

Sunday, Dec 13, 2020

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Discern the spirit

Often we get an intuition, a burning in the heart that feels motivating. It may tell us to speak up or shut up; to reach out or keep our hands off a situation; to admit we need help or to stop leaning on others. Do we obey the prompt, or ignore it? The problem with following what may be a divine nudge is that we can't always discern the Holy Spirit from a lesser kind. Discernment involves prayer, familiarity with scripture, consultation with faithful others, and sometimes spiritual direction. Above all, it needs to be practiced. Befriend the Spirit!

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28 (8). *"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances."*

Monday, Dec 14, 2020

MEMORIAL OF JOHN OF THE CROSS, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Be a light in the darkness

We have so many options in our modern world that it's easy to walk away from any organization or community that we struggle with and simply join ones that are more agreeable to us. But what if we stayed and worked to make them better instead? Saint John of the Cross did exactly that and reformed his Carmelite order, despite imprisonment for his efforts. When you feel disillusioned with institutions you love, be guided by John's writing—considered among the greatest in all of Spanish literature—about darkness leading to the light.

TODAY'S READINGS: Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a; Matthew 21:23-27 (187). *"By what authority are you doing these things?"*

Tuesday, Dec 15, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY

The darkness before dawn

Two days ago we celebrated Gaudete Sunday with refrains of rejoicing. Two days from now, we'll begin to pray the O Antiphons—seven days to laud the fast-approaching Messiah. What to make of this in-between time, when scripture shows Jesus chiding religious leaders and Old Testament prophets preach fire and brimstone? "The day in which we now find ourselves is still night," wrote Saint Augustine. But the promise of salvation is sure. "Keep your attention closely fixed on it, as you would on a lamp shining in a dark place until the first streaks of dawn appear."

TODAY'S READINGS: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13; Matthew 21:28-32 (188). *"Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God."*

Wednesday, Dec 16, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY

Usher in a renewed Advent

This Advent season is so different from any other in our lifetimes, and the holidays may not allow for worship in person with our faith communities or celebrations with beloved families. For many of us, this brings sadness to these Advent days as we mourn the loss of familiar rituals. The poetic words of theologian, educator, and civil rights leader Howard Thurman remind us that the work of Christmas is to "find the lost, heal the broken, feed the hungry . . . rebuild the nations and bring peace among others." Let us pray for the grace to overcome any disappointment we feel and focus on feeding the hungry, having compassion for the broken,

and rebuilding the relationships around us. In such practices, we will find Advent hope and peace.

TODAY'S READINGS: Isaiah 45:6b-8, 18, 21c-25; Luke 7:18b-23 (189). *"The poor have the good news proclaimed to them."*

Thursday, Dec 17, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O WISDOM)

Heavenly sounds

Today is the first of the O Antiphons, an Advent tradition from the seventh century whereby for a week the church's evening prayer salutes the coming Messiah by different names each evening. Tonight monasteries, parishes, and ordinary Christians will sing or recite "O Sapientia" (Wisdom). Reading about the loveliness of this prayer is no substitute for hearing it. Let the ethereal sound of this ancient tradition uplift your prayer today. Here is "O Sapientia" sung by Dominican friars in Oxford, England.

TODAY'S READINGS: Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Matthew 1:1-17 (193). *"Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations."*

Friday, Dec 18, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O SACRED LORD)

A call to rescue and restore

The calamities that piled up in 2020 point surely to the longing of today's O Antiphon. A wave of global pandemic, quarantine, massive unemployment, fires, floods, and protest for racial justice crests, resonating with the yearning for freedom. More than ever, we yearn for the Leader who will restore justice and rescue us with mighty power. And at a time when more people are exiled from their homes than ever before in human history, we commemorate Migrants Day with a plaintive call: *Come, Lord Jesus to our human mess. We need you as we have throughout the centuries.*

TODAY'S READINGS: Jeremiah 23:5-8; Matthew 1:18-25 (194). *"O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free."*

Saturday, Dec 19, 2020

ADVENT WEEKDAY (O FLOWER OF JESSE'S STEM)

Creation is full of surprises

The image of "Jesse's Stem" in today's O Antiphon comes from the Book of Isaiah. Using the image of a tree much like we use a family tree to trace our lineage, Isaiah traces the lineage of the kings of Judah forward from Jesse, the father of King David, to the hoped-for Christ, the new king who might restore the monarchy to its former greatness. But like the birth of John the Baptist, the actual coming of the Christ would be a surprise, a new revelation of a heavenly Kingdom. Reflect on the various ways God has surprised you in your life.

TODAY'S READINGS: Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a; Luke 1:5-25 (195). *"O Flower of Jesse's stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples."*

Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time



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