

*Walking
the Advent Road
With Emmaus*

Advent 2018



Original cover created by Regina Miolene

All About This Booklet

Emmaus Community was established in 1972 as a non-territorial parish in the Diocese of Bridgeport by our then bishop, Walter C. Curtis. From our beginnings to the present, the celebration of our weekly Eucharist has been the primary source of our life together. In 2015, the Archives of Emmaus as an Intentional Eucharistic Community were included in the library of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Through the more than forty-five years of our existence, many wonderful priests have become part of our community. One of our priests, the late Vincent Novak S.J., first dean of Fordham University's Graduate School of Religion, remarked that Emmaus has been "a strong learning experience for strengthening my priesthood."

Rev. Patrick Flanagan CM, of St. John's University suggested we take on the project of preparing an Advent Booklet with each member's reflection on one of the daily readings. The community enthusiastically responded to this call. Each member signed up for one of the days in Advent, a committee was formed and this booklet is the result of Father Patrick's call.



DECEMBER 2– Sunday of the First Week

Jer 33:14-16; 1 Thes 3:12-4:2; Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

The Lord Is Coming!

“The days are coming...” Jer 33:14

How do we know He’s coming? Because God promised, through the prophet Jeremiah: In the house of David He would send a Savior who is righteous and just. So, like the ancient Israelis, each Advent we wait.

And we believe He did come: Jesus, our Lord, born in Bethlehem. And yearly, we prepare to celebrate at Christmastide. Just think about that wonder, that Incarnation, God comes among us, a human being like us (almost).

And think what Paul said, writing to the early Christians who were more like us because they too sometimes made mistakes and could even be sinful. Paul called them to “increase and abound in love for one another and for all....Strengthen your hearts to be blameless; in holiness...conduct yourselves to please God.”

When we’re honest we realize we’re not “blameless.” Advent is a time to reflect with contrition on our everyday lives. At the end of each day this month we might follow St. Ignatius in thinking: what we are grateful for, what we hope for, what we want, where we find God in our lives; but think also, with contrition, of where we have failed that day to live up to the gift of God’s love.

Finally, in the gospel, we hear Jesus’ promise that He will come again. Do we believe that? Will it happen in our lifetime? We see signs of chaos—in the environment and among humanity. Are we ready to face God? What does that mean to you this Advent season?

DECEMBER 3 - Monday of the First Week

Is 2:1-5, Ps 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9, Mt 8:5-11

Faith and Trust

“Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof” – Mt 8:5-11:

This gospel is the story of a Centurion in the Roman army under Herod Antipas who asked Jesus to heal his paralyzed and suffering servant. The fact that there were very strict boundaries between the classes at this time shows how caring this Centurion was with finding help to save his servant's life. As a Centurion, he had authority over 100 men, was a man of war, an army captain and responsible for maintaining law and order in Capernaum.

He had heard of Jesus' healings and had faith in Jesus' ability to create miracles. As a Roman, he was a pagan, but believed in what he had heard about the miraculous things Jesus was doing. He came to Jesus and asked Him to cure his servant. When Jesus offered to go to the Centurion's home, the Centurion said, "Lord I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof, only say the word and my servant will be healed." The Centurion understood and believed in Jesus' ability to heal.

When Jesus heard this, He was truly amazed and said, "In no one in Israel have I found such faith." This is the only time in the Bible that Jesus says this about a person's faith.

As a Roman, would you have approved of the Centurion's appeal for his help?

When you were experiencing a serious problem, did you turn to Jesus? Would you trust that Jesus could just "say the word" and miraculously solve the problem?

DECEMBER 4 – *Tuesday of the First Week*

Is. 11:1-10, Ps 72:1-2, 7-8 12-13, 1, Lk 10:21-24

Be Childlike

“Father, . . . you have revealed them to the childlike.” – Lk 10: 21

Jesus taught His followers using metaphors and parables: be like sheep, think of a mustard seed, visualize a camel passing through an impossibly small gate, consider the relationship between a vine and its branches... One of the most recurring metaphors Jesus used was His call for His followers to be more childlike. He said that by emulating children we will understand what Jesus said better than those who come with preconceived ideas.

