

LIVING  LITURGY™

LIVING LITURGY™

Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities

Year A • 2020

Brian Schmisek
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PREFACE

Renewal

This is the third year since Liturgical Press gave a new look and feel to this popular resource, and the second year with this writing team. We are proud of the text with its engaging artwork and updated design, and we look forward to its use in parishes and faith settings throughout the world. We authors have incorporated feedback that we've received as we promote these materials throughout the year. But some things remain the same. As last year, we followed the structure established by Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, CPPS, director of the Institute for Liturgical Ministry (now closed, unfortunately), and Sr. Kathleen Harmon, SNDdeN, concerning the "Focusing the Gospel," "Connecting the Gospel," and "Connecting the Responsorial Psalm" sections. Producing these materials has been for us a "work of faith and labor of love" (1 Thess 1:3). We hope that shows.

Artwork

The updated artwork continues to receive positive reviews, and so we are happy to say Liturgical Press brought back the three artists from the 2018 and 2019 editions: Deborah Luke, Tanja Butler, and Ned Bustard. The artwork for this edition, like previous editions, is new and original.

Reflecting on the Gospel and Living the Paschal Mystery

According to what we have learned, the most frequented part of the book remains "Reflecting on the Gospel," followed by "Living the Paschal Mystery." Sr. Joyce Ann designed it this way, and we should not be surprised that it remains the case. Brian Schmisek wrote these pieces again, as he did last year, with that in mind. In this year of Matthew, we hear distinct themes of mercy. His gospel has been called "the church's gospel" in part because his is the only gospel to use the word "church." Aside from that, he gives us the Our Father, the Sermon on the Mount, the leadership role of Peter, the connection between words and action, some unique parables, and the demands of discipleship. Jesus teaches often in this gospel about end-times judgment (often punctuated with violent imagery). Some of these readings can be especially challenging.

Focusing the Gospel, Connecting the Gospel, Connecting the Responsorial Psalm, Prompts for Faith Sharing, and Homily Points

Katy Beedle Rice made her debut with this work last year, and she returns again, writing much of the material for pages 2–3 each week. As a mother, wife, and catechist, her insights are germane, to the point, and especially well written.

Liturgy

Diana Macalintal brings both broad and deep experience coupled with knowledge of the liturgy to this work aptly named "Living Liturgy." We are grateful that she returns for a third year, with fresh commentary and good advice for professional liturgists and volunteer ministers alike.

Purpose

The three authors for this book, Brian, Katy, and Diana, continue to retain its original and primary purpose: "to help people prepare for liturgy and live a liturgical spirituality (that is, a way of living that is rooted in liturgy), opening their vision to their baptismal identity as the Body of Christ and shaping their living according to the rhythm of paschal mystery dying and rising. The paschal mystery is the central focus of liturgy, of the gospels, and of this volume." We are humbled and privileged to be carrying on this task. We hope this work with its artful imagery assists many in living a liturgical spirituality. We are open to feedback and look forward to hearing from you about this renovated home for *Living Liturgy*TM.

SEASON OF ADVENT





SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Ps 85:8

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Show us, Lord, your love;
and grant us your salvation.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matt 24:37-44; L1A

Jesus said to his disciples:

“As it was in the days of Noah,
so it will be at the coming of
the Son of Man.

In those days before the flood,
they were eating and
drinking,
marrying and giving in
marriage,
up to the day that Noah
entered the ark.

They did not know until the
flood came and carried
them all away.

So will it be also at the coming of the
Son of Man.

Two men will be out in the field;
one will be taken, and one will be
left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill;
one will be taken, and one will be
left.

Therefore, stay awake!

For you do not know on which day your
Lord will come.

Be sure of this: if the master of the
house
had known the hour of night when
the thief was coming,
he would have stayed awake
and not let his house be broken into.
So too, you also must be prepared,
for at an hour you do not expect, the
Son of Man will come.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

“Stay awake!” These words in the Gospel of Matthew today strike us to the core as we begin the Advent season. These words also foreshadow the disciples’ struggle during the agony in the garden. The call to stay awake presumes that we might be dozing off, idling our time away. Disciples must be ready at all times without resorting to a false sense of security.

