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Verna Holyhead, SGS (1933–2011), Australian Sister of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict, wrote with an emphasis on biblical scholarship, liturgical insight, and pastoral challenge. She is the author of the three-volume collection Welcoming the Word in Year A, B, and C, published by Liturgical Press. Drawing from the wisdom of the community, her gospel reflections are included in this volume.


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**Purpose**

As a premier Catholic publisher, Liturgical Press remains committed to offering liturgical, spiritual, and scriptural resources rooted in the Benedictine tradition. While these resources have changed and developed over the years, the commitment to sound theology and best pastoral practice remain hallmarks of our mission and ministry. *Living Liturgy™* is one of our most loved and widely used incarnations of this commitment.

*Living Liturgy™* will always help people prepare for liturgy and live a liturgical spirituality (that is, a way of living that is rooted in liturgy). The paschal mystery is the central focus of liturgy, of the gospels, and of this volume. *Living Liturgy™* is more than a title. Rather, “living liturgy” is a commitment to a relationship with Jesus Christ, embodied in our everyday actions and interactions.

We hope this edition of *Living Liturgy™* will continue to facilitate this relationship, making liturgical spirituality a lived reality.

**Artwork**

This latest edition of *Living Liturgy™* features stunning new artwork from Ruberval Monteiro da Silva, OSB. Fr. Ruberval, a native of Brazil, resides in the Benedictine community of Sant’Anselmo in Rome. His colorful mosaics grace the walls of churches around the world, though he was eager to experiment with new mediums to fit within the pages of *Living Liturgy™*. His work is a labor of love and an outpouring of prayer, and will bring readers deeper into each gospel passage.

**Reflecting on the Gospel**

The gospel reflections in *Living Liturgy™* draw from the prolific work of Verna Holyhead, SGS, whose commitment to the intersection of Scripture and liturgy provides rich and provocative fodder for reflection. Additional reflections drawing from the wisdom of our community are contributed by John R. Donahue, SJ; Amy Ekeh; Dennis Gunn, CFC; and John W. Martens. Each of their continued commitments to the liturgical life of the church is evident and inspiring.

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

Now in her third and, sadly, final year of writing for *Living Liturgy™*, Katy Beedle Rice’s experience as a catechist shines through each of her contributions. Written in an accessible yet never simplistic style, Katy’s work is carefully constructed, inviting readers to engage the parallels between Scripture, liturgy, and life.

**Liturgy**

As a liturgical musician, composer, and author, Orin Johnson brings intimate knowledge of the pastoral needs of the people of God. Orin’s writing draws attention to some of the most timely realities of our church today through the lens of his own experience. For this edition, Orin suggested that each Sunday and solemnity in *Living Liturgy™* have a different feature catechetical section. We’re glad we agreed. His breadth of knowledge of liturgy will surely enhance yours.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS for Gospel Reflections

Original “Reflecting on the Gospel” sections

Amy Ekeh
The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist
The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls’ Day)
Thanksgiving Day

Dennis Gunn
Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper
Good Friday of the Passion of the Lord
At the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter

John W. Martens
Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary
The Annunciation of the Lord

Adapted “Reflecting on the Gospel” sections

Days of the Lord: The Liturgical Year, Volume 1; Advent, Christmas, Epiphany (1991)
The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), Vigil Mass
The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), Mass at Dawn

The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), Mass during the Night
Second Sunday of Lent
Seventh Sunday of Easter
Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Verna Holyhead, Welcoming the Word in Year B: Sowing the Seed (2008)
First Sunday of Advent
Second Sunday of Advent
Fourth Sunday of Advent
The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas), Mass during the Day
Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God
The Epiphany of the Lord
The Baptism of the Lord
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ash Wednesday
First Sunday of Lent
Third Sunday of Lent
Fourth Sunday of Lent
Fifth Sunday of Lent
Second Sunday of Easter (or of Divine Mercy)
Third Sunday of Easter
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Sixth Sunday of Easter
The Ascension of the Lord
The Most Holy Trinity
Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

John W. Martens, The Word on the Street, Year B: SUNDAY LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS (2017)
The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Third Sunday of Advent
The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion
Easter Sunday of the Resurrection
The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
All Saints
Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Pentecost Sunday
SEASON OF ADVENT
Reflecting on the Gospel

“Be watchful! Be alert!” are the first words with which Mark greets us at the beginning of this new year of the church. They are also the last words spoken by Jesus in Mark’s gospel (Mark 13:37) before the vortex of violence begins to suck Jesus into the passion and death that he will conquer by his resurrection. So even as we begin Advent, we are reminded of the paschal mystery of Christ, the hub of the liturgical year.

