

Guide for Prayer for the week of Dec. 11-17, 2005

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The Third Week of Advent

The Third Sunday of Advent offers us more of the promise. The words used by the prophet to describe God's vindication are the ones Jesus points to as describing his own mission: "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God.

In the U.S., Monday is the **Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe**. Tuesday is the **Memorial of Saint Lucy, virgin and martyr**. Wednesday is the **Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, priest and doctor of the Church**.

We continue to focus on the first readings, mostly from the Prophet **Isaiah**, in this first part of Advent.

Zephaniah is the prophet of impending doom, if the people don't abandon their idolatry. But this week we read about consoling healing, "on that day," when the Lord comes. **Isaiah's** message is full of promise: "Turn to me and be safe ... for I am God; there is no other!" "Fear not, you shall not be put to shame ... with great tenderness I will take you back ... My love shall never leave you." "Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed. ... For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

Gospels are chosen to show Jesus as the fulfillment of these promises: the parable of the two sons; the Baptizer's question about whether Jesus is the promised one; the fulfillment Jesus points to; Jesus' praise of John the Baptist; Jesus points to his works as his testimony."

With the **Fourth Sunday of Advent** we are in the second part of Advent. Our focus is now on the story, as told to us by Luke and Matthew. It begins with the Annunciation and Mary's response: "Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.'"

Daily Prayer This Week

This third week of Advent, our daily prayer continues to allow us to become much more concrete about naming our desires and preparing the way for the Lord. We begin this week with joy, knowing that our celebration of all the ways our Lord comes to us is near.

For some of us, the great grace will be to ask that expectant hope - and the joy that this can bring - will fill our hearts and replace whatever is heavy or dark or sad there. We can only let our Lord bring good news to us who are poor, if we acknowledge our poverty. He can only proclaim liberty and release to us if we can admit that we are captives and prisoners to so many habit and patterns that inhibit joy.

A week of recognizing ourselves, and recognizing our need for a Savior is a wonderful way to prepare. We can only turn to our God and trust in the safety we find accepting our God as the only god of our lives if we first can name the place in which we are in danger, with the choices we are making. We can be surrender our fear of being put to shame by humbly coming face to face with who we can sometime be. The depths of gratitude and joy come when we can experience the tenderness with which our Lord keeps taking us back.

This is a wonderful week to examine our consciences as we let our daily, prayer-filled background moments interact with some of the places in our daily lives in which we discover the need for mercy and peace. Wherever we encounter some experience of darkness or fear, some struggle with faith or hope, some discouragement about my own generosity or freedom, it is there that we have an opportunity to pause, in the briefest way and pray, "Come, Lord Jesus; come and visit me here, in this place." Preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, individually or in common, can be a powerful Advent religious experience. And the one who forgives us deeply desires to heal us and give us his peace.

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