Children can teach us a lot – a young child learns to trust her parents, to feel safe and protected by them. This is how we should feel towards God, who has only our best interests at heart. Children depend on their parents for nourishment; parents provide for their children. Parents accept their children just as they are. And parents love unconditionally; it comes with the job description.

Jesus spoke often of His relationship to His Father, Abba. All that He said describes a perfect parent/child relationship. What Jesus seems to be saying is that just as a child’s relationship with his/her parents is built on trust, protection, nourishment, acceptance and unconditional love, that is how we can begin to understand our relationship with God.

Not all people are blessed by great parent/child relationships; some may have been painful and less than ideal. But even then, we can approach Abba/Father as Jesus did and expect that we can trust, be nourished, be provided for and especially be loved unconditionally by an ever-present Parent.

Think of people who have “parented” you in your life. What did they do for you? What did that feel like?

DECEMBER 5 – *Wednesday of the First Week*

Is 25:6-10a, Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6, Mt 15:29-37

What's It All About?

"Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!" Is 25:9

I wait. I wait for the coming of a little babe who will be born in a manger stable; this little one who will grow into a fine man, teach and preach and heal, and then be put to death. I think about the full meaning of this birth I await. God's son, God's beloved, will be born of a woman. He will be fully human and experience all that life encompasses; joy, pain, weariness, love, disappointment, and finally death. I imagine the little boy Jesus loving His Mother's hugs; Joseph throwing Him into the air. I imagine Him laughing as He played with His friends; crying when he scraped his knee. I imagine Him grown and strong, lovingly helping Joseph and Mary. This child, grown into a man, has come to show me how to love. Let me take the time to realize the unbelievable gift my God has given me. Let me find a way to prepare a great welcome for the one who comes to save me.

As happy and excited as I am to prepare for my loved ones with gifts and traditional foods, and decorations, all the more I need to prepare my heart and soul, making them as loving, forgiving, and giving as possible. For surely, "This is the LORD for whom we looked, Let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!" Yes, I wait. And yes, I am glad! Let me prepare my gift.

Will you take a precious five minutes right now to imagine the life of Jesus from babe to the cross. Feel the gift. Rejoice and be glad!

Can you prepare a little gift for that babe each day by giving of yourself, your time, your attention, your love to someone out of your ordinary range of caring; to open your heart, your soul, to offer love?

DECEMBER 6 – Thursday of the First Week

Is 26:1-6, Ps 118, Mt 7:21, 24-27

The Road to Peace

“A nation of firm purpose you keep in peace.” -- Is 26: 3

For twenty years Greg Boyle SJ has run “Homeboy Industries”, a gang intervention program located in Los Angeles, CA. In his book, Tattoos on the Heart, the reader meets one homie (gang member) after another whose life had been transformed by Greg’s unending love and mercy. The encounters are simple and not so simple.

The following is an example in the book that exemplifies the power of love between Fr. Boyle and the gang members he ministered to. His unique approach was to take time to get to know them and gain their trust before he began his ministry.

One day there was an altercation over fireworks. Boyle broke it up and walked with Danny to the parking lot. Danny protested the whole way that he did not do it. Boyle changed the conversation to “How are you?”, having to repeat it several times. “Have you had anything to eat today?” When the answer was no, he took a ten dollar bill and suggested Danny go across the street to get something to eat. Danny turned, muttering “You don’t believe me.” Boyle called him back to reassure Danny he had accepted his word. Danny stood in the hot sun, tears washing his face and feeling the love between the two of them.

Can you think of a time in your life when settling the score became more important than acknowledging the humanness of the people involved?

What prevents you from identifying with the marginalized in your life?

DECEMBER 7 – Friday of the First Week

Is 29: 17-24, Ps 27: 1, 4, 13-14, Mt 9:27-31

From Darkness to Light

“Because of your faith, it will be done unto you.” – Mt 9:29

In this gospel we read about the healing of two blind people and their meeting with Jesus after traveling with Him from Capernaum where He had performed many miracles. They asked Jesus to have pity on them and called Him “heir to the house of David.” In response to their plea, Jesus asked them if they believed He could heal them and when they said they believed, He touched their eyes and their sight was restored.

