	\$2,076	\$2,152
Year to Date	\$18,976	\$10,222



Chair: Jeff Reach
jreach@protonmail.com

Vice Chair: Bernie Funderburg
boxacarbern1@aol.com

Secretary: Brenda Rochford
edenrochford@yahoo.com

Mary Burns: angels4maryb@gmail.com

Leslie Hutto: ljhutto@gmail.com

Britton Falkner: brittonfalkner@gmail.com

Debbie Gossett: debbiegossett@msn.com

Allen Ross: allentross5555@gmail.com

Cristy McKinney: cmckinney9839@gmail.com

Council meetings are open to all parishioners, and are typically on the third Wed. of the month after Mass.

FUNDRAISING BANQUET FOR THE POOR OF JESUS CHRIST

The Friars and Sisters of the Poor of Jesus Christ serve in our diocese in the Birmingham area with the poor and homeless. Four of the friars recently attended Mass in our parish.

There is a fundraising banquet for their ministry on December 2nd at Our Lady of Valley parish hall. If you would like to attend or sponsor a table, you can contact the sponsors of the banquet at Ltsau@uab.edu or call 205-913-3776.



Knights of Columbus Prayer Service

*Our Lady of the Lake Grotto
Saturday December 11, 2021 9:00 am*

Everyone is Invited!

Donuts and coffee will be served.

Contact Bernie Funderburg with questions
at 205-405-6382



© J. S. Palach Co., Inc.

Attention All Choir Members and those who would like to join us for the Advent and Christmas Season!!

Rehearsals will begin on Sunday, November 21, 2021, at 9:45 am (between Masses).

Please contact Charmaine Welch @ 205-913-4967 if you have any questions.

See you there!

Our Lady of the Lake Blanket Drive



The annual OLL Blanket drive for the homeless has begun. We are asking for used blankets but new blankets are also welcome. The blankets should be medium weight. Please no oversize comforters or light throws. All donations should be made by November 30.

Please place items in the Blue tubs provided in the vestibules, or call Mari Culver @ 205-525-0071 for pickup. You may also make a monetary donation by writing a check to OLL/Social Concerns.

Assignments—Nov 17 ~ Nov 21, 2021

WEDNESDAY MASS

11/17/2021 7:00 PM

Lector: Susan Moseley

Ministers: Deacon

SATURDAY MASS

11/20/2021 5:00 PM

Greeters: Jan Spencer, Paige Everett

Lector: Marguerite Gorman

Ministers: Deacon

Altar Servers: Bernie & Corey Funderburg

Ushers: Karen Hand, Sam Marston

SUNDAY MASS

11/21/2021 8:30 AM

Greeters: JP & Enid Willi,
Bit & Phillip Thomaston

Lectors: Shelly Hamman, Meagan Price

Ministers: Deacon

Altar Servers:

Ushers: Michael Gagliano, Laura Headley,
Bart Perry, Phillip Thomaston

11/21/2021 11:15 AM

Greeters: Frank & Gracie Troncalli

Lectors: Lexie Smith, Larry Foltz

Ministers: Deacon

Altar Servers: Destiny Markevich, Ethan Myers

Ushers: Chris Gallegly, Caleb Bluhm,
John Bluhm, TBD

If you are unable to keep your assignment, please find a substitute.



The Christian Love Pantry

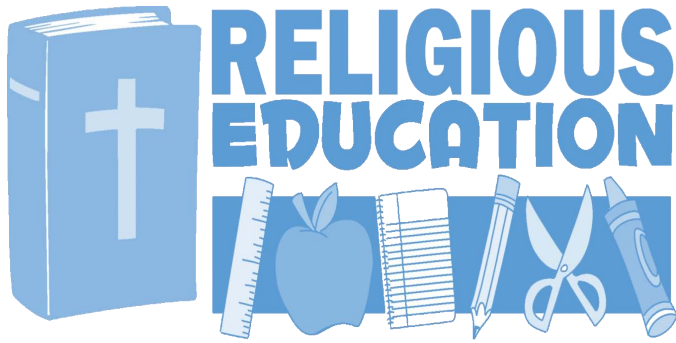
The Christian Love Pantry is helping the poor in the St. Clair County area. To assist them we are collecting canned soup at the church. You can leave donations in the South vestibule.