Today’s gospel is part of Mark 13, the chapter that is known as his “little apocalypse.” Apocalypse is sometimes called the literature of the oppressed, as it usually arises from and is addressed to people in a time of uncertainty or suffering, present or imminent. Such was the situation of the Markan church, persecuted and unsure what the next day would bring in terms of fidelity to or betrayal of their faith.

In one sense, uncertainty is always the season of the church as we await the return of Jesus, the great Traveler, who has gone abroad from the home of his human presence with us, but will return at his Second Coming when human history has run its course. We are uncertain about the day or the hour of this, because it is known only to the Father; but we have the certainty of faith that there is an end for the world: a faith that Christ will come again to pour out upon the cosmos the extravagant love of God that will transform it into the new heaven and new earth. When the new impinges on our lives to threaten the established order, we often express our reaction to this in terms of cosmic collapse: “I felt as though my whole world was collapsing!” In the verses immediately before today’s gospel, Jesus has spoken about the end of the old order in terms of the “passing away” of heaven and earth. The old order is the predictable, the ingrained habits, the mindless and often oppressive “business as usual.” Jesus’s words announce a new reality for which we must be awake and alert. Advent is our yearly reminder that, immersed in the present as we necessarily are, nonetheless we always stand on the edge of the future, secure in the words of Jesus which will not pass away but will help us journey into a new and hopeful transformation (cf. Mark 13:31-32).

Mark describes the “Jesus journey” through the parable of a man who goes abroad and leaves his servants in charge of his household. Just as each one of the servants in the parable is given specific work to do during his master’s absence, so we, as members of God’s household, are to be daily committed to our baptismal calling in our own circumstances, “evening, morning, cockcrow, dawn.” Especially as “doorkeepers,” we are to watch out for and open our personal and communal lives to the advent of God. Modern science speaks of the cosmos in terms of millennia of millennia, yet we know that this is not the scale of our own lifetime. The natural process of aging, perhaps the diagnosis of our own or our loved one’s terminal illness, the sudden fatal accident, the ravages of natural disasters—all these are reminders of our much shorter time and our need to be prepared for that “personal parousia,” Christ’s advent in our death.
Today in our churches or homes we light the first candle on the Advent wreath: a small flame is struck on an evergreen circle, a simple ritual and symbol of the first flicker of hope in the One who is the Light of the World, who will lead us through every darkness to eternal life with God who is without beginning or end. “Marana tha,” “Come, Lord,” is our persistent Advent cry.

Focusing the Gospel
Key words and phrases: “Be watchful! Be alert!”

To the point: We begin each liturgical year with a passage near the end of one of the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus, shortly before his passion, death, and resurrection, speaks to his closest friends regarding the moment of his return. Each gospel offers Jesus giving subtly different instructions. In Matthew, Jesus urges his followers to “stay awake,” in Luke they are to “be vigilant,” and in our gospel for today (from Mark) we are told three times to “watch.” As we enter into this Advent season of preparation and waiting, we might consider how to incorporate the spiritual practice of watching into our lives. In this moment in time, how can we attune our eyes to Jesus’s presence in our world and to his eventual return in glory?

