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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 20, 2021
Mass 5:00 pm

Sunday, November 21, 2021
Masses 8:30 am & 11:15 am



I Am the
Alpha
and the
Omega

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the
Universe

November 21 2021

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of
the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth.
—Revelation 1:5



Nov 22 - Nov 28

- Monday:** Robert Hollis by Bob & Karen Hand †
- Tuesday:** Frank Vollmann by the Zielinskis †
- Wednesday:** Walton Smith by Terry & Rita Rumore
- Thursday:** Teresa Ross by Walton Smith
- Friday:** Gene Smith by the Brazzolottos †
- Saturday:** Joseph Giangrosso by Sharon Stice †
- Sunday:** Robert Walsh by Terry & Rita Rumore
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, Frank Ironcalli, Angela
Ledlow, Michael Brayman, Shannon Ray, Mark
Boyle, Lee Walser, Judy Marston, Geri Bunt, Jay
Benson, Charles & Libby LaFleur

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 22—November 28

- Monday:** Dn 1:1-6, 8-20; Dn 3:52-56; Lk 21:1-4
- Tuesday:** Dn 2:31-45; Dn 3:57-61; Lk 21:5-11
- Wednesday:** Dn 5:1-6, 13-14, 16-17, 23-28; Dn 3:62-67; Lk 21:12-19
- Thursday:** Dn 6:12-28; Dn 3:68-74; Lk 21:20-28
- Friday:** Dn 7:2-14; Dn 3:75-81; Lk 21:29-33
- Saturday:** DN 7:15-27; Dn 3:82-87; Lk 21:34-36
- Sunday:** Jer 33:14-16; Ps 25:4-5, 8-10, 14; 1 Thes 3:12—4:2; Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

Today's Readings



First Reading — One like a Son of man received dominion, glory and kingship (Daniel 7:13-14).

Psalm — The Lord is king; he is robed in majesty (Psalm 93).

Second Reading — Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead (Revelation 1:5-8).

Gospel — For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth (John 18:33b-37).

DISCERNMENT

In preparing for the upcoming Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023, the Diocese of Birmingham will be going through a process to determine where the Holy Spirit is leading us. The first step is prayer. The second step is dialogue. The third step is discernment.

The Bishops of the Second Vatican Council wrote about, "Reading the signs of the times." They wanted to look honestly at the situation in the world and apply the Gospel of Jesus Christ to it. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Hebrews 13, 8) How to apply the Gospel to each generation may be different. It should always have the same result: that Christ may be known and loved by all.

That is where discernment comes in. Discernment is a process of looking at the reality of a situation and deciding to act in a way that conforms to God's will. There must be some evidence that can be recognized communally. It needs to affect the mission of the Church as a whole to be considered part of the discernment process.

There are many needs that can be addressed by the Church. The process of discernment should lead us to determine which of these needs God is calling us to address now and in what order. A good principal for discernment is given by Pope Francis in, The Joy of the Gospel: "I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation." (Paragraph #27)

The Pope never mentions anything about changing the Church's teaching, only the way it presents that teaching to the modern world. The process of discernment should lead us to decide how to use the Gospel, the "treasure that we hold in earthen vessels" (2Corinthians 4, 7), to enrich the world we all live in today.



Thanks to everyone who donated to the Thanksgiving Food Drive. Over \$4,000 was donated to help the needy in our parish and community this holiday season!

Offertory Collection

July 2021 — June 2022

	Actual	Needed weekly
Nov 14 Offertory	\$8,836	\$6,500
Year to Date	\$134,352	\$130,000



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.**

Advent Wreath Candle Lighters Third Sunday of Advent

Saturday, November 27

5:00 pm Mass—Jacky & Tommi Ann Johnson

Sunday, November 28

8:30 am Mass— Jeff Reach Family

11:15 am Mass - Henry Cardenas Family

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

Christmas Giving Tree



The Christmas Giving Trees are up and filled with tags in both foyers. We will be helping 32 families. As you know the need is especially great again this year.

Please be as generous as you can. This is how you can help:

- Take a tag or two from the trees
- Buy the gift listed on the tag
- Return the unwrapped gift with the tag attached to the gift and place it back under one of the trees.

