

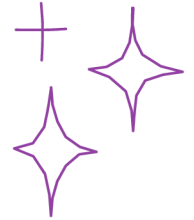
Marist Way England

ADVENT REFLECTIONS

WEEK 1



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1st Sunday of Advent: **“The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour...”** (Matthew 24:44)

I sometimes wish that life lasted for one day only. Not that I don't appreciate each new dawn, the changing of the seasons and so much else besides. It's just that, with a mere 24 hours of life left, it would be easier to stay focussed on what really matters - fulfilling God's law and earning salvation – rather than getting caught up – bogged down, even - in the multitude of distractions and trivialities that occupy so much of our elongated earthly time. **Knowing the end is in sight would sharpen the senses, forcing confrontation with life's real priorities and reducing the risk of straying off course.**

Jesus **urges us to live freely**, in the moment, *“like the birds of the sky”* (Matt. 6:26), but our time is so often spent, not only in the aforementioned diversions, but also either looking behind at the rosy-hued past or ahead to an uncertain future, leaving us in danger of losing the all-important present.

Jesus promised *“I am with you always”* (Matt. 28:20), so why be anxious? I guess that, along with complete trust in His presence, we need to:

- come to terms with our allotted **lifespan**, *“to which not a single cubit can be added”* (Luke 12:25),
- accept the fact that each of us is tasked with achieving **specific goals** before being called, and, finally,
- try to **remain focussed** throughout.



St. Francis of Assisi, when asked by a fellow brother how he would spend his time if absolutely certain of dying at midnight on a particular day, responded: **“In exactly the same way as I would any other day.”** That is being truly ready. May we all have a fraction of such serenity and submission when our time comes.

Tom Baker



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WEEK 2

2nd Sunday of Advent:

“The voice that cries from the wilderness”.

If you saw John the Baptist preaching on a street corner, what might you think of him? He would be a wiry man, wild in appearance, bearded and dressed in rough clothing. His message would be direct, but also mysterious. **“Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!”** He would offer free baptisms and would, from time to time, have less than kind words for various authorities who watched him baptise. He would be in today’s terms, a **troublemaker**, a religious fanatic, a fundamentalist, a narrowminded zealot.

John the Baptist, like so many of the Old Testament prophets was contrary and confrontational. He **drew attention** to things usually passed over in polite society, especially the reality of sin and the need for **repentance**. He denounced hypocrisy, spiritual sloth and injustice. The Church has long made the connection between John the Baptist and Advent because John perfectly symbolises the key themes of this season: **anticipation, preparation, humility, repentance**. His baptism was one of repentance, but he readily acknowledged that it would give way to the baptism of “the Holy Spirit and fire” offered by Jesus. We might say that John the Baptist worked his way out of a job. His message is for the people and is to the point, **“Repent!”** You need to change because the Kingdom of God is at hand. The **CHANGE** required is internal and fundamental, **a change of mind and heart**, not a scurrying to perform rituals. He knows that the new kingdom is a summons out of a human condition infected with sin, where we “hurt and destroy” one another, to a world of peace, built on Justice, animated by love. The heart of John is revealed as a man who speaks the truth in the wilderness, regardless of what everyone else on the street corner may think of him.

John understands that his mission is one of preparation and for that we need to change our hearts and ingrained patterns of thinking and acting. We need to walk a new talk. As St Oscar Romero said in his homily on this Sunday, **“Good works, Christian hearts, true justice, charity - these are what God looks for in religion. A religion of Sunday Mass, but unjust weekdays does not please the Lord.”** We all need to be recalled into the fidelity of our own baptism; we all need to be challenged again by the word of the Lord. We don’t have to trek into the wilderness to hear this word, we hear it at Mass and should act on it, this is the best preparation for the one who is to come.

The voice of the Baptist still cries in the deserts of humanity today – closed minds and hardened hearts. Advent causes us to ask ourselves if we are actually following the right path. Are we living a life according to the Gospel? **Are we preparing the way of the Lord?**

Maureen Meatcher



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WEEK 3

3rd Sunday of Advent (Year A): **"Are you the one who is to come...?"** Matthew 11:2-11

In the Gospel, St Matthew describes how John the Baptist had **expected a Messiah** who would come with fiery judgment leading him to wonder if Jesus was the long-expected Messiah. From his prison he sent his disciples to ask Jesus the question: *"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"*

Jesus' reply would have left John in **no doubt about who he really was**, having described himself as being the one who made the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, and lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Good News preached to them.

Yet, Jesus said that even the least in the kingdom is greater than John the Baptist; the basic requirement for entering the kingdom which Jesus brings is to recognise who he is. The least in the kingdom can do what John, initially, could not do: recognise who Jesus is and, in that sense, they are greater than John. In the early Church **the first credo was three simple words: Jesus is Lord.**



The question of John is **our question** too:

- Is Jesus the one for us, or are we waiting for someone else?
- Is his Gospel enough for us?
- Do we find in Jesus the true answer to our longings?

During this Advent we might have a few questions of our own!

Fr Des Hanrahan, SM

ADVENT

Advent is a period of waiting.

We look forward, with Mary, to the coming of Jesus
and to the **light of hope** coming into our lives,

Our Lord is coming. He is coming to save us,
to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, to protect
the stranger and take care of the widow and orphans.

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to us.

We ask his Blessed Mother, Mary,
to pray with us for peace, unity, love and joy
in our lives and in the world around us. Amen.



Marie Scott



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WEEK 4

4th Sunday of Advent: **"Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."** Matthew 1:18-24

Christmas is very near now. During this, the 4th week of Advent, our journey leads us to the time when God chose to come and live amongst us dwelling within us **experiencing life** with us in its joys and sorrows, hope and anxiety.

God remains within us now – in our relationships with each other. In every person we encounter, we can see God and by listening to each other's story, we can **discover something new about God's love** for his people.

Pope Leo in his exhortation 'Dilexi Te' calls us to care for one another focussing on our Christian call to love and serve the poor. This is why we are called to **care for one another**, to love our neighbour, especially those who are poor.

As Pope Leo XIV said in his message for the World Day of the Poor: **"The poor are not a distraction for the Church, but our beloved brothers and sisters, for by their lives, their words and their wisdom, they put us in contact with the truth of the gospel."**

Can we **like Mary, say yes to participating in God's plan** for our world?



Pat O'Connor