What struck me about this story was that Jesus first questioned the faith of these two people. He did not heal them immediately but waited for their affirmative response. As I pondered on the message of this powerful story, I questioned my own faith in Jesus. Do I have the faith of these two followers? And where do I need healing from my own blindness? Do I have the faith that God will bring me new sight?

The faith of these two blind ones is a great example to all of us. We, too, experience our own darkness and search for the light. Advent invites us to enter that dark time trusting that the light will come, that God hears our plea. I pray that I may walk in the path of light, believing that despite all the darkness that surrounds me and my world, the light of Christ will shine on all who suffer sadness and confusion.

Do you truly trust in God’s power to bring you to a place of new vision?

Where do you find yourself in this gospel?

Have you the faith in God’s healing power to bring you to a new place of light?

DECEMBER 8 – *Saturday of the Second Week*

Gn 3: 9-15, 20; Ps 98: 1, 2-3 ab, 3cd-4; Eph 1:3-6, 11-12; Lk 1: 26-38

What You Shine the Light On, Grows

“Blessed be the God...who has blessed us in Christ with every blessing”— Eph 1:3

Today we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the doctrine that Mary was conceived free from “original sin.” Original sin is the belief that within each person from birth is the inherent tendency to sin.

I recently stood behind the glass of a hospital nursery and looked at the innocent babies lying in their bassinets. It seemed unthinkable to me that each of those beautiful infants carried with them the stain of original sin. Perhaps, as has been suggested, Mary’s immaculate conception is a metaphor and archetype for every human life. That, as it says in Ephesians, “God chose us...before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish.”

But inherited original sin or not, humans are not perfect. What causes one individual to embrace a life of dignity, compassion, and principle, and another a life of selfishness, greed, and dishonesty? Surely genetics, parenting, environment, life experiences, and a person’s innate personality all play a part.

We always need to remember the goodness that God has bestowed on the world, on each one of us. It is there...if we look. When we notice it, name it, and acknowledge it, we are providing the sunlight, water, and fertilizer that will help it grow.

Today, and every day, acknowledge one good thing about yourself; one good thing about a friend, family member, or neighbor with whom you might be having difficulty, and one good thing about our country or world. Think of it, tell it to others, if appropriate, and thank God for the goodness S/He has blessed us with from the time we uttered our first cry.

DECEMBER 9 – Sunday of Second Week

Bar 5: 1-9, 126: 1-6 Phil 1: 4-6, 8-11, Lk 3:1-6

Are You Ready?

“Make ready the day of the lord, clear him a straight path” – Lk 3:4

Preparing the house for Christmas is part of our family fun as well as planning for guests and family gatherings. Our preparing means getting ready for something really special coming soon. We hope that we will have all the gifts wrapped, beds and rooms ready for the visitors.

Just as we prepare for Christmas, how do we prepare for other important events in our lives? Just as John prepared for the coming of the Messiah by going through mountains and deserts, so must we. How do I prepare my heart for my own life journey?

Like John, am I helping to prepare for my future just as I prepare all the details for Christmas? How am I ready? Is God calling me in a special way this year to use my gifts or to be an example in some new way?

Like John, we are all called to look for the places and opportunities to be ambassadors of light and hope. A friend of mine with cancer is a constant reminder to me of encouragement and kindness. Her long journey is a walk of hope and optimism.

How do you persist through your days of storms and surprises?

Do you feel part of a great journey with Jesus by your side?

DECEMBER 10 – *Monday of the Second Week*

Is 3 5:1-10, Ps 85:9ab, 10:11-14, Lk 5:17-26

The Miracle of Friendship

“Some men appeared, carrying on a bed a paralyzed man” – Lk 5:18

Some men brought a paralyzed man to the house where Jesus was teaching and healing. Were they friends, or people who just decided to help him out of kindness? Perhaps he asked them to bring him to Jesus, or did they have to convince him to let them carry him there? Did he express doubts about his importance that Jesus would not care to even pay attention to him. But he mustered enough courage and faith to face Jesus with his dire need. Those people who helped him had such unwavering faith in Jesus, they were willing to climb up on to the roof with their charge, and lower him through the tiles in the midst of the gathering.