There is also a box for cash donations in each vestibule. If you prefer, you may drop your donation at the parish office during normal office hours.

Goal –400 cans/month

Cans donated to date in November –169 cans

Please consider donating \$1 per week



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Advent is Approaching!

'Tis the season to string up Christmas lights, decorate the tree, plan out party menus, and buy gifts at shopping centers where it's close to impossible to find parking. Ladies and gentlemen, the Christmas season is in full effect...and it's only November!

Oddly enough, we constantly complain about how fast time flies, but we speed through a whole month to get to the holiday season. The to-do list of things that take over our lives leading up to the Christmas season usually causes more stress and anguish than joy.

Thankfully, the liturgical season of Advent is here to rescue Christmas.

Advent is a time when we can step back from the hectic routine, slow down and contemplate the Mystery of the Incarnation. It marks the beginning of a new liturgical year in the Church that slowly builds momentum towards Christmas as the weeks go by. As with all new beginnings, this season is intended to renew our joy, hope, faith and love.

FORMED

FAITH AT HOME

Parish Code: **JRQNH8**

Looking Ahead:

November 14th - RE— 9:45 am

November 17th -Youth Group-6:00 pm

November 21st- No Religious Education

November 24th— Youth Group will not meet

November 28th - R.E. 9:45AM-11AM.

1st Sunday of Advent. Reconciliation for 3rd, 4th, and 5th Grades.

YOUTH GROUP

Youth Group will continue to meet every Wednesday at 6PM. Students in grades 6-12 are welcome to join us for food, fellowship, and reflection on His Word! Bring a friend!

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”

—Philippians 2:12

BOTTLED WATER COLLECTION

Because of Covid, local children are not able to use water fountains in their schools. Our parish will be collecting bottled water to donate to the local schools. Just leave the donations in the foyers of the church or in the parish hall when they are open.

Thank you.

Advancement of Catholic Schools Special Offering-November 21, 2021

In the offertory envelopes there is a November 21, 2021, envelope for the Advancement of Catholic Schools. There will **not** be a special collection taken up that weekend. This offering is not part of Bishop Raica's special offerings for the 2021 fiscal year. You can disregard this collection envelope in your offertory envelope box.

If you would like to make a donation in support of Catholic education you may give to the "Faith in Education fund". Make your check out to the Catholic Charities and Communities noting your contribution is for the Faith in Education fund. Send any contributions to the following address:

Catholic Charities and Communities
P.O. Box 12047
Birmingham, AL 35202

Sunday—November 14

Mass 8:30 & 11:15 am
RE-9:45 am

Monday— November 15

Mass 9:00 am

Tuesday— November 16

Mass 9:00 am
RCIA-7:00 pm

Wednesday—November 17

Mass 7:00 pm
Pastoral Council-7:30 pm
Youth Group- 6:00 pm

Thursday— November 18

Mass 9:00 am

Friday— November 19

Mass 9:00 am

Saturday— November 20

Reconciliation 4:00-4:45 pm
Mass 5:00 pm
Pilgrim Virgin-6:30 pm

Sunday—November 21

Mass 8:30 & 11:15 am
RE-9:45 am
Holy Hour— 7:00-8:00 pm



Protecting **Seniors**
Nationwide



Call Today!

Toll Free 1.877.801.8608



\$29.95/Mo. billed quarterly

- One Free Month
- No Long-Term Contract
- Price Guarantee
- Easy Self Installation

Please Patronize

The Sponsors Who Appear On This Bulletin.
It Is Through Their Support That This Bulletin Is Made Possible.
Business Owners Interested In Advertising Please Call
J.S. Paluch at 1-800-438-8931





State Farm™

BART PERRY
STATE FARM AGENCY

205-525-0726 www.BartPerry.com

If You Live Alone You Need MDMedAlert!

