

Second Week of Advent

Prayer for Forgiveness

Merciful God,
John the Baptist prepared for the coming
of Christ

by proclaiming a baptism for the
repentance of sins.

In this Advent season, we prepare for
Christ's coming

by searching our hearts and asking your
forgiveness.

Forgive us for loving you too little
and our neighbors less than ourselves,
for preferring our will to yours,
for being lukewarm in prayer and timid
in faith.

Forgive our harsh words and resentments,
our excuses, selfishness, and pride.
Grant us sorrow for our sins, forgiving hearts,
and the grace to amend our lives.

May we never despair of your mercy
but find our hope increasing
as we await our Savior's birth. Amen.



December 7, 2008 Practicing Peace

Today's reading from 2 Peter (3:8–14) tells us how to wait. Awaiting the renewal of creation, we are to strive to be found at peace. This Advent, we await the coming of the Prince of Peace into a world shattered by conflict. As we remember the attack on Pearl Harbor that brought the United States into the Second World War, we pray for the countless men and women who have died, and continue to die, through war and violence. In *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)*, 78, the Church teaches that peace is not just the absence of war or the balance of power, but peace is justice, human harmony, and unity in love—the fruit of the Spirit. Wars thrive on injustice, pride,

and the striving after personal power. Peace thrives on justice, humility, and self-sacrifice.

How might you practice the peace of Christ this Advent at home, at work, in your parish, and in your neighborhood? One practice of peace is to pray daily for someone you dislike or someone who has angered you. Practice peace today by resolving to forgive someone and spending time praying about it. If you hope to act in ways that promote peace, you need to spend time cultivating the inner peace out of which you will act. An ancient practice is to pray the psalms. According to Saint Basil the Great, the words of the psalms calm our inner turmoil, transform our sinful tendencies, bring us inner peace, and promote reconciliation.

This Week at Home

Monday, December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Today we celebrate that Mary was preserved from any stain of original sin from the moment of her conception. Christians have meditated on this mystery of God's love for centuries. To view an artist's meditation on the subject, go to <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/infomenu.html>, scroll down to number 17, Marian Images, and click on "Immaculate Conception Tapestries of the Reims Cathedral." Click on one of the many images in this famous tapestry to see a detail and the symbol's origin in scripture. How do such symbols as an enclosed garden or a lily among thorns express the role of Mary?

Tuesday, December 9
Keep Growing

Jesus does not suddenly appear on the day of his birth. He grows, hidden in his mother's womb, only visible through the changes he brings about in her. Do others see Christ changing you? Are you more peaceful, more courageous, or less selfish? For some of us, no noticeable change is growth. It means we haven't lapsed into bad habits. For others, it's cause for concern. Waiting doesn't mean we do nothing. Advent is a time to grow. Are you growing? How can you tell? Using the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) or the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17), do an examination of conscience and find out.



Wednesday, December 10
The Perfect Gift

Saint Paul encourages us to be "cheerful givers" (2 Corinthians 9:7); but often as Christmas approaches, we become stressed out, worn out, and maxed out givers instead. Haven't found the perfect gift yet? Consider giving the gift of yourself. Give a massage to an elderly aunt, take on a chore your spouse hates, clean house for a working mom, or babysit for a young couple. Give the money you save to a favorite charity.

Thursday, December 11
Experience Advent

The liturgical seasons look, feel, and sound different from one another. The differences suggest the seasons' meanings. Advent's color, violet, symbolizes both penitence and the attitude of conversion. (Advent was once viewed as a mini Lent.) It also signifies the royal purple of Jesus Christ, Messianic King, who came first as a child, but who

will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Use a violet tablecloth. Sing familiar Advent songs and learn new ones, such as "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." Ask a parish music minister for help or go to <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/>, click on "Topics," select "Advent," and the song you want to learn. Words and tune are given.

Friday, December 12
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

The Patroness of the Americas appeared as a dark-skinned Virgin to Juan Diego, asking that a temple be built there at Tepeyac. She wanted a place where a conquered native people, suffering from disease, poverty, and despair, could easily receive her compassion and protection. Mary was the first Christian sanctuary, housing the Savior of humankind in her very body. If we make a place for her in our lives, she will remind us, even in our darkest days, of God's love. Today, make a home altar for family prayer, or decorate the one you have. Include a cross, Bible, candle, and picture of Our Lady.

Saturday, December 13
Memorial of Saint Lucy

The Swedish Festival of Lights begins today. Girls in white dresses awaken family members by serving them hot coffee and saffron buns shaped like cats' tails. According to legend, Saint Lucy's virtue could frighten away evil when it tried to sneak into houses, pretending to be a cat. Are dark thoughts and poor habits sneaking into your family life? Drive them out with God's light and love. Light candles throughout the house and bake *lussekatt* (recipe at www.swedishkitchen.com/lussekatt.html).