Jesus tells his audience that as it was in the time of Noah, so shall it be at the coming of the Lord. In Noah’s day, human beings went steadily on their way, unaware and apparently unconcerned that something larger was at work. Yet,

“the flood came and carried them all away.” Jesus tells his listeners that the Son of Man will come when we do not expect it. These words were written for Matthew’s community, which might have grown complacent during the intervening decades between Jesus’ time on earth and the composition of the gospel. But these same words are for us, even two thousand years later. Rather than expecting a cataclysmic event like the flood of Noah or something apocalyptic, we might consider our own death, which may come when we least expect it.

Unfortunately, some preachers and many others take the imagery in this gospel passage literally. There was even a 2014 movie that depicts the events from Matthew’s gospel in graphic detail.

The film, *Left Behind* starring Nicolas Cage, was

widely dismissed and received dismal reviews from critics and many movie goers. It portrays a regular day with families, friends, people going to work, etc., when suddenly millions of people around the world vanish in an instant with resulting mayhem, disorder, and disaster—cars crash, planes fall from the sky, and more. The remaining people resort to panic, looting, and violence. The character played by Cage is perplexed as he tries to sort out what this means. And all of this is brought to you by a loving God! It’s not likely Jesus had such a scenario in mind two thousand years ago, though it does sell movie tickets.

Perhaps there is a reason biblical literalism, also known as a fundamentalist approach to Scripture, is referred to as “a kind of intellectual suicide” by the Pontifical Biblical Commission (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 35). As Catholics, we recognize the theological truth conveyed in these gospel stories are much more profound than that portrayed in a 2014 action/horror film. When we reduce the message of Christ to crashing planes and big explosions, we may be fairly sure we are no longer on sound footing.

In sum, we must be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man, when we meet our own personal end (death). And with respect to that day, none of us knows when it might be. It will come as a thief in the night. Therefore, we should not grow weary, but instead “stay awake!”



Living the Paschal Mystery

The transformation that happens with the paschal mystery reaches out to us in our daily lives. Any tendency to become lethargic is thwarted by a resounding call to “stay awake!” The mystery of Christianity, the life, death, resurrection, and ongoing life of Jesus animates us so we are no longer complacent. We are not carried away by the latest thriller or a glittering spectacle. Our life in Christ makes us rooted in God’s vision of the world. We see the world through new lenses. We are prepared for anything that might come, even our own death. In a state of preparation, then, we are alert, aware, and awake. The metamorphosis on the horizon approaches. It is coming, though we know not when.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: [S]tay awake!

To the point: We enter Advent with a clarion call to attention. The patterns of our lives continue from one season to the next, and yet, on this first day of December and first day of Advent, we are called to pause and attune all of our senses to what really matters: Christ present in our midst and the kingdom of heaven being built here and now.

Connecting the Gospel

to the second reading: St. Paul echoes Jesus’ call to “stay awake” in his letter to the Romans. He tells them, “[I]t is the hour now for you to awake from sleep.” Both the gospel reading from Matthew and this portion of St. Paul’s letter are examples of eschatological literature found within the Bible. This genre deals with subjects concerning the end of mortal existence, most specifically death and judgment. Because we have a limited amount of time upon the earth, we can always be assured that, as St. Paul says, each moment “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11; NABRE). Adding to our mortality is the uncertainty of human life; not only will our lives come to an end, but we never know which day might be our last.

to experience: Advent calls us to confront both the gift and the anxiety of our mortality. We do not have unlimited time to spend our days in a stupor of half-living. Instead, we are invited to “put on the armor of light” and become the Christ-bearers we are called to be.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah foresees a time when the temple in Jerusalem (“the mountain of the Lord’s house”) shall not only belong to God’s chosen people, but to all the peoples of the world. For “[a]ll nations shall stream toward it” in search of divine wisdom and guidance. Our psalm tells us why the temple, “the house of the Lord,” has the ability to attract all the peoples of the world—this is a house of joy, one that promises unity, a place of peace and justice, and what nation doesn’t long for these things?

to psalmist preparation: We have entered into the time of Advent, and although we might associate the color purple with a time of penance, fasting, and preparation, we are called to joyfully journey toward the feast of Christmas and the fullness of the kingdom of God. The responsorial psalm calls us to “go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.” Is your parish a place that elicits joy?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Advent is a season for preparation. Amid the physical preparations for Christmas, how would you like to prepare spiritually for the feast of Christ’s nativity?