- ✓ Ambulance
 - ✓ Police ✓ Fire
 - ✓ Friends/Family
- 24 Hour Protection at **HOME** and **AWAY!**
FREE Shipping
FREE Activation
NO Long Term Contracts
- Solutions as Low as **\$19.⁹⁵** a month



CALL NOW! **800.809.3352**

MDMedAlert
Safe-Guarding America's Seniors Nationwide!

GPS Tracking w/Fall Detection
Nationwide, No Land Line Needed
EASY Set-up, NO Contract
24/7 365 Monitoring in the USA

As Shown GPS,
Lowest Price
Guaranteed!

This Button SAVES Lives!

Knights of Columbus
Council 12270



Pell City, AL



**Get this
weekly bulletin
delivered by
email - for FREE!**



Sign up here:

www.jspaluch.com/subscribe

Courtesy of J.S. Paluch Company, Inc.



FINDaPARISH.com

*The Most Complete
Online National
Directory of
Catholic Parishes*

Check It Out Today!

catholicmatch®

Alabama



CatholicMatch.com/myAL



Please Cut Out This "Thank You Ad" and Present It
The Next Time You *Patronize One of Our Advertisers*

Giving Thanks When You Shop

Please be sure to thank the generous advertisers in our bulletin.

Through their participation, our parish receives our weekly bulletin free of charge.

Thank You

Thank you for advertising in our church bulletin.

I am patronizing your business because of it!

Catholic

UPDATE

© 2021 LIGUORI PUBLICATIONS, A REDEMPTORIST MINISTRY.

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE
LIGUORI, MO
63057-9999

800-325-9521
LIGUORI.ORG

PHOTOCOPYING
PROHIBITED.

