

Emmanuel



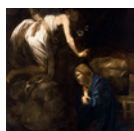
DAILY ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
REFLECTIONS 2016

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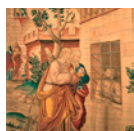
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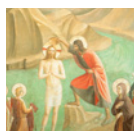
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This is a gift to

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Emmanuel

*May your eyes be opened
to the God who is with us
this Christmas*

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from

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FR LEO DUCK



Fr Leo Duck is the Resident Priest at Vincentia, NSW. Born in Sydney in 1955, his education began with the first and best of teachers, his parents. He also credits the influence of the Sisters of St Joseph, Marist Brothers, Passionists, Christian Brothers, Discalced Carmelites, Marist Fathers, Cistercians and Dominicans. He was ordained in 1983. In Rome, in 1995, he was licensed as a Theologian. He has served in ten parishes in the Diocese of Wollongong and beyond.

MR PETER GILMORE



Mr Peter Gilmore has a background in Youth and Young Adult Ministry and currently works as a Faith Education Officer for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in the Diocese of Wollongong. He is currently completing studies in Theology. Peter has a passion for making Church teaching and Biblical truth accessible for all.

FR SHANE KELLEHER OCD PP



Fr Shane Kelleher is the Parish Priest at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish Varroville, NSW. He hails from Aotearoa, New Zealand. He joined the Carmelites in 1985. From 1992 he spent 10 years as a missionary in Africa. Upon his return he was involved with Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Melbourne before joining the Carmelite Community at Varroville in 2008. He also serves as the unofficial chaplain to the Sydney Maori Catholic community.

MRS SUZ MARDEN

Mrs Suz Marden is the Team Leader for Staff Spiritual Formation at Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong. Suz was a primary school principal who holds a Master of Educational Leadership and a Master of Religious Education as well as a Theology Degree from the Columban Missionary Institute. Suz is passionate about the transformative impact that spiritual formation has in the professional and personal lives of Catholic school staff.

MISS TRISH MCCARTHY



Miss Trish McCarthy is a Faith Education Officer for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in the Diocese of Wollongong. Trish holds a Bachelor of Exercise Science, Graduate Diploma in Education and a Masters in Theology. With a passion for living an integrated approach to faith and life, her work in delivering seminars, retreats and faith formation is directed toward seeing people fully alive – an expression of God's love and freedom.

FR CHRISTOPHER G SARKIS PP



Fr Christopher Sarkis is the Parish Priest at Our Lady Help of Christians Parish Rosemeadow, NSW. He was ordained in 1985 and has served in a number of parishes in the Diocese of Wollongong including the Wollongong Cathedral, Campbelltown and Rosemeadow. His current diocesan appointments include member of the College of Consultors, Council of Priests, Diocesan Finance Council and Diocesan Property Committee.

SR HILDA SCOTT OSB



Sr Hilda Scott is a Benedictine Sister and the Vocations Director for the enclosed Benedictine Abbey at Jamberoo, NSW. She became known to wider Australia through the ABC TV documentary, *The Abbey*. She also engages in spiritual direction, retreat giving, talks and formation. Prior to 1990, Sr Hilda was a member of a religious order where she taught at all levels, worked with youth and children and did pastoral work in parishes.

FR GRAHAM SCHMITZER PP



Fr Graham Schmitzer PP is the Parish Priest at Immaculate Conception Parish Unanderra, NSW. He was ordained in 1969 and has served in the parishes of Campbelltown, Gwynneville, Unanderra, Wollongong, Albion Park, and Corrimal. He was also Chancellor and Secretary to Bishop William Murray for 13 years. Fr Graham loves travelling and has visited many of the major art galleries in Europe.



first

WEEK OF ADVENT





The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew

DUCCIO DI BUONINSEGNA (1255–1318)

Duccio di Buoninsegna, Italian (c. 1255–1318),
“The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew”,
1308–1311, tempera on panel. Public Domain.