The first reading from Isaiah foretells a time when the people will beat their swords into plowshares—turning instruments of war into those of cultivation. How do you already live this call to peace? How might you embrace this call more fully?

In the second reading, St. Paul invites the Romans to “throw off the works of darkness / and put on the armor of light.” What spiritual practices strengthen you to live in the light of Christ?

In the gospel Jesus urges the disciples to “stay awake! / For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.” What is Jesus calling you to “wake up” to this Advent?



Model Penitential Act

Presider: On this First Sunday of Advent we come before the Lord with hopeful hearts and joyful spirits, and ask him to once again send his light to illuminate the darkness in our lives . . . [pause]

- Lord Jesus, you call us to walk in the way of peace: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you are the light that dispels the darkness: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you hold the world in love and offer salvation to all: Lord, have mercy.

Homily Points

- Before the invention of electricity, for thousands of years our ancestors followed the rising and setting of the sun in their daily rhythms. Now, in this time of artificial lighting, it is easy to divorce ourselves from the motion of the sun across the horizon. We can stay up late into the night reading a captivating story or watching a new TV show, only to hit the snooze button and pull our eye shades tighter to block out the sunlight peeking through the blinds of our bedroom window the next morning.
- In the gospel today Jesus gives the command “stay awake!” Later in Matthew’s gospel he will tell the parable of the ten bridesmaids (Matt 25:1-13) who are entrusted with keeping watch for a delayed bridegroom. When the bridegroom arrives, the five young women with lamps burning brightly are invited to join in the wedding feast. In today’s first and second reading we hear more imagery of this light that leads to the kingdom of God. St. Paul urges the Romans to “throw off the works of darkness / and put on the armor of light.” Isaiah calls the people of Israel to “walk in the light of the Lord!”
- In the northern hemisphere, the season of Advent coincides with the darkest time of the year. As we look ahead to the feast of Christmas, when we celebrate the light of God coming into the world in the mystery of the incarnation, we might ponder, what is it that helps us to heed Jesus’ call to stay awake? When we let the light of God shine in our lives, we are compelled to waken to the reality of what is—to confront the darkness inside ourselves and the darkness in our world. And then to recommit to being people of light.

Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Presider: Strengthened by the word of God, let us confidently bring our needs before the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For bishops, priests, and religious leaders, may they lead the people of God to true conversion and repentance this Advent season . . .

For leaders of nations, may they embrace the vision of the prophet Isaiah for a peaceful world in which swords are turned into plowshares . . .

For those who suffer in the darkness of mental illness and addiction, may the light of Christ ease their burdens and foster healing and hope . . .

For this parish, may we dedicate this Advent season to righteous deeds that embody the light and peace of Christ . . .

Presider: God of peace, your love and care envelop all creation. Hear our prayers that, formed by your word and nourished by your Body and Blood, we might become instruments of your creative will. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

COLLECT

Let us pray.

Pause for silent prayer

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,
 the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ
 with righteous deeds at his coming,
 so that, gathered at his right hand,
 they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity
 of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Isa 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz,
 saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
 In days to come,
 the mountain of the LORD’s house
 shall be established as the highest
 mountain
 and raised above the hills.
 All nations shall stream toward it;
 many peoples shall come and say:
 “Come, let us climb the LORD’s
 mountain,
 to the house of the God of Jacob,
 that he may instruct us in his ways,
 and we may walk in his paths.”
 For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
 and the word of the LORD from
 Jerusalem.
 He shall judge between the nations,
 and impose terms on many peoples.
 They shall beat their swords into
 plowshares
 and their spears into pruning hooks;
 one nation shall not raise the sword
 against another,
 nor shall they train for war again.
 O house of Jacob, come,
 let us walk in the light of the LORD!



RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me,
 “We will go up to the house of the LORD.”
 And now we have set foot
 within your gates, O Jerusalem.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Jerusalem, built as a city
 with compact unity.
 To it the tribes go up,
 the tribes of the LORD.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel,
 to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
 In it are set up judgment seats,
 seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
 May those who love you prosper!
 May peace be within your walls,
 prosperity in your buildings.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Because of my brothers and friends
 I will say, “Peace be within you!”
 Because of the house of the LORD, our God,
 I will pray for your good.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

SECOND READING

Rom 13:11-14

Brothers and sisters:
 You know the time;
 it is the hour now for you to awake from
 sleep.

For our salvation is nearer now than when
 we first believed;
 the night is advanced, the day is at
 hand.

Let us then throw off the works of
 darkness
 and put on the armor of light;
 let us conduct ourselves properly as in
 the day,
 not in orgies and drunkenness,
 not in promiscuity and lust,
 not in rivalry and jealousy.
 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
 and make no provision for the desires
 of the flesh.

About Liturgy

The urgency of the Gospel: In his last public address before succumbing to cancer, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago said, “A dying person does not have time for the peripheral or the accidental . . . To say it quite boldly, it is wrong to waste the precious gift of time given to us, as God’s chosen servants, on acrimony and division” (*A Moral Vision for America*, ed. John P. Langan). This is the urgency we get from today’s readings as well.

At its beginning, Advent insists we look to the end. Advent prepares us not only for the first coming but also the second coming of Christ at the end of time (cf. Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar 39). Therefore, let us make Advent less like a sentimentalized Christmas card and more like a dying person’s call to action, for those suffering on the brink of death have precious little time. We must act now to live the gospel on their behalf.

Let this urgency be present in your preaching, intercessions, music choices, and environment. Most especially, let radical hospitality and reconciliation be how you “put on the armor of light” (second reading).

About Initiation

The sacrament of the liturgical year: Sacraments are specific moments when we most clearly recognize God’s grace acting in our lives through prescribed rituals. These rituals make visible how God is saving us. Small “s” sacraments are also perceptible moments of grace. These may be more intimate encounters with God that are unique for each person. In this sense, we can call the liturgical year a sacrament revealing the mystery of God’s love for us.

When we think of time this way, it is no longer abstract, neutral, or meaningless. Every moment of our lives, whether filled with joy or grief, is an opportunity to encounter God’s presence. All these moments of grace gathered into a lifetime have the potential to reveal the mystery of God. We know this because God’s visible presence in Jesus entered human history to consecrate all human time.

For this reason, the church takes seriously the sacramentality of time. It is also why the length of the catechumenate should be long enough so that the catechumens “are properly initiated into the mysteries of salvation” (RCIA 76).

Don’t rush God’s time. Let time do its sacred work of gradually drawing your catechumens to the heart of God.

About Liturgical Music

The importance of beginnings: My piano teacher always emphasized the importance of good beginnings in performance. How you approached the piano, acknowledged the audience, placed your hands on the keys, allowed space for silence, and breathed before that first note—all these were as important as the piece itself. They signaled the value of the performance and prepared both performer and audience to fully enter the experience of the music.

What we do at Sunday Mass is not a concert. Yet the same disciplines for good beginnings still apply. At the beginning of Mass, especially in Advent, give space for silence. Complete any rehearsals and setup at least ten minutes before Mass starts so you can be present to the people and prepare yourself for prayer. If you offer a spoken greeting to the assembly before Mass, do it with respect for them and a sense of the dignity of the work you are about to do together. Before the season begins, reflect on the profound ministry we do to lead people in prayer. Give thanks and ask the Spirit to bless this new year of service to God’s people.



GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 3:4, 6

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:

all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matt 3:1-12; L4A

John the Baptist appeared,
preaching in the desert of
Judea
and saying, "Repent, for the
kingdom of heaven is at
hand!"