Connecting the Gospel
to the first reading: Jesus illustrates the need for watchfulness with the parable of a master leaving his servants in charge as he travels abroad, having placed a gatekeeper “on the watch.” The prophet Isaiah seems to be utilizing the same imagery in today’s first reading, pleading for God to “return for the sake of your servants” with the hope that “you might meet us doing right.” While Jesus’s parable seems to warn against becoming drowsy lest the day of his return catch his disciples unawares, Isaiah is eager for God to make his presence known again in the midst of his people, even if, in that moment he relates, “[Y]ou are angry, and we are sinful; / all of us have become like unclean people, / all our good deeds are like polluted rags.”

to experience: How often in the spiritual life do we cry out to God seeking comfort and tenderness? Instead, Isaiah calls upon God’s righteous anger and cleansing justice to turn the hearts of his people back to an existence where all are “mindful of you in our ways.” We know our God is both perfect justice and perfect mercy. How might the justice of God be challenging you to greater fidelity and purity of heart this Advent?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm
to the readings: Today’s psalm matches the first reading in urgency and tone. The psalmist pleads with God to “[r]ouse your power, / and come to save us.” In the gospel, Jesus calls his disciples to “[b]e watchful! Be alert!” But in the psalm, God is the one who is called upon to “hearken” to the cries of his people and to “look down from heaven and see.” In the covenant, God, with consideration and patience, waits for our full and wholehearted response to his invitation to relationship. We are not forced, and at times it can seem as if God is far away, even when we know he is closer than our very breath.

to psalmist preparation: In your life of faith, when have you been most in need of God’s strength and saving power?

Throughout salvation history the people of God have prayed as in today’s psalm, “Rouse your power, / and come to save us.” Where is God’s restoring power most needed in your community?

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes, “[I]n [Christ] . . . you are not lacking in any spiritual gift.” How would it change your family or faith community if this belief was lived out?

How is Jesus calling you to be watchful and alert this Advent season?
Model Penitential Act

Presider: We begin this season of Advent with Jesus’s words from today’s gospel: “Be watchful! Be alert!” For the times we have grown weary and apathetic in faith, let us ask for mercy and healing... [pause]

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world and the just judge come to save us: Lord, have mercy.
Christ Jesus, in joyful hope we await your coming in glory: Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, mold us into a people after your own heart: Lord, have mercy.

Homily Points

• In the gospel parable, the master of the house goes abroad, leaving his servants in charge, “each with his own work.” Jesus uses parables for many reasons throughout the gospels, but primarily to help his listeners understand the mystery of the kingdom of God. Today’s parable is the final one Jesus gives in the Gospel of Mark. Intent upon preparing his closest friends for what is to come, Jesus explains the parable’s meaning as a way to urge watchfulness in his followers, even when it seems like the master of the house is delayed in returning, or indeed might never be coming back at all.

• Nearly two thousand years later, we are still waiting for the time that has been promised, when Jesus will return in glory and the kingdom of God will be established in its fullness. It is not easy to wait—just ask an expectant couple two weeks away from their due date, or a five-year-old wondering why Christmas isn’t here yet. It is even harder to wait, though, when we do not know the timeline for when our expectations will be fulfilled.

• Though it is of unknown duration, we are not left to our own devices in this time of waiting. Instead, we’ve been given the gift of work. We find ourselves as part of an unbroken chain stretching from the friends of Jesus, who heard these words directly from his lips, to now. It is our turn in history to carry out Jesus’s commandment to be watchful and alert, and to attend to the work that is ours to do. In this way, through the grace of God, may the kingdom of God continue to grow until the moment when it reaches its fulfillment and the Master of the house returns home.

Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Presider: As we enter into Advent, a season of preparation and joyful hope, let us turn to God with hearts and minds intent on building his kingdom here on earth.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the church, may it be a force for good in the world, intent upon lifting up the lowly and comforting the brokenhearted... For those who labor throughout the world, may the dignity of their work be upheld with safe conditions and a just wage... For those who have wandered far from God’s way of peace and justice, through conversion and penance may they be restored to right relationship with God and others... For all gathered here, may we attune our senses to the presence of God in the world and dedicate our lives to carrying out his holy will...

Presider: Loving God, you are our father, our redeemer, and the one who forms us as a potter forms clay. Hear our prayers, that molded into the image and likeness of your son, we might hasten the arrival of his kingdom of peace and justice. 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 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

You, Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever.

Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?

Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old.

No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him.

Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways!

Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind.

There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt.

Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.
RESPONSORIAL PSALM
Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

R. (4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.
O shepherd of Israel, hearken, from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Rouse your power, and come to save us.
R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted, the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.
May your help be with the man of your right hand, with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.
Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us new life, and we will call upon your name.
R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

SECOND READING
1 Cor 1:3-9

Brothers and sisters: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

About Liturgy
Active Waiting: Advent is perhaps the most difficult season for liturgical ministers to shape and form. No matter how well the liturgy and music are crafted and executed, it can feel, against the pervasive “Christmas Spirit” which imbues almost everything outside the church doors at this time of year, that these efforts are nearly meaningless. Another aspect of the Advent season that makes it so challenging for liturgical ministers is the need to hold together in peace the paradoxical elements of rushing and patience: in today’s collect, we ask God for “the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ,” while the Scripture passages urge us to patient waiting and watching for that coming of the same Son of God.

It would be wise to be attuned to how those in the assembly perceive what is happening in our liturgies, especially against the backdrop of their presumed experiences the other six days and twenty-three hours of the week. Notably, it can be quite challenging for any of us to recognize simple, quiet waiting as something active and preparatory, but so it is! In fact, sometimes stillness is the only and best thing we can do. While the Advent wreath helps us mark time, it also bids us “be patient,” as only certain candles may be lit each week while the remaining candles, too, must patiently wait. This can also be echoed in other pieces of the art and environment: a set of four banners, with one more revealed each passing Sunday, or indeed in the pacing and music of the liturgies.

About Stillness
Intentional Tranquility: On various Sundays in this resource, you will find brief sections that examine liturgical postures, gestures, objects, and furnishings and their impact on our liturgical celebrations. As mentioned above, stillness is one of those challenging aspects of liturgy, particularly as Christmas draws near. At any time of year, it can be a challenge to set aside time for quiet stillness—and at times when it is most difficult to do so, we ought to set aside even more time for peaceful contemplation! The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) instructs us to insert several moments of silence into the liturgy: during the penitential act, after the presider’s invitation “let us pray,” following each Scripture passage, after the homily, and following the distribution of Holy Communion. If these moments are not intentional at our liturgies, Advent is the perfect time to be more aware of the necessity for silence in prayerful liturgies. Elijah, we must remember, recognized the voice of God not in powerful winds, earthquakes, or fires, but in a gentle whisper.

About Music
Marking Time: It is wise to mark the changing of seasons with noticeable changes in the music of the liturgy. This can be through the selections of pieces themselves or through how they are presented: changes in the use of unisons and harmonies, the use of different tempos, and the use of (or resting of) certain instruments can be very effective in helping our assemblies mark the passing of time and the different characters of each liturgical season.

We should be mindful that, even though it is sometimes nicknamed “Little Lent,” Advent should have “joyful, anxious anticipation” as a primary affect, not penitence. Still, it may be a good time to include a sung Kyrie Eleison, since the Gloria is omitted during Advent. A hymn that speaks well to the activity of Advent is “People, Look East,” found in many hymnals; one that effectively paints the quietness of the season is John Foley’s “Patience, People” (Oregon Catholic Press [OCP]). Consider using one of these as a common gathering hymn or sending hymn for the entire season.

NOVEMBER 29, 2020
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Gospel Acclamation
Luke 3:4, 6

R: Alleluia, alleluia.
Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
al all flesh shall see the salvation of God.
R: Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel
Mark 1:1-8; L5B
The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.
As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:
Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way.
A voice of one crying out in the desert:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight his paths.”
John the Baptist appeared in the desert
proclaiming a baptism of repentance
for the forgiveness of sins.
People of the whole Judean countryside
and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem
were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River
as they acknowledged their sins.
John was clothed in camel’s hair,
with a leather belt around his waist.
He fed on locusts and wild honey.
And this is what he proclaimed:
“One mightier than I is coming after me.
I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.
I have baptized you with water;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Reflecting on the Gospel
The Liturgy of the Word puts the adult John before us today and next Sunday to block our view of “baby Jesus,” and so remind us that the Advent–Christmas mystery is less about the child and more about the adult Coming One and the mystery of his life, death, and resurrection that he offers to us as our own mystery. We are called to make our way down to the Jordan with the hopeful and curious crowds to see this wilderness man. John had accepted the hospitality that the desert had offered him. Cruncher of the desert food of bitter locusts sweetened with wild honey, he is satisfied with the food of the poor; clad in rough camel hair, he is dressed like a new Elijah (2 Kgs 1:5-8); tempered in his spirit by solitude, John, in his turn, welcomes the crowds with a bittersweet message in sparse words that are honed to a fine cutting edge for slicing through consciences and exposing them to the truth.