When Jesus saw their faith, he told the paralytic his sins were forgiven. When the religious scholars in the crowd began to question Jesus' authority to forgive sins, Jesus responded by asking them whether it is easier to say “I forgive sins or to get up and walk.” Claiming his authority to forgive sins, as well as to heal, Jesus said to the man, “Get up, take up your mat, and go home.” The man got up, praising God.

I think of situations in my life when I needed a miracle to put me on my feet, when I felt prostrated and unable to get up, and I realized that I had been helped by others, those who brought me to Jesus. I think it is a part of our mission in life to help those who need a miracle by encouraging them to muster courage to bring their plight to Jesus.

Have you ever needed a miracle and then someone helped you to go to Jesus to ask for one?

Have there been times when you have helped others who had found themselves in a similar situation?

DECEMBER 11 – *Wednesday of the Second Week*

Is 40:1-11, Ps 96:1-2,3 and 10ac, 11-12,13, Mt 18:12-14

Do We Walk Alone in This Life?

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray...” – Mt 18:12

In one's lifetime there are moments when we are convinced we are alone and forgotten. Maybe, if we tend to the dramatic, even forsaken. We see the rest of the world going on, seemingly unconscious of our separation from them. We are in a vacuum of loss or despair.

This is especially the case when we are grieving the loss of a loved and precious someone. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to relate to the assurances of others. They cannot know the dimensions of our sorrow and how apart we feel from their efforts to comfort us. Our grief separates us from the rest of humanity.

We can all relate to times in our lives when we founder in our faith and appear to walk alone. That is when, perhaps, we leave the din of the outside world and spend a few minutes in silence. Or allow ourselves to take in the beauty of the natural world to know that, surely, God has not forgotten us.

Here is the test of our faith. Can we remind ourselves that we are, as Thomas Merton tells us, the place God has chosen for God's presence in the world, the sign of God in our being? If we can internalize that, then we are not lost but found.

What are ways you can access the belief that you cannot be lost to a loving God?

In this season of Advent, how will you center yourself until that connection becomes a tangible reality?

DECEMBER 12 – Second Wednesday of Advent

Zec 2: 14-17, Judith 13:18-19, Lk 1: 26-38

The Unexpected

"Do not be afraid, Mary" – Lk 1:26-38

Life is full of unexpected moments that catch each of us unaware. Depending on the nature of the unexpected, we can experience emotions ranging from sadness, disbelief, fear, anxiety and anger to joy, relief, gratitude and peace.

Mary had human experiences just as we do. Her life was planned. She was betrothed. In her culture a betrothal was a binding contract. The angel's greeting, "Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you," followed by the angel's message that God was choosing her to become the mother of His son brought her confused and anxious response. Accepting God's request would require a complete letting go of a planned future.

After hearing "Do not be afraid, Mary," she made the decision to say yes all on her own. Mary's willingness to let go of her planned future and to be open to stepping out into a new, unknown one made it possible for God to come to earth in human form. It took courage and faith. The many challenges that followed in Mary's life from "no room in the inn" to the manner of her Son's death required a sustained trust in the active presence of God in her life.

What has sustained you when the answer to your prayers is not what you are praying for? I have found that sometimes the answer is a gradual unfolding of a new perception of how God wants you to use the gifts He has given you in a new way.

Do memories of unexpected joyful moments in your life strengthen your faith and trust that God is actively with you on your journey?

DECEMBER 13 – *Thursday of the Second Week*

Is 41:13-20, Ps 145:1, 9, 10-11, 12-13ab, Mt 11:11-15

Preparing Our Life For Jesus

“Among those born...there has been none greater than John the Baptist” – Mt 11:11

As John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus “to make ready the way of the Lord, a people prepared.” Advent gives us the time to prepare our lives, our home for Jesus. It is an opportunity to actively embrace a period of purposeful waiting with prayer and joy.