It was of him that the prophet
Isaiah had spoken when he
said:

*A voice of one crying out in
the desert,*

*Prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight his paths.*

John wore clothing made of
camel's hair
and had a leather belt around his waist.
His food was locusts and wild honey.
At that time Jerusalem, all Judea,
and the whole region around the Jordan
were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the
Jordan River
as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and
Sadducees
coming to his baptism, he said to them,
"You brood of vipers!

Who warned you to flee from the coming
wrath?

Produce good fruit as evidence of your
repentance.

And do not presume to say to yourselves,
'We have Abraham as our father.'

For I tell you,

God can raise up children to Abraham
from these stones.



Reflecting on the Gospel

Though today is December 8 when we might expect the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, it happens to fall on a Sunday. Therefore, the Second Sunday of Advent is what we celebrate today. We will commemorate the Immaculate Conception tomorrow. And for this Advent Sunday we hear the fiery preaching of John the Baptist, introduced for the first time in the Gospel of Matthew.

It almost goes without saying that John the Baptist is Jewish, and he is preaching to fellow Jews. But because he is considered a Christian saint, it's possible to overlook that he is a Jewish prophet calling the Jewish people to repentance, as prophets had done for centuries before.

He directly confronts the Pharisees and Sadducees, name-calling them a "brood of vipers." They are not to rest assured in their being part of the chosen people of God, the children of Abraham. For God can raise up children of Abraham from the stones. This message is so stark it nearly needs to be recast to our own day for those of us who might feel secure in our Christian or Catholic identity. We can hear John telling us that God can make Christians from the stones. There is no inherent value or guarantee of salvation simply by being Christian. Such a statement is shocking. But John would say something more is demanded. We are to repent, for the kingdom is at hand.

The people confessed their sin and were baptized for repentance. Even this, however, is only a foreshadowing of the one who is to come, for he will baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire." It can be easy to overlook the "fire" with which the one mightier than John will baptize. But the fire will consume the chaff. The baptism John imagines is apocalyptic and judgmental.

We are familiar with the stories of John the Baptist and his preaching. But when we read them with careful attention to detail, new meaning pops from the page. Let us not grow complacent in the face of such a baptism. John's baptism only prefigures that of Jesus, the mightier one. An interior renewal is called for. Resting in our identity as chosen by God, even as a Christian, is not enough.

Living the Paschal Mystery

As human beings we desire consistency, predictability, and stability. Though it's good to experience new things, not many of us thrive on doing new things all the time. Our lives may be punctuated by difference, but regularity reigns. Even the liturgical cycle of readings is regulated, and each Advent we read from John the Baptist's fiery preaching.

Even so, it's good for us to be shaken up a bit and jostled from our regular routine, as John the Baptist is doing today. We are reminded that we need to repent, turn away from selfish interests and turn toward God. This interior renewal is nothing less than a dying to self and rising with Christ, the paschal mystery. What regular routines do we need to abandon? From what in our lives do we need to turn away? What does turning toward God look like in our own time and place, in the midst of the relationships we have? Going to church, being Catholic, or knowing about God is not enough. An interior reorientation toward God and the values of his kingdom is demanded.

Continued in Appendix A, p. 261.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

To the point: In last week's gospel we heard Jesus' own words from the end of his ministry. Today we turn backward to John the Baptist's witness to Jesus near the beginning of Matthew's gospel, preparing the people for this one who will come to baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire. In the season of Advent, the light of our candles burn brighter each week. May we pray for the fire of this season to purify us and prepare us to welcome the risen Christ into our hearts anew at Christmas.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first and second readings: The Spirit with which Jesus comes to baptize, as proclaimed by John the Baptist in the gospel, is described in the prophet Isaiah's words from the first reading. The Spirit Jesus gives is one that seeks to anoint us in wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and fear of the Lord (sometimes translated as wonder and awe in God's presence). And it is only through calling on these gifts that we can live in true Christian community with one another. In the second reading St. Paul describes this type of community when he urges the Romans to "think in harmony with one another, / in keeping with Christ Jesus, / that with one accord you may with one voice / glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