Son of a priest though he may be, John does not deliver his message in the temple or anywhere else in Jerusalem, but on the banks of the Jordan River. At this busy crossing place, so significant in the history of Israel’s journey into the Promised Land (cf. Josh 3), John urges the people to cross over into God’s forgiveness through the waters of a ritual baptism of repentance. The Baptist invites us, too, to honest mindfulness of the water—not of the Jordan, but of our baptism—and to examination of our consciousness about our fidelity to the Christ into whom we are baptized. Despite the crowds he draws, John’s self-evaluation has nothing of self-exaltation. At this high point of his popularity he speaks directly to the people to point them away from himself to the stronger One who is coming, and declares that he is unworthy even to be a slave who would bend down and untie the sandals on the smelling and sweating feet of this Coming One. John resists the temptation of successful ministers: to allow our own popularity to become the main concern of our ministry. When we do this, we are proclaiming what we consider the good news of ourselves, not of Jesus.

In the Puerto Rican city of San Juan, named for John, there stands a huge stone sculpture of the precursor. It is located between the ocean and a main highway of this busy modern city. With the relentlessness of the stone from which he is carved, the Baptist stands with head bent and eyes looking down the highway. But one arm is raised high with a determined finger pointing to heaven. The statue expresses the gospel paradox of John the Baptist, the earthy man of both the wilderness and the Jordan crowds, and the heaven-directed prophet; the paradox of disengagement and engagement—and so the embodiment of the paradox of the Advent season. Day after day, as surely as the waves break on the shore, our lives must be directed to heaven, and yet we must also be involved in the rush and business of daily life. The former is almost certainly the more difficult during these weeks. But it can be done if we opt to deliberately turn off the TV, to unplug our ears from iPods or mobile phones and turn to a few moments of silent reflection about the hopes and promises
PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the first reading, Isaiah calls for every valley to be filled in and every mountain to be made low. What mountains and valleys need attention in your own life at this moment?

The psalmist proclaims that in the time of salvation, “Truth shall spring out of the earth.” What is the place of truth in the spiritual life?

In the second letter of St. Peter, we are asked to consider “what sort of persons ought you to be, / conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion.” What insight do you gain when considering what sort of person God is calling you to be?

John the Baptist tells the gathering crowds that the one who is coming “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Where in your life are you in need of the Holy Spirit’s animating fire?
Model Penitential Act

Presider: In today’s gospel, John the Baptist calls the people to repentance so that they might “prepare the way of the Lord.” Knowing our own sinfulness, let us also turn our hearts to the Lord and ask for God’s pardon and healing.

Lord Jesus, you are the shepherd who longs to restore us to your flock: Lord, have mercy.
Christ Jesus, your patience never wavers as you tirelessly seek out the lost: Christ, have mercy.
Lord Jesus, you are the mighty God who desires to lead us to lasting peace: Lord, have mercy.

Homily Points
• At the beginning of our second reading, we are reminded that God does not experience time in the same way that we do, for “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day.” The second letter of St. Peter is believed to be the latest writing in the New Testament, most likely composed in the first half of the second century. At this time, the community of Christians faced new challenges as they dealt with the unrealized expectation that Christ would return in glory within the lifespan of the first apostles. Instead of a sprint, their collective waiting for the fulfillment of God’s kingdom had turned into a marathon of unknown duration.
• We, too, find ourselves in a time of waiting. Advent calls to us to renew our own desire and longing for the “coming of the day of God,” and each of today’s readings offers insight into how we are called to prepare both individually and as a community for this moment.
• The prophet Isaiah invites us to turn our attention to the valleys and mountains that obscure our vision of God’s glory. The epistle writer invokes us to “holiness and devotion,” while John the Baptist calls us to repentance.