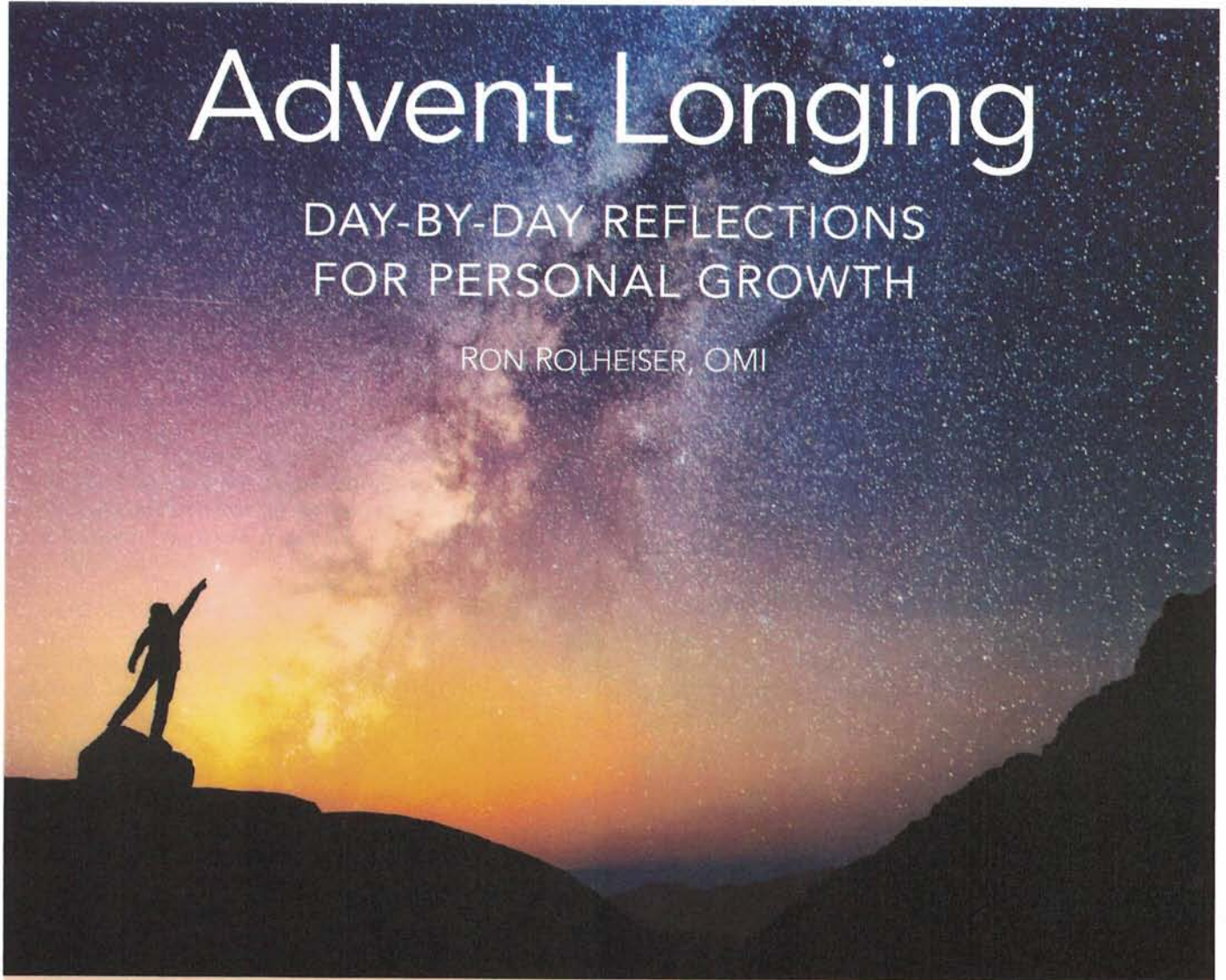
C2111A

NOVEMBER 2021

Advent Longing

DAY-BY-DAY REFLECTIONS
FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

RON ROLHEISER, OMI



Prayer

I am going to strive to be as gracious, warm, and charitable as possible.

I am going to strive to live a more fully "reconciled" life.

No room for past hurts anymore.

I am going to strive, always, to never look on what I am losing

but rather to look at how wonderful and full my life has been and is.

And I am going to, daily, lay all of this at God's feet through prayer. Amen.

First Week of Advent

Getting in Touch with Our Longing and Learning to Wait

JEREMIAH 33:14–15

Sunday Messiahs can only be born when there's enough patience to let things happen on God's terms, not ours. Every frustration should make us more open to love. Every tear should make us more ready to forgive. Every heartache should help us let go of some of our selfishness. Every unfulfilled ache should lead to more sincere prayer. Our impatience should make us feverish enough to burst into love's flame. It is with much groaning of the flesh that the life of the spirit is brought forth!

Monday Some things can't be rushed. Impatience often triggers an irreverence that damages the natural order of things. The process is short-circuited. Advent means waiting. For something sublime to be born, there must first be a proper season of patience. Advent is an invitation to wait and be patient.

Tuesday Scripture tells us that the kingdom of God is not a matter of simple bodily pleasure, but a coming together in justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Advent is about heightening our longing, about letting it raise our psychic temperatures, about sizzling as damp, green logs inside the fires of frustration, about intuiting through desire what the world might look like if a messiah were to come and, with us, establish justice, peace, and unity on this earth.

Wednesday How often can we honestly pray: "God, for you alone do I long"? Desire is complex. There's surface desire and there's deep desire. We can ask: I know what I want on the surface, here and now, but what am I ultimately longing for? Yes, our lives are marked by encounters that exhibit desires that are seemingly not for the bread of life. But they are, and Advent asks us to contemplate their true consummation. At a place deep inside, we long for divine intimacy.