To the untrained eye, Christmas and Advent are no more than an excuse for family reunions and end-of-year parties. But for the Church, this is serious business. Through the Liturgy, Christmas evokes and makes present Emmanuel – *God with us*. If the creator really did become part of creation, then human history has been changed forever. God now knows us from the inside out. God’s advent to us is the beginning of our return to him. This is made a reality in the Eucharist. As Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI once remarked, “In the Eucharist, creation returns to the creator.” Bread and wine, the fruit of our hands, become Christ himself. We are called to return to the reason for our existence.

Our whole life is the response to a call. And so, on the first Saturday of Advent, the Church presents us with the call of the first disciples. To what were they called? St Mark’s Gospel (the first) tells us that Christ called the Apostles firstly to be his companions. No one can live alone. Christ himself felt the need for companionship.

He calls us to be his companions, his intimate friends. Only *after* we have accepted this invitation does he indicate what he wants us to do. Christ calls us firstly to *be*; only then are we called to *do*. This is the lesson taught us by the Contemplatives in the Church. The Weeks of Advent are given to us each year for serious reflection.

Week One presents us with the Art of Duccio di Buoninsegna (1255-1318). Under commission for 3,000 gold florins by the Cathedral of Siena (more than any artist had previously commanded), Duccio created one of the most important masterpieces of Western painting. Fra Angelico (who we will meet in Week Six) is considered the bridge between iconography and modern art, a realism the world had never before seen. Duccio would have to be considered Fra Angelico's inspiration. The Maestà was a two-sided altarpiece commissioned for Siena's Cathedral. Our Lady seated in majesty was the frontal. On the reverse were more than seventy individual scenes from the Gospel.

It is very hard for us to understand today the power of Christ's physical presence. At first meeting, two unlettered fishermen leave this earthly vocation and accept a heavenly one. They "followed" him, the Gospel tells us. The Greek uses the aorist participle, indicating they *kept* following him. I am reminded of the story of a nun interviewed on radio on the occasion of her 80th birthday. "When did you decide to become a nun?" asked the reporter. "This morning," she said.

Our "yes" to God is not a momentary decision. It must be renewed every day. Duccio intimates in his painting that the disciples' call is a heavenly one by giving us a gilded sky as to the background. And while Peter and Andrew are brothers, they are at the same time individuals, represented by different coloured clothing. In other words, our individual calling is unique.

FR GRAHAM SCHMITZER PP

28 NOVEMBER 2016

Monday of the first week of Advent

By his wounds you have been healed. 1 PETER 2:24

When Jesus learns of the centurion's sick servant, he says, "I will come myself and cure him." In St Matthew's Gospel alone there are more than a dozen other examples of Jesus curing or giving his disciples the authority to *cure*. The Greek word used is the source of two modern words – *therapeutic* and *therapy*.

However, when the centurion responds with words that have become enshrined in the Communion Rite, another word is used, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant (soul) shall be *healed*." The only other place Matthew uses this word is Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite or Syrophoenician woman. What are we to make of this distinction in Matthew? Is it because in both cases the request is made by a gentile, an outsider? Or is it because in both cases the miracle takes place from a distance? Jesus is not physically present.

Another question might be – is there a difference between curing and healing? Is Matthew making a distinction between the two? The act of *curing* focuses on treating the disease, illness or affliction. Whereas, *healing* is more concerned with the person and their state of being. Healing, or health, has its roots in an ancient word that means *whole* or *complete* and from which we also get another word – *holy*. As we begin the Advent season, waiting and watchful in prayer, let us spend some time today reflecting on those aspects of our life which we seem unable to shake off, that leave us paralysed or incomplete.

Come and save us, Lord our God.

Let us see your face shine, and we shall be saved. Amen

FR SHANE KELLEHER OCD PP

4 DECEMBER 2016

Second Sunday of Advent

A voice cries in the desert: prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. MATTHEW 3:3

The Judean desert has traditionally been a place for Bedouins and a hiding place for refugees, eg, David escaping Saul. Lying to the East of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, it is an array of arid hills and canyons falling from the mountain heights to the Dead Sea. The desert is a dangerous environment lacking in water and life – a land of barrenness and deprivation where one loses all sense of direction. It is also a land of profound silence that has haunted many seekers of a deeper spiritual life. John the Baptist emerges from the desert crying out for us to change our ways.

