

On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, The web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces;
Isaiah 25

First Week of Advent: Dec. 2 - 8, 2012

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The First Week of Advent

Sunday is the beginning of a new liturgical year with the **First Sunday of Advent**. The first reading from the **Book of Jeremiah** offers a comforting promise of safety to beleaguered Israel: “those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure.” **Luke's gospel** offers us a repeat of several of the daily gospels, advising us to be alert and vigilant, watching for signs. “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

Monday is the Memorial of the great Jesuit missionary, **Saint Francis Xavier**. Friday is the **Memorial of Saint Ambrose, bishop and doctor of the Church**. Saturday is the **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, with its own special readings.

Unlike most of the liturgical year, the focus during the first part of Advent is on the first readings, this week from **the Prophet Isaiah**. These readings are about promises. Isaiah is consoling, building up and preparing his people to have hope. “One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” He promises “luster and glory” for the people: “and the fruit of the earth will be honor and splendor for the survivors of Israel.” Even though the family lines of King David and his father, Jesse, are almost wiped out, Isaiah proclaims hope: “On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.” The prophet tells of feasting and security: “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of

Daily Prayer This Week

It seems like a contradiction, but it becomes easy to stay focused during Advent. There are many distractions at this time of the year, we seem to get very busy, and at times have to go to a number of parties and social events. But the heart of this season is all about expectant hope. So, we begin our Advent journey by giving ourselves some time to reflect this week on how much God promises us.

Each morning, while we are first coming to consciousness, we can focus for just a few moments, to name a desire, to name an emptiness or feeling of anxiety or worry. It is into places just such as these that our Lord came to be with us. So, this week, we can begin to invite our Lord to be Incarnate in our lives, in the places we need him the most.

Our goal this week is to let ourselves feel like the ones to whom the promises of our God are made. We want to get in touch with ourselves, especially those parts of ourselves that are in need of a Savior. We do this by keeping our focus on the places that feel like a desert, the places that feel like we've been through a war, the places that feel like a lifeless stump. When we have a hard time seeing, we ask for the grace to be able to believe the promise that we shall see. When we seem deaf, we place our trust in the One who assures us that we will hear. And when we feel beaten down and awfully lowly, we turn to the One who promises that we will “find joy in the Lord.” And, who among us doesn't have days on which we are aware of various kinds of wounds? On the day of

rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines” and “A strong city have we; he sets up walls and ramparts to protect us.” Even Jesus' own statement about his mission is seen in the powerful images Isaiah uses to give us courage and hope: “On that day the deaf shall hear ... the eyes of the blind shall see ... the lowly will ever find joy in the LORD ... ” “On the day the LORD binds up the wounds of his people.”

The gospels for these weeks are chosen from several gospels. They are meant to match the first readings and to show the promises are fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus brings healing. He raises up the childlike. And Jesus calls and sends the twelve apostles to continue his ministry.

“Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever.” Those words from **Baruch** are in the first reading for the **Second Sunday of Advent**. **Luke's Gospel** offers us a first look at the promise of John the Baptist as he cries out, “Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

promise, “the Lord binds up the wounds of his people.”

As we let these deep realities of our daily, busy lives come into focus and interact with the readings, something wonderful happens. We become more and more aware of our need for God. Very naturally and quite spontaneously, a prayer comes forth from deep within us, which we can say in the smallest moments of our busiest days. “Come, Lord.” “Come and save me.” “Come and be with me in all of these messy, empty, dry and disordered places in my life.” “Come, Lord. I feel my longing for you grow. I feel my hope grow. And, as I place my hope in your promises, Advent begins to come alive in me.”

All of this preparation can happen in the simplest way, before the first Christmas decoration goes up. And, for each moment of each day that we encounter a place that we desire, that we long for our Lord's coming, we can express our thanksgiving. Each night we might pray:

*The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?*

*The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom
should I be afraid? (Ps. 27)*

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