Thursday Patience, chastity, and the capacity to nobly live out tension are not our strengths. Many were never taught that life is hard and that waiting in some form of frustration is the natural state of things. Most will learn this the hard way through bitter experiences, tears, and lots of restlessness. Hunger, not satiation, is the norm. Karl Rahner teaches us that in the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable in this life, all symphonies must remain unfinished.

Friday Though few will admit it, we daydream a lot. Our hearts and minds, chronically frustrated by the limits of our lives, naturally seek solace in daydreaming. In these dreamy states, we're never petty or small. We're always noble and grand, traits that can easily stoke our natural inclination toward narcissism. But, as Henri Nouwen suggests, one of the important struggles in our lives is to turn our fantasies into prayer. That's the task of Advent.

Saturday In the days of apartheid in South Africa, a candle burning in a window was a sign of hope. Similarly, today it conveys the idea that despite chaos in the world, you are still nursing a vision of peace and unity based upon something beyond the present state of things. We light candles during Advent because we believe that God, who is more real than anything else, has promised to establish a kingdom of love and peace on earth and is gracious, forgiving, and powerful enough to do so.

Second Week of Advent

Staying Awake and Waiting with Renewed Patience

ROMANS 13:11

Sunday Jesus tells us to wake up, to stay awake, and to be vigilant. What does he mean? How are we asleep? The distractions and worries of daily life tend to consume us so that we fall asleep to what's deeper and more important inside of life. That's why it's important to participate in regular spiritual rituals, prayer, and the Eucharist to jolt us back awake so it doesn't take a serious ailment like a heart attack or cancer to wake us up.

Monday We live with an impatience that can test the strongest faith and the stoutest heart. We want God to rescue us and intervene actively for justice and goodness. No one wants to live with lifelong patience predicated on the promise that, in the unforeseen end, love and justice will prevail. The need for patience arises from the rhythms innate within life and love—they unfold in due time. They can't be rushed, no matter how great our impatience or discomfort.

Tuesday Celebration is paradoxical, created by a dynamic interplay between anticipation and fulfillment, the ordinary and the special. Previously, a long fast led up to a feast, followed by a celebration. Today we've reversed that watering down of the sublimity in the feast. Experiences often are dull and unable to excite us because we had them prematurely. It's Advent! If we use this season to fast, to intensify longing, and to raise our psychic temperatures, then the feast that follows will have a chance to be sublime. Let's live Advent the right way.

Wednesday Barrenness is more than a biological incapacity to have children. It describes the universal human condition in its incapacity to be generative in the way it would like and the vacuum and frustration that remains in our lives. How do we face this emptiness? The answer is tears. We need to mourn so that our very foundations are shaken. Many of our wounds are irreversible and our shortcomings permanent. Our loss cannot be reversed. Both what we lost and what we failed to achieve can be mourned. In that mourning there is freedom.

Thursday A Norwegian proverb reads: "Heroism consists of hanging on one minute longer." A story from my youth told of a boy who had fallen through the ice. The tale and its moral are simple: The boy lived because he had the courage

and strength to hang on one minute longer. In Galatians 6:9, St. Paul writes: "Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up." If the fight has value, keep hanging on.

Friday Most of us, despite good intentions, push the things we need to change in our lives into the future. We're like the guests in the Gospel parable who are invited to a wedding banquet. We want and intend to go to the feast. But first we must attend to other things. We can get serious later. After converting to Christianity at age twenty-five, St. Augustine struggled for another nine years to bring his sexuality into harmony with his faith. At some point he asked God to "grant me chastity...but not yet." To his credit, unlike many people, at least he eventually stopped pushing things into the indefinite future. Heaven is here.

Saturday We often struggle with faith because God's presence in us and in our world is rarely dramatic. God doesn't work like that. We tend to misunderstand this dynamic. We can learn from the way God was born into our world that faith needs to ground itself on something that is quiet and undramatic. God lies inside us as an invitation that respects our freedom and never overpowers us—precisely like a baby in the straw, gently beckoning us but helpless. God can't make us accept his invitation.