The time before Christmas is filled with commitments, with shopping and rushing to get everything done for family and friends. We need to set quiet time aside each day upon waking, in the afternoon or before sleep to prepare our hearts and minds for Jesus. This can be our time to be alone in conversation with God each day to the exclusion of all our busy activity. It can be a time to say no to distraction and yes to prayer. We can give our complete, mindful attention to Jesus’ coming birth and the impact of His presence in our life.

Passive waiting can become an act of concentrated attention. This can be a time to pray for some aspect of ourselves that we would like to improve. Maybe we would like to be more patient, more merciful, more aware of others’ needs, to show more kindness or be more tolerant. We could also set aside time for special liturgical services or readings, or time to visit a homebound friend or send a special loving message to someone we haven’t been in touch with for awhile.

This is a time to listen consciously for Jesus’ message of love and care, to let Him enter our life more fully in order to nourish ourselves and those around us in preparation for the gift of Christ’s birth.

How do you “make ready for the way of the Lord”? How are you preparing for the birth of Jesus during this time of waiting?

What is your gift to Jesus?

DECEMBER 14 – *Friday of the Second Week*

Is 48:17-19, Ps 1:1-2,3,4,6, Mt 11:16-19

Judge Not, That You Be Not Judged

"To what shall I compare this generation?" -- Mt 11

Shall we be defined by the observations of others? Neither John nor Jesus was honored by their critics in this gospel: John as a demon, Christ condemned for his humanity and associations. How often do we suffer at the mercy of the modern world? We are quick to judge and quicker yet to feel the sting of condemnation.

Where is wisdom when we need her? The wisdom to know we are called to be understanding and compassionate however it looks to those waiting to judge us as naive or too trusting. This calls for a certain kind of courage, maybe even risk. Will I come to someone's rescue no matter how it may appear to others? Letting go of our complacency and comfort is a challenge. Standing up for justice and mercy may force us to go outside of our comfort zone.

Can we live the words of the Dalai Lama who proclaims: "Compassion is my religion"? In this season of waiting, may we be more aware of our reflexive tendency to judge others.

Can you think of one or two persons whose behavior to which you have had a negative reaction?

If you apply the kindness of compassion, can you change your perception? The corollary of letting go of judgment allows us to feel less vulnerable to others' opinions as well.

Are you able to separate the person from the behavior?

Can you recognize we are each God's presence in our world?

DECEMBER 15 – *Saturday of the Second Week*

Sir 48:1-4, 9-11, Ps 80, Mt 17:9a, 10-13

Who Are Our Prophets Today?

“In those days, like a fire there appeared the prophet Elijah “ – Sir 48:1

In the Old Testament, which of course, Jesus and the others knew well, Elijah was the one who spoke against the worship of Baal and wanted to bring back Israel to worshipping the true God. He rides a chariot of fire to heaven, signifying that he is not truly dead but waiting for the Messiah. When Jesus and the disciples come down from the mountain after the Transfiguration, the disciples clearly see the reference to Elijah. Jesus ties this to not only the experience of John the Baptist, but also the foreshadowing His own fate.

What Jesus is saying to us is that there are signs that help us to understand our world through the eyes of our faith. Jesus’ transformation changed the way the disciples saw Jesus. They saw Him as God sees Him not just as a man whom they thought they knew. This experience was a glimpse of the kingdom.

By mentioning Elijah and John the Baptist, Jesus is also saying that there will be other prophets who will speak the truth in our time as well. We need to be alert because recognizing these prophets will transform the way we see the world and what we can do. Just in the last one hundred years we have seen many prophets, quite a few of whom have paid the ultimate price for their courage. There were Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, Pope John XXIII, Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Pope Francis and so many others.

In our own personal lives there are people who speak prophetically to us individually. Who are these people in your life? Do you listen? How has that impacted how you see your world? How has that changed you?

DECEMBER 16 – *Sunday of the Third Week*

Zep 3:14-18a, Phil 4:4-7, Lk 10-18

Treat Others with Compassion

“Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none.” – Lk 3:11

I find it difficult not to compare what is described in this gospel to our world today. In this gospel we hear the message of John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus, who calls us all to be more mindful of our brothers and sisters in need. The scripture exhorts us to be generous with those less fortunate, no matter what level of wealth we have. The call to us in this twenty-first century is to be mindful of all the poor and suffering in this world and to do what we can to hear and answer the call of the gospel.