to experience: We receive this Spirit at baptism and are strengthened in its gifts at confirmation, but every day of our Christian life we can call upon this Spirit to refine us in God's fiery love and lend us the spiritual ability most needed at that moment as we endeavor to build the kingdom of God.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Our responsorial psalm paints us a picture of the kingdom of God: "Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever." In the first reading Isaiah prophesies that the one to come shall have justice as "the band around his waist." This justice is the force that hears the cries of the poor and bears good fruit in the lives of those who live by its dictates. The harsh words John the Baptist has for the Pharisees and the Sadducees is a warning for anyone in a position of religious leadership. Later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus will describe the principal fault of these religious leaders by stating, "They tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them" (23:4; NABRE).

to psalmist preparation: What enables you, as ministers who lead the people of God in worship and song, to minister from a place of humility, formed by justice and peace?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Which gift of the Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, or fear of the Lord) from today's first reading are you in need of most in your life right now?

The responsorial psalm tells us, "Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever." What ministries within your parish or diocese are seeking to establish a more just and peaceful world? How might you be called to participate in this work?

In the second reading, St. Paul urges us to "[w]elcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you." When and where have you received this kind of welcome? What difference did it make in your life?

In the gospel, John the Baptist describes Jesus as holding a "winnowing fan in his hand," ready to gather the wheat and burn the chaff of his harvest. We know Jesus is both perfectly just and perfectly merciful. In your spiritual life are you more apt to focus on Jesus' justice or his mercy? Why do you think this is?



Model Penitential Act

Presider: In today’s gospel John the Baptist tells us, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” For the times we have not lived lives worthy of God’s kingdom of justice and peace, let us ask for forgiveness . . . [pause]

Lord Jesus, you hear the cries of the poor and afflicted: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you are the source of true justice and peace: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you call us to continual conversion: Lord, have mercy.

Homily Points

• As we prepare for the feast of Christmas, often thought of (and advertised) as one of the happiest and most joyful times of the year, we hear some of the most challenging gospel passages. Today’s ends with the ominous warning that Jesus comes with “winnowing fan in his hand,” ready to “clear his threshing floor / and gather his wheat into his barn, / but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” Despite the starkness of this language, St. Paul assures us in his letter to the Romans that all of the Scriptures have been written with one purpose in mind, so “we might have hope.”

• Where do we find hope in this gospel? Perhaps it is the hope of redemption. John the Baptist preaches repentance to the people of his day, and they respond by acknowledging their sins and being cleansed in the Jordan River. Even the Pharisees and Sadducees whom John calls “a brood of vipers” are not turned away from this redemption. Instead they, too, are invited to this baptism of repentance in order to give up their prideful ways and “produce good fruit.”

• In December 2014 Pope Francis began his annual address to the Roman Curia by clarifying what we really celebrate at Christmas: “It is our encounter with God who is born in the poverty of the stable of Bethlehem in order to teach us the power of humility.” John the Baptist tells us the one who is coming “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” With hope, we could consider this fire as a purifying flame ready to free us from the crippling effects of pride and beckoning us to embrace the humility of Christ.

Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Presider: With hope in God’s mercy and trust in his everlasting love, let us bring our prayers before the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the church throughout the world, may all her members joyfully take up the work of preparing the way of the Lord . . .

For civic leaders, may they be strengthened in their desire to serve the common good and in so doing, reject all worldly power and pride . . .

For the poor and afflicted within war-torn communities, may they receive the support and resources necessary to rebuild their lives in safety and peace . . .

For those gathered around this altar table, endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, may we proclaim God’s love to all in word and deed . . .

Presider: God of compassion and love, your Spirit strengthens us with wisdom and understanding. Hear our prayers that we might await the coming of your son, Jesus, in joyful hope. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

COLLECT

Let us pray.

Pause for silent prayer

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Isa 11:1-10

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the
stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and of
understanding,
a spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the
LORD,
and his delight shall be the fear of the
LORD.

