

*Advent
2017*



“Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

John 8:12

Dear Sisters, Associates and Friends,

I once lived with Sister M. Carmen (Davy) for more than three years in a rural mission in Jalchatra, Bangladesh. We had no phone, no TV and infrequent electricity. The electronic devices we all use today were beyond our imaginations. The one thing we received daily was the newspaper, which arrived in the afternoon. Our schedules were busy, filled with our ministries and community activities.

On some evenings, we sat in the moonlight and shared our stories. A kerosene lantern was our great source of light for the darkest nights, and nights when we were working. Interestingly, the lantern, which we needed at night, was prepared in the morning: we cleaned the chimney and wick and filled the oil. It was a custom I grew up with, but did not think about. I never asked why we prepared the lantern in the morning. I realized later that we did this to note any supplies that were needed for the lantern before walking to the distant market where we purchased our household items. This way, there was sure to be enough time to return with the supplies and prepare the lantern for nightfall.

During the four weeks of the Advent season, these insightful reflections will help to prepare us, even in the darkest night, to receive and welcome Jesus Christ, who is the source of all light. I am grateful to Holy Cross Associate Jessica R. Balandrán and Sisters Margaret Ann Shield, Marjorie Ann Manning, Mary Ann Pajakowski and M. Perpetua (Meyer) for writing the reflections. May the Advent season bring us all inner peace and joy, that we may become a joyful and hopeful people of Christ.

In Holy Cross,
Sister Angela Golapi Palma
Leadership Team Member

First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2017

Mark 13:33–37

Over the span of a few years, beginning when I was nine years old, I experienced the loss of 10 family members, including my maternal grandmother and my beloved, younger sister Libby. This experience could have made me fearful, dreading the thought of my own mortality. Instead, it has given me a profound perspective on living, which is illustrated in today's reading.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus calls us to "Be watchful! Be alert!" His words are not intended to cause anxiety. Rather, they remind us to live with great urgency: being mindful of the needs of our world, and staying open to the many ways God calls us to serve. This often requires that we step out of our comfort zones. But, if we work toward using our gifts and talents to accomplish God's will on earth—listening and following where God leads us—we can move away from living in fear of 'earthly death' and experience the peace of mind that comes from knowing that life in the resurrection was always God's plan.

Reflection questions:

How do I respond to the needs of the world?

Do I 'act with urgency' when the Lord calls me into service?

If life in the resurrection is what we all hope to experience one day, how can I put aside any fears about death and focus on God's will in my daily life?

Holy Cross Associate Jessica R. Balandrán

Second Sunday of Advent

December 10, 2017

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11 • 2 Peter 3:8-14 • Luke 3:4, 6

Prepare the way of the Lord!
The glory of the Lord shall be revealed!
All humankind shall see it together!

Each of us is inimitable. Each of us has a special role in this preparation of the Lord's way. We get to do it together!

The Serra Cross Park, in Ventura, California, gives witness to this effort. With the founding of Mission San Buenaventura in 1782, St. Junípero Serra, OFM, originally erected a large wooden cross at the site. Later, another was raised on a hill overlooking the mission, probably as a sign for travelers. Over the years, it was replaced several times, and eventually roads were built leading up to it.

In 2003, a case was made against the city, claiming a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. In response, the city council voted to sell the land to the highest bidder.

Hundreds of residents and visitors expressed interest in keeping the cross and maintaining the land; stoneworkers from around the world designed and built a rampart and a stairway to the cross to make it more accessible.

Today, families lease small tracts of land leading up to the cross, brightening them with gardens for the pleasure of all who make the pilgrimage.

Reflection questions:

Where does God's beauty shine in your life?

How do you spread the glory of the Lord among those around you?

Sister Margaret Ann Shield

Third Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2017

John 1:7

“He came as a witness to testify about the light, that all might believe through him.”

How are we doing at witnessing? John was asked, “Who are you?” We ask, “Who am I?” Often, we, too, say what we are not. Today, we profess that we are disciples of Jesus, those in whom Christ is being born each day, those awaiting the fullness of the revelation of Jesus; those relying on his presence for daily living.

We pray without ceasing. We give thanks in all circumstances. We move forward in a world seeking light. We see those who are brokenhearted, hungry, imprisoned, mourning, suffering injustice. How can we be witnesses? Whom can we touch with our light? Who awaits our touch?

Sometimes we ask, “How can we rejoice?” The evil one seeks to snuff out the light—and yet, we know God is faithful. The Spirit is upon us. As witnesses to the light, how will we act each day? What unique work is God asking of us to bring more light into this struggling world?

The light will not go out because within each of us is the desire to be light to one another. Let the light shine in the darkness. Let it lead us and our awaiting world to the Christ in our midst.

Reflection questions:

This week, whose light will you receive?

Will someone receive the touch of Jesus through you?

Sister Marjorie Ann Manning

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2017

Luke 1:26-38

Greetings, O favored one! *Saludos, persona favorecida!* Do not be afraid! Today is Christmas Eve—a night of miracles. Angels appear to shepherds. Stars announce that something big has happened. A baby is born who was conceived by a virgin. What is not to hope for on Christmas Eve?

Mary had the simple and certain faith of a teenager. She was not praying every day to become the mother of God. All she needed to hear was, “The Lord is with you!” She basically replied, “Let’s do this!”

What miracles shall we make happen on this night? Let us dream big with Mary! Each of us hears the daily invitation, “Greetings, O favored one! I have an idea for you!” We answer with, “Great news! I will certainly think about it.” Then the Holy Spirit takes over.

The dream and the vision came first, then the particulars—the kindness of Joseph, a great visit with an older cousin, strangers who opened a stable, animals who gave warmth, shepherds who shared joy, kings who brought gifts and warnings, Egypt which gave refuge; then, a son, who came to remind us that we are of God too.

So, this same thing can happen to us! A very good reason to celebrate well and with everyone this Christmas!

Reflection vision:

We ask that our brothers and sisters who are migrants, refugees, immigrants will find peace in their own countries and welcome in others.

Sister Mary Ann Pajakowski

Christmas Day

December 25, 2017

John 1:3–14

The Gospel of St. John presents Jesus, the Word of God, as the powerful creator of all that exists. “Without Him, not even one thing came into being... The Word was made flesh; he pitched his tent among us.” The feast of Christmas presents the opportunity to reflect on the marvel of God becoming one of us. We celebrate the belief that God chose to share in the lives of ordinary people.

In the Book of Wisdom, at a different time and under different circumstances, we hear a similar message. “While all was in quiet silence and the night was in the middle of its course, your almighty Word leapt down from the Royal Throne” (Wisdom 18:4–15).

In this reading, the word ‘leapt’ can imply speed, vigor, enthusiasm and determination. It tells us that our loving God could not wait to be one with us. In the bright days and dark days, the happy or sad events, the successes or failures of our lives, we can know that God wants to be with us.

Most babies crawl. This baby leapt and continues to leap into our lives, always. He promised!

Reflection question:

How did God leap into your life today?

Sister M. Perpetua (Meyer)



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