Third Week of Advent

Mary as the Advent Figure

LUKE 1:46–47

Sunday Christian tradition emphasizes that Jesus was born of a virgin, primarily to highlight that Jesus did not have a human father and was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Our concept of the virgin birth has been infiltrated by a piety that cannot accord sexuality to the holy. Beyond denigrating the God-given goodness of sexuality, it misses a moral challenge that invites imitation rather than admiration. Why a focus on purity? Because, as we know, our lives are full of impure characteristics like disrespect, irreverence, and grandiosity. The Messiah can only be born from a virgin's womb.

Monday In the synoptic Gospels, Mary is presented as a model of discipleship. John's Gospel presents her as Eve, the mother of humanity, including each of us. When she stands under the cross, she is in human pain. In this, she shows herself as an example of how injustice must be handled: namely, by standing within it in a way that doesn't replicate its hatred and violence to give it back in kind. Mary offers us an example we should never ignore. Mary is the first to hear the word of God and keep it.

Tuesday Greek myths center on gods and goddesses who mirror aspects of life, including innate human propensities. The goddess Artemis was chaste and celibate. She conveys that, in an overindulged world, one can be generative and happy inside of chastity and even celibacy. Society tells us sex is what we're supposed to live for. We're psychologically and spiritually impoverished by that notion. When one

aspect is asked to bear the weight in terms of human intimacy and joy, it can't help but fall short. If Artemis had been real and lived in the time of Mary, they likely would have been good friends.

Wednesday Joseph is that quiet figure prominently named in the Christmas story as the husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus. We understand that Joseph provides an accepted physical, social, and religious place for Jesus to be born and raised. But Joseph also teaches us how to live in loving fidelity to everything within his religious tradition and yet remain open to a mystery beyond his human and religious understanding. Isn't that one of the ongoing challenges of Christmas?

Thursday In the story of the visitation, Mary, pregnant with Jesus, meets her cousin, Elizabeth, who carries John the Baptist in her womb. Each pregnancy holds something of the divine. Elizabeth's baby leaps for joy in his mother's womb in the presence of Christ. That reaction releases the Magnificat inside of Mary. This image shows us how Christians should encounter other religions. We need each other—Christians and non-Christians—to understand God's revelation. Without recognizing that the other also is carrying the divine, we will be unable to truly release our own Magnificat.

Friday What is finitude? The finite, as we can see from the word itself, contrasts itself to the infinite, to what is not limited, to God. God, alone, is self-sufficient. God, alone, is never helpless. Everything else is finite. Thus, as humans, we're subject to helplessness, illness, hunger, tiredness, irritation, and death. Recognizing and accepting our finitude should challenge us to be like Mary and take up the cause of those in need and ensure that someone spares them from indignity by changing their "water" into "wine." Let's open our hearts to the helpless.

Saturday Mary sometimes is painted lying prostrate under the cross, helplessly distraught, an object for sympathy. But such depictions don't honor the reality or teach the lesson of the cross. Prostration is a sign of weakness. In the Gospels, standing is a position of strength. At times, we need to protest and throw ourselves into the face of injustice. But we also need to accept when darkness is going to have its hour and we can only stand firm, watch, and wait under the cross.

Like Mary, we must have the courage to say: "I can't stop this, but I will not perpetuate its hatred."

Fourth Week of Advent

The Checkered Origins of Christmas

JOHN 3:16

Sunday The story of Jesus and the meaning of Christmas can only be fully understood by looking at where Jesus came from and examining how his story has continued in history. Three of the four gospels tell Jesus' story by beginning with his family tree. Jesus wasn't born of all saintly ancestors. His origins include a long list of saints and sinners,

selfless martyrs, and selfish schemers. Flawed persons and institutions have been part of his Church ever since. Faith can accommodate the recognition of sin and infidelity. So can Christmas.

Monday The mystery of Christ is more encompassing than what we see visibly and historically. It also includes the notion that physical creation itself was created through Christ, that Christ holds it together, and that Christ will give it an eternal future. The mystery of Christ extends beyond saving us, the people, to saving the planet itself. The earth also longs for salvation: "Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now" (Romans 8:19, 22).