Our call now could be to open our hearts to the refugees, to those who are treated unjustly in our court system, to support those who have the courage to speak truth to power, to those who are discriminated against because they are looked upon as “the other.” How can we open our hearts to them? What specific actions can we take to support our beliefs and become examples to others?

Every time we extend a kind word, contribute to food banks, support literacy, visit the sick, the imprisoned, the lonely, speak out against injustice, and make our voices heard to people in power, we are acting out this gospel.

In this time of Advent, how have you responded to this call of John the Baptist? What people in your life today are living out this message?

How can you encourage our leaders to be more mindful of the poor and suffering?

DECEMBER 17 – *Monday of the Third Week*

Gn 49:2, 8-10; Ps 72:1-2,3-4ab, 7-8, 17; Mt 1:1-17

How Am I Included in God's Plan?

"...the genealogy of Jesus Christ..." -- Mt 1:1

Have you ever thought about your ancestors who go back forty-two generations? Probably not. But, that's the span of time in today's gospel by Matthew. He recites the genealogy from Abraham to Jesus.

That is important to us because it provides the evidence that God's promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his offspring was fulfilled in Jesus. He used the step-by-step recitation to validate that message. Unlike today, ancestry was an integral part of Jewish society. Land was inherited according to family lines, taxes were calculated by heritage and those who could not prove their ancestry were considered outsiders.

In listening to this gospel read many times at Mass over the years, I was inevitably bored by the "begats" and tended to ignore the gospel. But after doing research and thinking about this gospel, I developed a new appreciation and understanding of it.

Matthew mentioned women in his gospel; something not done in genealogies of the time. He also included some less than perfect characters such as David, Judah and Tamar in the genealogy. Was God's plan a message of inclusion?

Do you hear other messages coming through this historical passage?

Does it provide assurance that God's promises are trustworthy over the generations?

Most importantly, how are you included in God's plan, even with your imperfections?

DECEMBER 18 – *Tuesday of the Third Week*

1 Jer 23:5-8, Ps 72, Mt 1:1-25

Choosing to Say Yes

“...he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him...” – Mt 1:27

Imagine you could fly over your life and look at all the forks in your road, places where you had to make a decision. Some probably determined the direction of the rest of your life. Too often, I realize now, I “went along” and didn’t really weigh the consequences fully. But I remember a time when the decision was to stay in a comfortable, though very predictable, place rather than step into the unknown with no assurance that I would be successful. I spent a lot of time in prayer, trying to discern what God might like me to do. Finally I took a deep breath and said “Yes” and that has made all the difference. Looking back on that decision, I realize that it has affected who I became, what I believe and what I care passionately about.

Joseph also had a decision to make -- he could quietly divorce Mary and go on with his life, or take a giant step into the unknown with Mary and the Child. He did not make this decision lightly, but listened to his inner self, speaking through the angel. His and Mary’s YES made all the difference.

Wouldn’t it be nice to have angels whispering in our ear when we face major crossroads in our life?

How do we make decisions? Do we bring them to prayer?

What decisions do you have to make now?

DECEMBER 19 – *Wednesday of the Third Week*

Jud 13:2-7, 24-25, Ps 71:3-4a, 5-6ab, 16-17, Lk 1:5-25

Announcement of a Great Birth

“How shall I know this? For I am an old... and ... advanced in years.” – Lk 1:18

Today's gospel tells the story of Elizabeth becoming pregnant with John the Baptist. She and Zechariah were both old childless people. At first, he did not believe Gabriel's message, while she reacted with relief that her disgrace of being barren was being taken away. Elizabeth and Zechariah were told that their son John would be a great man who would turn the hearts and understanding of his people so that they would be prepared to receive God. They would come to experience this event making a joyful and profound change in their own lives.

Since I have lived many years, I often wonder if I have rejected opportunities to do something important. Do I act as if my moments are behind me? As Elizabeth and Zechariah did, I can pay attention to what is happening around me and discern my role.