Not by appearance shall he judge,
nor by hearsay shall he decide,
but he shall judge the poor with justice,
and decide aright for the land’s afflicted.
He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of
his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall
slay the wicked.

Justice shall be the band around his waist,
and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.
Then the wolf shall be a guest of the
lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the
kid;

the calf and the young lion shall browse
together,
with a little child to guide them.
The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.

The baby shall play by the cobra’s den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder’s
lair.

There shall be no harm or ruin on all my
holy mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with
knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea.

On that day, the root of Jesse,
set up as a signal for the nations,
the Gentiles shall seek out,
for his dwelling shall be glorious.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

R. (cf. 7) Justice shall flourish in his time,
and fullness of peace for ever.

O God, with your judgment endow the
king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon be no
more.

May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the
earth.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

For he shall rescue the poor when he cries
out,
and the afflicted when he has no one to
help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the
poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

May his name be blessed forever;
as long as the sun his name shall
remain.

In him shall all the tribes of the earth be
blessed;
all the nations shall proclaim his
happiness.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and
fullness of peace for ever.

SECOND READING

Rom 15:4-9

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written previously was
written for our instruction,
that by endurance and by the
encouragement of the Scriptures
we might have hope.

May the God of endurance and
encouragement
grant you to think in harmony with one
another,
in keeping with Christ Jesus,
that with one accord you may with one
voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ.

Continued in Appendix A, p. 261.

About Liturgy

The peaceable kingdom: Isaiah's reading today beautifully describes the messianic dream of the day that the ideal king comes to reign. Creatures that have long been enemies will live together as neighbors, their children at peace. Would that this be our own dream for our communities!

This worldwide peace may seem impossible in these contentious days of conflict, racism, and prejudice. Yet for those of us who are Christians, a primary focus of Advent is the kingdom of God, which we pray to come every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. By keeping this vision of the peaceful reign of God ever before us, we can take small steps toward making that vision a reality in our lives.

One place we rehearse these small steps is at our Sunday gathering. At the Sunday assembly, we can practice judging not by appearance or hearsay (cf. Isa 11:3) but with justice, especially for those afflicted and outcast. This begins simply by greeting the stranger seated next to, in front of, or behind us. Do not wait to be invited to do so by parish leadership; make it a habit and discipline on your own. This small step will train your eye to see God's kingdom that is already here.

About Initiation

Way of faith and conversion: The opening words of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults summarize what this entire process is: "The rite of Christian initiation presented here is designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the *way of faith and conversion* as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts" (RCIA 1, emphasis added). It is a path, a road, or, in John the Baptist's words today, "the way of the Lord." The RCIA is not a schedule of classes; it is a journey on which one meets Christ and grows in that relationship. Attend to how you structure this process so it truly is a path of conversion and not merely a classroom syllabus. The destination of initiation is not complete knowledge of the tenets of faith but a total change in one's way of life, that is, repentance. Therefore, measure conversion not through written tests or oral exams but in verifiable actions and attitudes that show that inquirers are becoming more and more like Christ, through "conversion in mind and in action . . . sufficient acquaintance with Christian teaching as well as a spirit of faith and charity" (RCIA 120).

About Liturgical Music

Moderation and anticipation: John the Baptist's call to repent reminds us of Advent's penitential nature. In both Lent and Advent, we express this through moderation in the liturgy, in particular through the restrained use of instruments. In Lent this moderation is taken to its penitential fullness through the directive that states that organ and other instruments are allowed "only in order to support the singing," with some exceptions (General Instruction of the Roman Missal 313). In Advent, however, this penitence is more akin to heightened attentiveness, similar to the anticipation felt on the eve of one's wedding. Thus, the church recommends that in Advent "the use of the organ and other musical instruments should be marked by a moderation suited to the character of this time of year, without expressing in anticipation the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord" (GIRM 313).

This anticipatory moderation can be expressed through the use of simpler instrumentation. For example, if your ensemble includes a full roster of keyboard, solo instruments, guitar, and percussion, experiment with using only guitar or only percussion on some pieces. Try this with the acclamations used each Sunday of the season.

DECEMBER 8, 2019

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT