

The writer refers to members of the early Church as the first to do this but, of course, the very first to do so was Mary, Jesus' mother. From the moment of her conception, Mary's soul was tuned into the grace of God and ready to place her hope—her entire life—at the service of God's plan.

- How does Mary's trust in God contrast with the disobedience of Adam and Eve?
- How does Mary's life bear witness to her faith in God?

Today, you might pray the Rosary as a prayer highlighting Mary's journey from the Assumption to the fulfilment of her life in being honoured by her Son. Alternatively, choose a couple of the Mysteries to contemplate more deeply—reflecting on how they show her deep faith and trust—and their vindication at the end of her daily life. You can find a list of the Mysteries of the Rosary online or in one of the many books and leaflets dedicated to the Rosary.

# Daily Reflections



Week beginning Sunday 2 December  
(1st Sunday of Advent Year C)

To

Saturday 8 December 2018

## Sunday 2 December – First Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Jeremiah 33: 14-16; Psalm 24(25); 1 Thessalonians 3: 12-4: 2;  
Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

Our Advent opens with stirring and reassuring words from the prophet Jeremiah. He sometimes gets a bad name—being often seen as a prophet of doom. In fact, he was simply a prophet of truth—and the truth is not always what people want to hear. However, this makes his words today even more powerful. If this man is not afraid to tell people truths that will cause them to hate him—and even try to kill him—then when he speaks words of absolute confidence and faith in the God who fulfils promises, his words are not idle or designed to give easy comfort but are a truth we can build our own faith upon.

- When have you heard truths that were unwelcome—but which showed you that the speaker could be trusted absolutely?
- Why is it important to know that God does keep his promises?

Today might be a day to draw a breath and pause to look ahead to the weeks to come— to look at our sad and troubled world and its many needs and pray the words of Jeremiah... in *those* days and at *that* time, God will fulfil his promises to humanity. Much was accomplished in the coming of Jesus—but yet more is to come. Pray for the confidence and faith of Jeremiah—to hold fast to hope and light in dark and difficult times.

It can be tempting to see spirituality as removed from some of the harsher realities of life—somehow rising above them—or waiting for them to be dealt with in the next life. One great gift of Judaism is its sense of sanctifying the everyday—of seeing God at work in the lives of ordinary people. Many Jews—and Christians have believed that wealth and prosperity are signs of God’s favour. Where this is fairly earned this could well be true but throughout the Scriptures, God speaks through his prophets to warn us that it is never an excuse to exploit—or deny justice to others. God promises that it will be the meek and neediest who will rejoice most in his presence.

- Why do you think God has to spend so much time warning people of the dangers of exploitation and the abuse of power?
- Who are the meek and neediest in our own day?

Pray today for the grace to be thankful for the good things in your life. Look at your life honestly and see if there are ways in which you could be undermining other people—and preventing them getting justice. Consider how you might respond and change.

## Saturday 8 December

### The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Scripture: Genesis 3: 9-15, 20; Psalm 97(98); Ephesians 1: 3-6, 11-12; Luke 1: 26-38

*From the Letter to the Ephesians:*

*In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.*

In the Genesis reading, we hear how the first man and woman turned away from their destiny and how God promised that, one day, the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent—the tempter. In the extract from the Letter to the Ephesians, we hear that those who set their hope on Christ will live in joy and praise in his glory.

## Thursday 6 December (St Nicholas)

Scripture: Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalm 117(118); Matthew 7:21.24-27

*Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—  
in peace because they trust in you.  
Trust in the Lord for ever,  
for in the Lord God  
you have an everlasting rock.*

Isaiah is referring to two “yous” here. In the first part, it is God whom he is addressing—in the second, it is the reader. Steadfastness is a quality we often underestimate—but it can offer a strong underpinning to all that we do and are. It is the quality that keeps us going in love and kindness when it would be so much easier to give up. It is the quality that enables us to keep faith when things happen which make us wonder if God exists or whether we really believe at all. It is this steadfast trust that, over time, brings us a peace of heart and mind that the world cannot give us.

- What do you think of when you hear or read the word “steadfast”?
- How does steadfastness in faith and trust make us stronger and bring us peace?

Pray today for the gift of steadfastness—especially if you are in a situation where that is the quality you most need to develop.

## Friday 7 December (St Ambrose)

Scripture: Isaiah 29:17-24; Psalm 26(27); Matthew 9:27-31

*The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord,  
and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.  
For the tyrant shall be no more,  
and the scoffer shall cease to be;  
all those alert to do evil shall be cut off—  
those who cause a person to lose a lawsuit,  
who set a trap for the arbiter in the gate,  
and without grounds deny justice to the one in the right.*

## Monday 3 December (St Francis Xavier)

Scripture: Isaiah 2: 1-5; Psalm 121(122); Matthew 8: 5-11

*God shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.*

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the centenary of the Armistice that drew the “war to end all wars” to an end. Despite the carnage and suffering of that war, it did not end all wars. Too often, we hear of atrocities that we can hardly believe one human would perpetrate on another—but the testimonies bear witness to the capacity of humans for violence and cruelty. Isaiah was writing (astonishingly) around the turn of the 7th and 8th centuries BC—but his words and the longings they express are as fresh and timely as they were 2700 years ago. This is the power of Scripture.

- How does knowing that these words were written so long ago and still carry power help you to understand why the Word of God is so important to our faith?
- What do Isaiah’s words remind you about the longings of the human heart—across time and distance?

In all the 2700 years since Isaiah wrote, there probably has not been one in which the world was fully at peace. Acknowledge the challenge of that—and then pray for peace anyway. It might help choose a particular region of conflict to focus your prayer on.

## Tuesday 4 December (St John Damascene or St Osmund)

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 71(72); Luke 10:21-24

*(The shoot from the stock of Jesse)  
...shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*

We live in a world of great inequality—of wealth—of life-choices—even of how long someone can expect to live. One aspect of Church teaching is often called “the option for the poor”. This is nothing new—as we can see from Isaiah’s writing today. He too saw great inequality—which was probably not on the scale of the world in our own time. And somehow, he sensed as he looked upon it all that God saw it too—and did not side with the rich and powerful as many of his (and our own) age tended to think. Rather, the coming of the Messiah would unequivocally show that God also has a powerful option for the poorest and humblest of humanity.

- Why do you think Isaiah talks about judgement and equity for the poor and meek?
- How does God’s option for the poor inspire—or challenge—your own?

Based on your responses to the questions/ prompts for thought—how might you be called to strengthen your own option for the poor? Bring thoughts and reflections into a time of prayer and see where the Lord leads you.

## Wednesday 5 December

Scripture: Isaiah 25: 6-10; Psalm 22(23); Matthew 15: 29-37

*The Lord will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;  
he will swallow up death for ever.  
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,  
for the Lord has spoken.*

Many of us will recognise this reading which is often used at funerals. It is very appropriate since death is the ultimate barrier and the sorrow that comes with it can be utterly desolating. Isaiah takes this human experience of death and grief and applies it to the world... a world shrouded because of the death and decay within. But God does not leave the earth shrouded—dead—and her people grieving. God will overcome death and the sorrow covering the nations will be taken away. When this will happen we do not know—but “the Lord has spoken” and we trust that, one day, it will.

- How does Isaiah linking our human experience of death and mourning with the state of the world express something of how we might feel about it?
- How well does it express your concern—and your hope—as you look at the world in our own day?

Think today of places and people in the world over whom a shroud has been cast. You may even come up with images that highlight this for you. Pray Isaiah’s words, holding them in your heart and trying to be strong in faith as you intercede for them and pray that God will wipe away the tears of so many people in our world today.