

# FROM THE PASTOR'S



## First Sunday of Advent November 29, 2009 C

### WELCOME TO A NEW LITURGICAL YEAR THE YEAR OF LUKE

*By means of the yearly cycle, the Church celebrates the holy mystery of Christ, from his incarnation until the day of Pentecost and the expectation of his coming again.*

General Norms for the Liturgical Year Calendar (#17)

The Liturgical Year is the way Mother Church places before us the main events and teachings in the life of Jesus. When we remember the events and stories in the life of Jesus, we make them as real to us as they were to those who first experienced them. We bring past events into the now. So the Liturgical Year is not an historical look at past events but the way that our Church invites us to enter and experience Christ who continues to be present and active in the events of our lives in the here and now.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us: “*We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus’ life and his mysteries...*” So through the ebb and flow of each liturgical year, we seek, with the guidance of our Church, to live and internalize the events of Christ’s life.

#### *Two Main Seasons*

Nature has four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. Our Church year has two main seasons: the *Advent/Christmas* season and the *Lent/Easter* season. Christmas celebrates the Incarnation of Jesus—God becoming one of us. Easter celebrates Jesus’ death and resurrection. Each season has a time of *preparation*. We prepare for the Feast of the Incarnation with four weeks of *Advent*. We prepare for the *Sacred Triduum* (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil) with 40 days of *Lent*. Both events (the Incarnation and our Redemption) have an extended *period* of celebration. We do not just celebrate Christ’s coming on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day; we celebrate it for *twelve days* culminating with the *Feast of the Baptism of Jesus*. We do not just celebrate Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday. We celebrate it for *50 days* of Easter culminating with the Feast of Pentecost.

So, in our Church year calendar, the two great seasons of the year are the *Advent/Christmas* season and the *Lent/Easter* season, the latter being the more important of the two because it celebrates Christ’s death

and resurrection. One-third of Mark’s Gospel is given to the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Wrapped around the two main seasons of the year are 34 Sundays in *Ordinary Time*.

#### **Advent**

*Advent has a twofold character. As a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.*

General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar #39

The word Advent means “coming.” During the liturgical season we call Advent, we wait to celebrate the *First Coming* of Christ that occurred 2,000 years ago, and we wait for his *Second Coming* at some future time. As Christians, we live in an age between the two comings of Christ, in a period that scholars call the “already, but not yet.” The Kingdom of God has *already* come into our midst in the Jesus event of 2,000 years ago, but Jesus has *not yet come* in his fullness. During the Advent season, we prepare to remember Christ’s first coming and, at the same time, we yearn for him to come again. This period is a bit like the pregnancy period in the life of a child. He is a pre-born child in his mother’s womb but not yet fully born.

Words most often associated with this season in our Church’s calendar are: *longing, yearning, vigilance, conversion, joyful expectation* and *hope*. Advent is a time of *joy* because Christ has already entered our world. It is also a time of *expectation* and *hope* for the kingdom yet to come.

#### **The Year of Luke**

The Church’s liturgical calendar has three Cycles A, B and C, sometimes called Year One, Year Two and year Three.

- During Cycle A or Year I, the gospel readings are mainly from *Matthew*.
- During Cycle B or Year II, the gospel readings are mainly from *Mark*.
- During Cycle C or Year III, the gospel readings are mainly from *Luke*. This weekend, we begin the *Year of Luke*.

## Introduction to Luke's Gospel

Some of the most cherished stories about Jesus are reported only by Luke: the annunciation to Mary, the birth in a manger, the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Some of the New Testament's most memorable characters are only found in Luke: the diminutive but resourceful Zacchaeus, the aged and astonished Elizabeth and Zechariah, the hospitable Martha and the attentive Mary. Some of Jesus' most beloved parables—brimming with poignancy and compassion, and universal in their broad religious and humanitarian appeal—are jewels of Luke's gospel: the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and poor Lazarus, the Pharisee and the tax collector. The backbone of the Church's daily prayer comes from Luke's gospel: Zechariah's Canticle at Morning Prayer, Mary's Magnificat at evening prayer, and Simeon's Canticle at night prayer.

## Characteristics of Luke's Gospel

Each gospel has its own particular set of characteristics. The following are some of Luke's.

**Universal Gospel.** Scholars note that the main characteristic of Luke's gospel is its *universal* nature. All barriers are down. *All* are invited to the kingdom. The universal nature of Luke's gospel is shown in several ways.

**Gospel for Gentiles.** The Gentiles or non-Jewish persons are intentionally included. Luke, himself a Gentile, wrote his gospel with a view to include the Gentiles. Unlike Matthew, Luke is not that interested in showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. He seldom quotes the Old Testament. Whereas John states that the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans (4:9), Luke highlights them. One of his best known and best loved parables is the parable of the *Good Samaritan* (10:29-37). After Jesus healed the ten lepers, Luke states that the only leper that returned to give Jesus thanks was a Samaritan.

**Gospel of women.** Luke's gospel, more than all the other gospels, includes women—another sign of the gospel's universal nature. Only in Luke do we find mention by name of women who accompanied Jesus and supported his ministry with their own resources (8:1-3). The birth narrative is told from Mary's point of view. It is in Luke that we read of Elizabeth, of Anna, of the widow at Nain, of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It is Luke who makes vivid the pictures of Martha and Mary and of Mary Magdalene.