Many seekers of God have experienced an interior desert. No comfort of God's presence; no certainty of where we are going; a silence that begets the question, "Where is God?" Preparation for Christmas can be a desert time for us as we cope with the demands of a consumerist society in the midst of a world of inequality, poverty and violence. We lose our way as we chase the next sale item. We forget which way leads to life. The voices of refugees coming from the Middle Eastern deserts today challenge us to change our priorities.

Then the Lord will truly come and be God with us, our Emmanuel.

Give me the Grace O Loving God, to hear the voices calling to me from the deserts of our world. Show me how to change my ways and make you present in our world through compassion and generosity to those in need. Then this Christmas will truly be a celebration of Emmanuel, God is with us. Amen

SR EILEEN BROWN sgs

10 DECEMBER 2016

Saturday of the second week of Advent

Visit this vine and protect it, the vine your right hand has planted. PSALM 79:14-15

If you were to address the Lord with the intensity of the plea captured in this Psalm, what would you say?

My Lord and my God, I long for you to look upon me and acknowledge me. I yearn to belong, to rest my weary heart.

I am tired of *keeping up*. I stumble under the weight of expectations. I let down my guard in your presence. I lay down my weapons. I surrender. Break down the walls I have made. Meet me in the depths of my heart. I long for deeper meaning. I desire to feel alive again.

And the Lord responds. What might God say?

(Your name) I am here. I am with you. I know all that fills your heart in this moment. But tell me of these things. Tell me how it makes you feel. I am big enough to hold all your thoughts and feelings ... I created you.

I invite you to be real with me. It is only through the cracks that I can enter. I value your honesty. Show me where the cracks are and I will meet you there.

What scares you? What anger or sadness do you feel? Are there any doubts that you have? Has someone rejected you or left you feeling alone? Are there things that are going well in your journey? What has given you life or made your heart smile? And what I can do for you? For those you care about? What Holy discontent is burning within you that you would like me to act on? Invite me and I will come, without delay.

Son of the Living God, visit this vine and protect it. Amen

MISS TRISH McCARTHY

**The angel of the Lord appeared
to [Joseph] in a dream. MATTHEW 1:20**

During his Apostolic visit to the Philippines back in 2015, Pope Francis had a special meeting with families. During his address at this gathering, Pope Francis told his hearers that on his table in his residence he has an image of St Joseph sleeping, and that when he has a problem – a difficulty – he writes a little note and puts it underneath St Joseph, so that he can dream about it.

In the light of this personal revelation that he has a “great love for St Joseph”, the Pope went on to say that, “The Scriptures seldom speak of St Joseph, but when they do, we often find him resting, as an angel reveals God’s will to him in his dreams. In the Gospel passage ... we find Joseph resting not once, but twice ... I am very fond of dreams in families ... when you make your examination of conscience ... ask yourselves this question: Today did I dream about my children’s future? Today did I dream about the love of my husband, my wife? Did I dream about my parents and grandparents who have gone before me? Dreaming is very important. Especially dreaming in families. Do not lose this ability to dream! How many difficulties in married life are resolved when we leave room for dreaming, when we stop a moment to think of our spouse, and we dream about the goodness present in the good things all around us.”

O God, St Joseph’s rest revealed your will to him. May we have the courage and strength to dream like St Joseph. Amen

FR DAVID CATTERALL PP

She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean. LUKE 1:29

The right response when someone lavishes praise on us for something we have done or some positive character trait is to smile politely, say thank you and, with humility, accept what has been said. Often it's much easier to deflect the affirmation out of embarrassment, feelings of unworthiness and a desire to shrink from the spotlight. It's probably partly cultural but it's also a core identity problem. Put simply, we don't think we are or have done anything worth affirming. Now, don't get me wrong, it can go the other way too. We all know people who have found immense security in their achievements, their personality or their looks, but, like a house of cards, one little failure or blemish and the world comes crashing down. Both these extremes are dangerous. So what then?