GIFTS MUST BE RETURNED NO LATER THAN SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12th

Gifts will be distributed to the families on Sunday, December 19th

Except for bicycles, no request should cost more than \$35. For those on a smaller budget, there are \$10 donation tags on the tree. Of course, larger donations are always appreciated. **PLEASE, IF YOU TAKE A TAG, RETURN**

THE GIFT TO THE TREES. Someone is counting on you. Also note that your gift is one of several on the tree for each child.

If you have any questions please call Brenda Rochford, 423-242-5029 or

Sharon Stice, 205-613-1053.

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 24 ~ Nov 28, 2021

WEDNESDAY MASS

11/24/2021 7:00 PM

Lector: Teri Gagliano

Ministers: Deacon

SATURDAY MASS

11/27/2021 5:00 PM

Greeters: Karen Hand, Dawn Adamson

Lector: Buddy Spradley

Ministers: Deacon

Altar Servers: Larry & Stephen Reese

Ushers: Amy Carreker, Jim Gorman

SUNDAY MASS

11/28/2021 8:30 AM

Greeters: Bill Bethell, Shelly Hamman

Lectors: Carey Monistere, Dennis Veigl

Ministers: Deacon

Altar Servers:

Ushers: Michael Gagliano, Bit Thomaston,
Teri Gagliano, Joaquina Reyes

11/28/2021 11:15 AM

Greeters: Mattie Osborne,
Patrick Cowart & Patsy Lopez deVictoria

Lectors: Gloria Raynor, Mark Johnson Jr.

Ministers: Deacon

Altar Servers: Jhon Paul & Natalie Rodgers

Ushers: Chris Gallegly, Gregg Becnel,
Lexie Smith, Emily Bluhm

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



The Christian Love Pantry

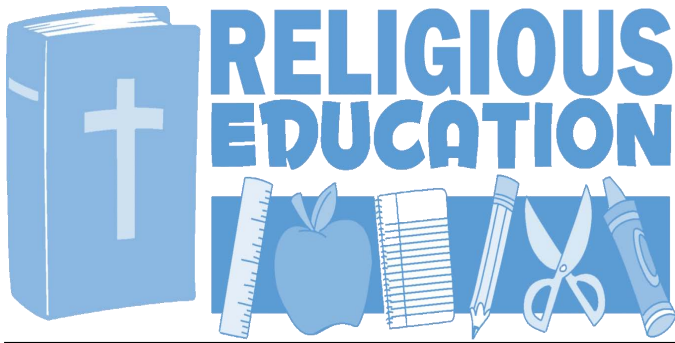
The Christian Love Pantry is helping the poor in the St. Clair County area. To assist them we are collecting canned soup at the church. You can leave donations in the South vestibule.

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 –263 cans

Please consider donating \$1 per week



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Thanksgiving!

As Thanksgiving approaches, let us reflect on the many blessings the Father has bestowed upon us! Whether it be good health, opportunities to grow, quality time spent with loved ones, good food, or a break from school and work: GIVE THANKS! Take some time to share what you're thankful for with friends and family—it's good to let others know you are thankful for them and their presence in your life.

Breakfast with Santa!

Teresa Carden, R.L. Mitchell and the Pell City Line Dancers are sponsoring a Breakfast with Santa Event at the **Brook Besor** on **November 26th**, from **9-10AM** and **10-11AM**. Admission is **\$10/person** and includes: **Breakfast, Live Nativity, and presentation of "The True Meaning of Christmas" Short Story.** *Breakfasts are limited to 100 participants per time slot so reserve your spot on **Eventbrite** or **Call: 205-473-4063.**

FORMED

FAITH AT HOME

Parish Code: **JRQNH8**

Looking Ahead:

November 21st - Religious Education will NOT meet.