My voice can be raised in my community and to national leaders. My experience can be used and my time expended as a volunteer or advocate. My wisdom can be shared in my interactions with other people. I can be used to continue my task in history, preparing a people for God. I can support young people who are acting to improve the world they have inherited.

What particular activities would suit my current situation?

How can I share my wisdom and life experiences to help others?

Do I recognize new avenues open to me now in this new stage of my life?

DECEMBER 20 – *Thursday of the Third Week*

Is 7:10-14, Ps 24:1-2,3-4ab,5-6, Lk 1:26-38

Pray for Direction . . . But Follow Jesus!

“ . . . for nothing will be impossible for God” -- Lk 1:37

If the angel Gabriel had revealed God’s plan for you, how would you have responded? Most of us would have accepted God’s plan, while worrying about our ability to succeed. However, for many, God’s plan has remained obscure. We have never had a clear chance to say yes or no to a heavenly script. Mary was truly blessed in that regard but we must forever pray for a clearer view of God’s design.

Mary was probably a teenager when she learned of her role in God’s kingdom. I’m eighty-eight years old and have not yet received my script. Perhaps I should have listened more carefully. However, here I am, still listening for whispers from above. It’s been necessary to move forward while waiting for Gabriel.

We each need to decide how to best bring the world into alignment with God’s will. For me, moving ahead involved embracing a hackneyed but vital question: What would Jesus do? What God wants in the macro sense has always been a fuzzy view. What Jesus wants under micro conditions is usually quite clear. Pray, Yes! But look at the world and ask yourself: What would Jesus do.

If the angel Gabriel today revealed God’s plan for you, how would you respond?

Do you really wish that, like Mary, your path had been laid out for you?

DECEMBER 21 – *Friday of the Third Week*

SOS 2:8-14; Ps 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21; Lk 1:39-45

Who Really Loves You, Baby?

“Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one!” – SOS 2:12

When we are called “Beloved” by God, how do we feel about it?

Does the idea of God as a lover scare us? Many canonized saints, such as Teresa of Avila, write about God as a “lover”, just like in the first line of our First Reading.

Some studies have shown that people who conceive of God as lover have better health, heal faster and a better relationship with God than others.

Intense spiritual experiences are often so overwhelming they surpass the feelings of falling in love, and just as falling in love and staying in love are intensely personal, so too is an intimate encounter with God.

One first-century commentator speaks of feeling that God was benevolent but distant, too busy moving the stars around and making the universe run, to be involved emotionally in her personal life, then had a taste of an intimate encounter with the Infinite one evening and was forever changed and healed.

Of course, God is intensely personal and is intensely interested in every single detail of our lives. He is our lover, springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills, even looking into our very lattices and windows in His eagerness to awaken us with the Good News, that our winter’s flowery spiritual springtime—Christ’s personal arrival at Christmas—is coming, right on time!

How do we choose to love and be loved by God in this world?

How do we allow the love of our beloved God to awaken in us with the inner power and strength to expand this love to others?

DECEMBER 22 – *Saturday of the Third Week*

1 Sm 1:24-28; 1 Sm 2:1, 4-5, 6-8; Lk 1:46-56

Re-Gifting Our Gifts

“Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord.” – 1 Sm 1:28

Hannah approached Eli, the High Priest of the people, and said: “I am the woman who stood praying for this child and the Lord granted my request. Now I, in turn, give him to the Lord.”

WOW!!! When I read this passage from the book of Samuel, I was taken back to the many prayers of petition I have prayed over the years. It is usually in times of need that prayer comes easily to me and I feel like a daughter asking my Heavenly Father for some grace. Usually when my prayers are granted, I thank and praise God and quickly go about my life.

Hannah’s response to the answering of her prayer was a bit different. She not only showed her gratitude in words but in trusting action. She willingly offered back to God the gift for which she had deeply prayed in an action of selfless devotion.

In my life of being a parent and recipient of numerous blessings, I can see just how much faith Hannah demonstrated in her love of God. She knew that God would do anything for her but she also had the humility to give her most beloved gift back to God. She chose not to cling to God’s gift but to open her hands and allow God’s full grace to work through her by the act of surrendering her desire.