**Gospel of the poor, the outcast and sinner.** In Jesus' time, poverty was a sign that one must be a sinner, for God had not blessed one with riches. In Luke's gospel, the poor and the outcast hold a special place. The poor shepherds are the first to be told about the birth of Jesus, the first invited to come see him (2:1-20). In his Inaugural Address (4:16-24), Jesus states that "the poor will have the gospel preached to them." Only Luke tells the story of the rich man and poor man (16:19-31).

In Luke's gospel, the religious leaders are scandalized that Jesus sits with sinners and eats with them (15:1-3). In Luke 15, we find three marvelous parables that speak of God's mercy. Rightly, Luke's gospel has been called "the gospel of the underdog."

**Gospel of prayer.** Luke's gospel is a gospel of prayer. At all the great moments of his life, Luke shows us Jesus at prayer. He prayed at his baptism (3:21); before his first collision with the Pharisees (5:16); before he chose the Twelve (6:12); before he questioned his disciples as to who they thought he was; before his first prediction of his own death (9:18); at the transfiguration (9:29); and upon the cross (23:46). Only Luke tells us that Jesus prayed for Peter in his hour of testing (22:32). Only he tells us the prayer parables of the friend at midnight (11:5-13) and the unjust judge (18:1-8). To Luke, the unclosed door of prayer was one of the most precious in all the world.

**Gospel of praise.** In Luke, the phrase *praising God* occurs oftener than in all the rest of the New Testament put together. This praise reaches its peak in the three great hymns that the Church has sung throughout all her generations: *Magnificat* (1:46-55), *Benedictus* (1:68-79) and *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-32). There is a radiance in Luke's gospel which is a lovely thing, as if the sheen of heaven has touched the things of earth.

In his introduction to Luke's gospel, William Barclay wrote:

"Somehow of all the gospel writers' one would have liked to meet Luke best of all, for this Gentile doctor with the tremendous vision of the infinite sweep of the love of God must have been a lovely individual. F.W. Faber wrote the lines:

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in his justice,  
Which is more than liberty.  
For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man's mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

Luke's gospel is the demonstration that this is true."

## Today's Readings

### FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

This reading seeks to bring comfort and hope to a people living in exile wondering, perhaps, if God has forgotten them. The reading speaks of God's *promise* to raise up a "just shoot" from the house of David—one who will "do what is right and just in the Lord." The early Christians see in this promise a reference to Jesus of Nazareth, a descendant of the family of King David. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise proclaimed in this reading. Jerusalem, a city whose name means "foundation of peace," is given here a new name, "the Lord our Justice." Implied in this is that the city will have peace when justice is done. Recall the famous words of Pope Paul VI, "If you want peace, work for justice."

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 25

In this psalm, we ask God to teach us his ways.

### SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

In this reading, we have a "wish prayer" and an exhortation to a community who believes that the Second Coming of Christ is imminent. Paul prays that the Thessalonians "grow in love" thus becoming ready for the Second Coming or return of Jesus. Then he urges them to "conduct themselves in a way pleasing to God."

### GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Chapter 21 in Luke's gospel speaks about the destruction of the Temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and the end of the world—all terrifying events.

In these verses, Jesus speaks about the coming of the Son of Man (at the end of the world). Using apocalyptic ("veiled") language, Jesus presents images of both cosmic and political upheaval ("seas and waves roaring," "nations in anguish") to speak about this event. The unrighteous will be terrified by these events, but faithful disciples of Jesus need not fear, for the coming of the Son of Man will signal their deliverance and salvation.

Then Jesus exhorts his followers to "be on guard," lest they fall into self-indulgence and forget God and his ways. There will be a day of reckoning for *all* people. The Gospel ends with an exhortation to "watch" and "pray." Such "watching" and "praying" will view all that they *say* and *do* in the context of the gospel. In other words, "What would Jesus say or do in this situation?" For the faithful disciple, the coming of the Son of Man will not be a fearful event. Rather, it will be a day of triumph and joy.

## Five ways to live the Advent season

As followers of Christ who have to live in the world, we are most likely torn between two approaches to Christmas: between what is happening in the shopping malls and in our churches. While we cannot easily ignore what is happening in the shopping malls, we must do our best to also live the Advent spirit during the weeks prior to Christmas. Some suggestions:

- Have an Advent wreath in your home and light it several times during Advent.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an excellent way to respond to John the Baptist's call to "prepare a way for the Lord."
- Include the poor in your Christmas budget. In our parish, we have an angel tree on which hangs hundreds of names of needy children. Parishioners shop for gifts and return them to our church office. On the Saturday prior to Christmas, the families come to our parish hall for a party during which their children receive their gifts.
- Use an Advent Daily Devotional to pray your way through the season. Most Catholic publishers provide us with such devotionals each year.
- Connect all the beautiful Christmas lights to him who is the Light of our World.

### *An Advent Prayer*

A beautiful Advent prayer, which could be said throughout Advent and when we light the candle on the Advent wreath, is the opening prayer from today's Mass.

*Father in heaven,  
our hearts desire the warmth of your love  
and our minds are searching for  
the light of your Word.  
Increase our longing for Christ our Savior  
and give us the strength to grow in love,  
that the dawn of his coming  
may find us rejoicing in his presence  
and welcoming the light of his truth.  
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.  
Amen.*

Have a blessed week,

*Fr. Aaron*