

Catholic

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UPDATE



Advent Day by Day

A Season of Surprises

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There comes another Advent and we aren't up to it. The thought of digging through boxes in the basement, finding the Advent wreath, mustering the energy to shop for gifts may leave us drained. We were numb and cozy in our safe routines; how will we ever find the time or the resources to do more?

Alone, we won't. Isaiah offers comfort: we are the clay; God is the potter. With exquisite care and a tender hand, God shapes us into something useful or beautiful. Achieving the perfectly orchestrated holiday doesn't matter. What matters is watching for God in every situation, being attentive to small signs and fingerprints. These brief meditations may sharpen awareness and bring a reflective calm into a busy time.

First Week of Advent

Sunday God's Initiative

We can begin Advent with noble intentions, but the readings remind us that the main initiative is God's. Standing on the threshold of this season, we are achingly aware of our need for someone greater than ourselves. Alone, we can't create Christmas, or even a decent Advent.

Jesus asks us to be alert, aware of his awesome work. God's action may come when we least expect it. We'd like a more dramatic sign: rend the heavens or shake the mighty mountains. But God enters softly, quietly. Are we waiting, awake?

Monday

(Is 2:1-5; Mt 8: 5-11) Utter amazement

When a Roman centurion asks for help, Jesus responds immediately. He doesn't quibble over nationalities or occupations but immediately focuses on healing the servant. When he hears the centurion's tribute, he has the grace to be amazed. In the exchange of a few moments, the kingdom expands, larger than he ever dreamt. When we confront the glimmer of hope in our day—the truce, the breakthrough, the dramatic reversal—can we too stand astonished?

Tuesday

(Is 11:1-10; Lk 10:21-24) The child

In Isaiah, the child guides the calf and the lion, unaware that wild animals like these are murderous enemies. Innocently, the child rests a tiny hand on the snake's den. Jesus praises those who, in childlike simplicity, understand mysteries hidden even to the most educated. The season holds many changes. The season confounds appearances, offers reversals of the usual, "the way things are." Our response? Praise and gratitude that we have seen and heard these surprises.

Wednesday

(Is 25:6-10; Mt 15:29-37) *No more tears*

“How do we find this place in Isaiah where death is destroyed and tears are wiped away?” We want to buy one-way tickets there. The answer comes in the gospel and it’s not a place, but a person. The leader Isaiah foretold takes on flesh in Jesus. Compassionately, he restores God’s original vision of wholeness and beauty to the mute, lame or blind.

Thursday

(Is 26:1-6; Mt 7:21,24-27) *Built on rock*

Jesus’ metaphor of housebuilding snags our interest because most people long for secure homes. We’ve seen too many foreclosures and flimsy structures destroyed by storms. Like a master builder, Jesus not only speaks; he models. We in turn imitate the compassion, directness and courtesy of Jesus. He directs us to a lifestyle which is less about pious phrases, more a matter of determined work, strong sinews and aching muscles.

Friday

(Is 29:17-24; Mt 9:27-31) *Coming to sight*

Our point of view changes over time. With God’s help, we gradually come to see better. Just as Jesus touched the eyes of the blind, so he shows us a clearer picture of another person, or the solution to a problem. Slowly, we begin to appreciate God’s presence in a situation which seems impossible, God’s energy in an area where we flag, God’s beauty if only we take time to notice. This Advent, we might all ask for a graceful touch to lightly brush our eyes.

Saturday

(Is 30:19-21, 23-26; Mt 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6-8)

Finding our Teacher

Today’s readings sound like call and response or two voices talking on the phone across a long distance. Isaiah promises: “your eyes shall see your Teacher” and in Matthew, Jesus goes to all the villages, teaching. The yearning for bread and water, direction and security voiced in the first reading is fulfilled in Jesus. He is moved by compas-

sion for the plight of the people because their leaders have failed them. He must feel as a farmer does when the crops are ready to harvest, but there are too few workers to bring in the ripe grain. But his frustration does not lead to anger, as it would for many of us. Instead, he asks his friends to get involved.

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