In this season of giving and receiving gifts, I encourage you to consider if you have any gifts from God that you have stored away or have left unused?

DECEMBER 23– *Sunday of the Fourth Week*

Mic 5:1, 4a; Ps. 80; Heb: 10:5-10; Lk 1:29-45

Visiting

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” – Lk 1:29

Christmas is a time of visiting – of families and friends getting together to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Sure, there is the commercial aspect of this as well, which sometimes overshadows the main event – but deep down it is about family and friends and coming together for a birthday!

When I was growing up, you just showed up at a friend’s or relative’s home unannounced at any time. You sat down and visited with them. There was always food to go along with the visit. I am sure the same applied in Jesus’ time – near and far you showed up to say hello and spend time with neighbors.

Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth was a special visit of two cousins spending time together talking about the anticipated birth of their children, exchanging advice and more than likely sewing, knitting and discussing their impending needs and their immense joy. This visit was so exceptional because of who they were, and who the fruit of their wombs would be. Little did they know what the future had in store for them.

The arrival of Mary to visit her cousin caused a leap of joy in all three of them, including the baby. And Elizabeth returns the joy with “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” I am sure that baby leapt for joy as well.

Whom have you visited recently that brought you both immense joy?

Whom can you think of who would “leap with joy” at a visit from you?

DECEMBER 24 – *Monday of the Fourth Week*

Sm 7:15, 8:12 Ps 89: 25-29 Lk 1:67-80

The Promise of Faith

“And you, my child, will be called the prophet of the most high.” – Lk 1:76

In this gospel we once again read of John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus. Earlier when Mary visited Elizabeth, her cousin, Elizabeth’s child “leaped in her womb”. Clearly this child was to be destined for great things.

Luke tells us of the birth of John in the stirring canticle of Zechariah, his father, who calls his newly-born son a prophet who would prepare the way of the Lord, “giving the people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.” The gospel further states that John “grew up and became strong in spirit” and lived in the desert before going to Israel to begin his ministry fulfilling the promise his father had prophesied.

How do I relate to this story? Having been brought up by parents who had faith and always prayed for me, I think of Elizabeth and Zechariah. No doubt they had great faith in God’s promise to bring forth a Savior. They believed their son was fulfilling that promise by preparing the way for Jesus.

In my own life I have tried to support my children by encouraging their faith in God just as my parents did for me.

How do you relate to this gospel?

What do you see in God’s promise to you?

What has influenced you in making your decisions about your own faith journey?

DECEMBER 25 – *Christmas Day*

Is 52, 7-10, Heb 1, 1-6, Jn 1, 1-18

Christmas/Epiphany Mystery

“ . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwells among us.” John I:14

The reality is that both liturgical feasts, Christmas and Easter, are inextricably woven together in the one tapestry of our Christian Faith. It certainly seems reasonable that we would not be celebrating the reality of the Christ being born among us fully human if the Christ had not been raised from the dead after His ignominious crucifixion and death.

Resurrection is why we celebrate the Christ as the Messiah! But only because of the Incarnation, the Christ “pitching his tent among us” (literal translation of the “Word made flesh”), is Christ’s victory over sin and death, our victory. He is “first-born” of redeemed humanity because He is truly born of our flesh. We celebrate this feast because the Incarnation heralds “God became human so that human could become God” (*attributed to St. Irenaeus 2nd century C. E.*).

Christmas, of course, only makes sense with Epiphany, the more ancient annual celebration of the birth of Christ, because Epiphany makes manifest our authentic identity as daughters and sons of God. The Christ discloses not only our divine origin and destiny, but reveals our very life and living is of God. Christ reveals our true face and affirms “and God found it very good!” (our Genesis “original” story).

This Christmas, what gift do you think God has been planning to give to you (or to the Emmaus Community)?

Can you name an epiphany in your life, where/when you “came into your own”?

On the Road to Emmaus

“And how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread” – Lk 24:35

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, “What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?” And they stood still, looking sad.

One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, “Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?” And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.”...

Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

And they approached the village.... So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?” And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.” They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread. – Lk 24:13-35

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