Tuesday God writes straight with crooked lines. That axiom sounds clever. Can good ever arise out of evil? The answer to that question will invariably be negative when examined at surface level. But faith is never predicated on how things look on the surface. Today's error is at the service of tomorrow's truth, so our faith needs to look deeper than what's happening on the surface. God is always alive and working underneath, even through our worst errors.

Wednesday The ideal disciple is the one who is attuned to Christ's heartbeat and sees the world with that sound in his or her ear. This is how we should imagine ourselves when we are at Eucharist because, ultimately, in the Eucharist, Jesus gives us a place of reprieve, nourishment, and security. With gratitude, this is the perspective from which we should view the world.

Thursday What are we looking for? Near the end of John's Gospel, we read about the poignant post-resurrection meeting between Jesus and Mary of Magdala. Mary goes to the tomb on Easter morning wanting to embalm Jesus' dead body. She meets Jesus but doesn't recognize him. After an exchange, he calls her by name (John 20: 15–16a). Ultimately, all of us want the same thing: to hear Jesus call our name in love.

Friday Scripture shows God works more through anonymity than popularity, through the poor rather than the powerful, and more through those outside circles of power than those inside them. It's no accident that Jesus was born outside the city or that he was buried outside the city. On the surface, seeing power as residing in financial influence, political clout, and physical strength is not bad. But looked at more deeply, as we see in the birth of Christ, God's word bypasses the centers of power and gestates in the hearts and consciences of those outside the city.

Saturday When the Gospel of Luke recounts the birth of our Lord, it says shepherds were keeping watch in the night. They were seeking light to brighten their darkness. Christmas asks us to imitate the shepherds: keep watch and hope to see

light inside of darkness. When we watch with our hearts, there is more wonder than familiarity, more childlike trust than cynicism, more love than indifference, more forgiveness than bitterness, and more focus on others than ourselves. Jesus is the "light of the human race" (John 1:4).

Christmas Eve Reflect on meaningful anonymity. Mary gave birth to Christ in a stable because there was no room for them in the inn. This is a statement about what lies deepest within human life. In essence, it says that those who sit at the center of things—the powerful, rich or famous, government leaders, corporate heads, or scholars and academics—do not ultimately sit at the center of life. What lies deepest and most meaningfully inside of life lies in anonymity, unnoticed and tenderly swaddled in faith.

Christmas Day

This Present Gives Forever

MATTHEW 1:22–23

The fact that God incarnate is with us does not bring us immediate festive joy. Our world remains wounded. Wars, selfishness, and bitterness linger. The Incarnation does not promise heaven on earth. On earth, it promises us God's presence in our lives. We need to celebrate Christmas heartily, recognizing the gift that God is always with us in our joys as well as in our shortcomings.

The word was made flesh. That's an incredible thing, something that should be celebrated with decorations and songs of joy. If we truly understand Christmas, then carols will flow from our lips naturally.

The Epiphany of the Lord

The Contrasts of Christmas

MATTHEW 2:1–2

Inside the Christmas story are smaller narratives, each one rich. One is the story of the three Wise Men at the beginning of chapter 2 of the Gospel of Matthew, where we read of the powerful contrast that exists between the reaction of the Wise Men and King Herod to the birth of Jesus.

What's the lesson for us? Can we bless new life that threatens us? Like the Wise Men, can we lay our gifts at the feet of the young and move toward anonymity and eventual death, content that the world is in good hands, even if they aren't our own? The Wise Men did that for Jesus.

.....
Ron Rolheiser, OMI, is an internationally renowned spiritual author, speaker, and community builder. He has a master's degree in theology from the University of San Francisco, and a PhD/doctorate in Sacred Theology from the University of Louvain, Belgium. Fr. Ron is a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and was president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio from 2005–20, where he remains a full-time faculty member.