While these readings seem to promote interior reflection, today’s psalm turns our attention outward, telling us, “Justice shall walk before [the Lord], and prepare the way of his steps.” After we have done the internal work of acknowledging sin, we are invited to consider how our actions affect the dignity and rights of others. The path of justice is one that leads us to right relationship with God and with all people. In our waiting there is plenty of work to be done.

Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Presider: In this time of preparation and anticipation for the coming of God’s kingdom in its fullness, let us come before the Lord bringing our needs and the needs of our world.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay ministers, may they shepherd the people of God with holiness and devotion.

For politicians, diplomats, and peacekeepers, through their work may justice, peace, kindness, and truth flourish throughout the world.

For those nearing the end of life, may they be comforted and sustained by a loving community and know deeply the tenderness of God.

For all gathered here, formed by the Word of God, may we turn our hearts and minds to the work of preparing the way of the Lord.

Presider: God of truth and kindness, with love and mercy you call us forward on the path of conversion. Hear our prayers that we might answer your call with courage and live lives that proclaim your peace to all. 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 40:1-5, 9-11

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:
In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!
Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news!
Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God!
Here comes with power the Lord God, who rules by his strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him.
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

R: (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.
About Liturgy

Navigating Connected Seasons: During the Advent season, liturgical and music ministers face the challenge of navigating the inherent connection between Advent and Christmas. Setting aside the concerns mentioned last week—those of how the secular world has, by now, been fully into Christmas mode for a few weeks—there is an additional element to be wary of: celebrating Advent, with its innate character, while being mindful that Advent has a relationship to Christmas, but is not itself Christmas.

We can sometimes fall into the trap of treating liturgical seasons and celebrations as nearly historical reenactments. This is understandable: many feasts are placed on the calendar with a mindfulness of the historical date on which they (might have) happened, and when possible, the Scripture passages bring us to, or at least inform us of, a particular historic time and place for certain celebrations. Yet today, and each and every time we celebrate liturgy, we must do so with the fullness of our salvation story and the paschal mystery in our minds and souls. Advent means so much more when we know the truth of Christmas that follows; Lent similarly is a shadow of itself if there is no knowledge of the Easter resurrection to come.

We obviously avoid some particular music as well as the art and environment of Christmastide during Advent, but that does not mean that some elements of the two seasons might not be the same, or perhaps undergo a transformation on Christmas Eve. For example, we might use the same Mass setting, music for the ordinary of the Mass, for both Advent and Christmas. At Christmas, we might expand the instrumentation of the setting, as described last week. The Advent wreath could be relocated and adorned with lights or white candles, in place of the violet and rose. Some communities also add a fifth candle, in the center of the wreath, symbolic of Christ. Many parishes take up some sort of collection during Advent: items for food pantries; winter jackets, hats, and gloves; or presents for area organizations that serve underprivileged youth. Advent “Giving Trees” are one way to do this: adorn a tree, in a lobby or gathering space, with gift tags that list special requests or items to donate. As the season progresses, tags are removed, and donations begin to grow. By Christmas, lights can be added to the tree and it can become a powerful symbol of your community’s witness to celebrating fully Christ’s birth and presence in the world today.

About Music

A Common Repertoire: Last week, this space suggested using the same hymn at all seasonal liturgies to help delineate the season of Advent. This can be a powerful technique, if a piece of music is chosen well and, when possible, connects to the art and environment of the season and other notable elements of the liturgy.

Taking this approach would also allow a bit more rehearsal time for choirs and ensembles to prepare for Christmastide during this busy time of year. And it might be easier on your assembly to sing the music of this season for these four weeks (and then never again, at least not until next Advent).

There is such a richness, however, in the Advent repertoire, and repeating one hymn for several weeks would mean neglecting a few others. This may be a trade-off we are not willing to make. Today’s readings especially are likely inspiration for many of our favorite hymns; which one would we be willing to omit?