There is One who has been affirming us since eternity. One who reminds us that we were made good (Genesis 1:31) and chosen from before creation (Ephesians 1:11) with a plan in mind (Jeremiah 29:11). And that plan was that we would become his children (1 John 3:1) and like a doting father, he would rejoice over us with singing (Zephaniah 3:17) and comfort us in times of trouble (2 Corinthians 1:3). A baby cannot earn a parents love. A parent chooses to love or not and the baby's only job in the equation is to accept it, to enjoy it, to revel in it and hopefully grow into someone in the parent's image. It is the same with God. We cannot explain his love. We didn't earn it. We couldn't earn it. But if we can humbly accept it, our value and our security will be found in him.

*Father God, speak to us today as your children.
Show us your love and your tender care. Amen*

MR PETER GILMORE

22 DECEMBER 2016

Thursday of the fourth week of Advent

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour.” LUKE 1:46

The Canticle of Mary, known throughout the ages as the Magnificat, is the song of praise that Mary uttered upon her visitation to her cousin Elizabeth, rejoicing in the knowledge that she was carrying the Christ child.

This most ancient of Christian hymns forms a central element of our Church's Liturgy of the Hours; it is remembered as one of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary and mirrors that ancient hymn of Hannah upon the birth of her son, Samuel.

With its poetic cadence and transparent beauty, the Magnificat speaks of the immense grace bestowed by a God of tenderness and love and the heartfelt exultation of spirit experienced through Mary's realisation of such a grace.

It is a song for each of us as well, bringing to mind the extraordinary grace granted to us in the ordinariness of our lives. Yet it is also a song that reflects the long biblical tradition that seeks justice for the marginalised and the oppressed, that commands us to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. Mary's Canticle sings of a God whose immeasurable mercy reaches from age to age.

The Magnificat, in proclaiming God's glory, challenges each of us to be the face of God's mercy in the world. The birth of the Prince of Peace calls us to a rebirth in ourselves, to be agents of this peace in all we do.

*God of Glory, our hearts rejoice and sing in praise to you.
May our lives, like the life of your mother Mary, reflect your
love and compassion as we become beacons of mercy in our
world. Amen*

MR KEN BRYANT

23 DECEMBER 2016

Friday of the fourth week of Advent

At that instant his power of speech returned and he praised God. LUKE 1:64

Context is essential to understanding Scripture. Zechariah had been visited by the archangel Gabriel and told that his elderly wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son. Zechariah, old himself, doubted the angel's word and using the power of speech, asked for a sign. The sign given? He was silenced! The very power that voiced his doubt was silenced until the prophesied child's birth restored it and he "praised God".

Much doubt is borne of undue noise, just as faith is the fruit of silence. Today's frenzied and noisy world is hostile to the silent recollection of faith and solitude, yet this is essential if we are to know the God of silence who speaks not in noise but in the Spirit's gentle breeze that inhabits the soul. Zechariah's silence became a blessing in disguise enabling him through the events unfolding in his life to recognise the presence and action of God in his life. Silence became the means of understanding the purpose of his own life and his relationship with God. In short, silence enabled him to pray!

The noise around us is getting louder and more dissonant the closer we get to Christmas when, in fact, the opposite should be the case. Shopping, presents, food, parties – all important – but please, take some time in these last two days to stop, be still, be quiet, and just look at Jesus. If you do, you may even, very quietly, hear his gentle voice whispering in your soul.

*Jesus, my Lord, please help me to be still and to hear you in the silence of my heart and soul so that I may "praise God".
Amen*

FR CHRISTOPHER G SARKIS PP

28 DECEMBER 2016

The Holy Innocents

God is light. 1 JOHN 1:5

The beautiful imagery that “God is light” is a constant theme in the Advent readings and reminds me of the story of *The Lamplighter* told by the 19th century British writer, John Ruskin. It is set in a time before electricity was invented. City streets had gas lamps that were lit every night by lamplighters.

One night, when he was advanced in age, Ruskin was seated at a window where he could see the torch of the lamplighter igniting lamps as he walked along the street. Because of the darkness, he couldn't see the lamplighter, only his torch and the trail of lights it left behind.

After a while Ruskin pointed to the trail of lights and remarked that the lamplighter was a good example of how Christian men and woman should live – because you may never see them but you know they passed through the world by the trail of lights they left behind.

Advent is a time to be grateful for all those who have left their trail of light for us to follow. It is a time to reflect on how we light the way for others and an invitation to be for our world what Jesus was for his – a light in the midst of darkness, a ray of hope in the midst of despair, so we too will be known for the trail of light we leave behind.

Ever present God, may we in this time of Advent light the way for others, through loving and compassionate thoughts, attitudes, words and actions. Amen

MRS SUZANNE MARDEN

30 DECEMBER 2016

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him ... MATTHEW 2:14

I saw an old woman once in a surgery being given instructions, with rapid fire delivery, about what was now required of her. Patience was lacking on the part of the receptionist and I saw tears begin to work their way down the woman's confused and frightened face. Somehow the whole surgery looked dark and forbidding in the light of this woman's lonely plight. I wondered, "Why are you here on your own? Isn't there someone who could have come with you?"

Having someone else, having solid relationships with others, is so important in our lives. Our DNA actually contains the inbuilt drive toward, not against, others. Without using it, we all, whether needy or not, become a disfiguration of who we really are.

This Feast today speaks loudly of relationships. It is the significant relationship of Joseph with his God (and God's relationship with him) and then Joseph's relationship with Mary and Jesus that wins the day here. I cannot see this Joseph leaving a poor woman on her own, can you?

Furthermore, whether we hear it not, angels – those Divine messengers – speak to us too of the needs of others, and God counts on our listening as he did on Joseph's listening. Perhaps this will be our *Joseph/listening/relationship* year? If we make it so, then no one near or far from you will be on their own and frightened ever again.

Dear Father, imprint on my heart. Joseph dying of love for Mary, Mary dying of love for Jesus and Jesus dying of love of me. Amen

SR HILDA SCOTT OSB

5 JANUARY 2017

Thursday before Epiphany

“Come and see,” replied Philip. JOHN 1:46

No one can be argued into Christianity. Sometimes our words of argument can do more harm than good. The only way to convince someone of the supremacy of Jesus Christ is to show that person Jesus. Our preaching and teaching are secondary to how we present the story of the Cross.

Before we can invite others to come to Jesus, we, of course, have to know him first ourselves. Philip didn't argue with Nathanael, he just invited him to experience what he himself had come to know of Jesus.

So Nathanael comes, and Jesus immediately sees into his heart. Jesus knew him from noticing him sitting under a fig tree, which for Jewish people represents peace.

Here was a person waiting for the promises of God to be fulfilled, and in Jesus he found the one who understood his dreams, saw his most intimate longings, and who knew his deepest prayers. In that, he surrenders his life to Jesus.

But Jesus can do more than read our hearts. He can be the way that leads to heaven. Our hearts need to be cleansed of pride and arrogance so we can come to Jesus with a waiting and seeking heart.

Lord, as we await your Epiphany, guide us to you with innocent and expecting hearts. Amen

FR SEAN CULLEN PP

They returned to their own country by a different way. MATTHEW 2:12

The wise men returned to their own country “by a different way” because they had been warned about Herod. But there is another reason why the Magi set out on their journey “by a different way”. The Magi had searched, and because of what they had found, they themselves and their lives could never be the same again. They had found Jesus. The “different way” taken by the Magi refers not only to the new route taken on their journey home. The “different way” refers to something interior. It refers to the entirely new outlook they had been given because of Jesus.

T. S. Eliot wrote about the journey of the Magi in a poem with that name. Eliot’s poem ends with one of the Magi, now an old man, reflecting on the journey he and the others had made so many years before. Traditionally, the Magi are depicted as wise kings from pagan lands. In the poem this is what the Wise King says:

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.

After finding Jesus, the Magi had returned home but they no longer felt “at ease” in their own Kingdoms. Although they had returned home, they no longer felt at home. Their own people now seemed alien to them. For the Magi, seeing the infant Jesus was an epiphany, a revelation which had opened their eyes. Nothing could be the same again. They had no choice but to take “a different way” in life because they themselves were now so different.

Lord Jesus, help me be at ease in not being at ease in this world. Amen

FR LEO DUCK