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 21

Mass 8:30 & 11:15 am
Holy Hour 7:00-8:00 pm



Monday— November 22

Mass 9:00 am
KOC Meeting-6:00-8:00 pm

Tuesday— November 23

Mass 9:00 am

Wednesday—November 24

Mass 7:00 pm
Parish Office Closed

Thursday— November 25- Thanksgiving

Mass 9:00 am
Parish Office Closed

Friday— November 26

Mass 9:00 am

Saturday— November 27

Reconciliation 4:00-4:45 pm
Mass 5:00 pm

Sunday November 28-First Sunday of Advent

Mass 8:30 & 11:15 am
RE-9:45 am
RE Reconciliation-3rd, 4th and 5th grades

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UPDATE

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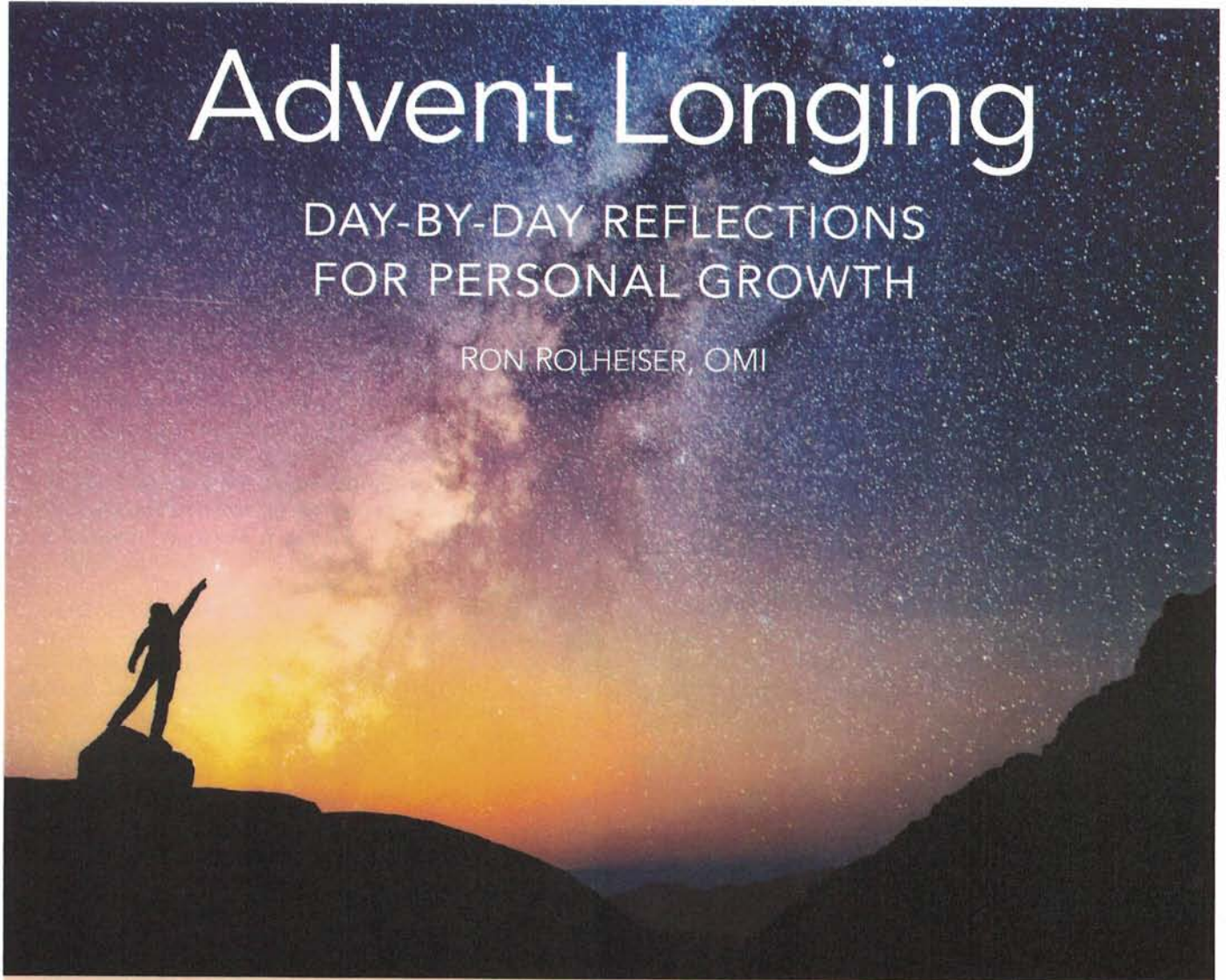
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NOVEMBER 2021

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.

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