

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Prayer for Watchfulness

God our Father,
you are the potter who formed us.
You know that we wander from your ways.
Rouse us! Bring us to attention!
Make us watchful,
always scanning for your arrival.
Don't let us miss the ways
that you break into our lives,
in the small tasks and delights of everyday,

in service and sacrifice to family
and stranger,
in the safe return of an absent loved one.
Let us ever be alert
for the final return of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Sunday, November 30, 2014

Watch! Be Alert!



Today's Readings: Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7; Psalm 80: 2–3, 15–16, 18–19; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Mark 13:33–37. As we hear in the Gospel on this First Sunday of Advent, we cannot let ourselves sit back and be comfortable. As Christ tells his disciples, we need to “be watchful! Be alert!” As we prepare for Christ to come into our hearts at Christmas, we also ready ourselves for the Second Coming. We cannot be complacent. Our relationship with God and our relationships with others need to be in order. As Advent begins, we might examine how we can grow in our relationship to God and take care with our familial relationships.

Relationship is at the heart of the reading from Isaiah. Twice this reading calls God “father,” and throughout the

reading, it is apparent that humankind has damaged the relationship through sin. Finally, invoking the metaphor of clay and potter, it is noted that we are the work of God. God shapes us, but we need to allow him to work within us. During this Advent, we can consider how we rest in the potter's hands.

Finally, we see in the letter from St. Paul an acknowledgment that everything is from God. Paul is thankful to God for what he has bestowed on the Corinthians. The people in Corinth are filled with spiritual gifts. Paul assures them that God will keep them faithful as they await Christ. He will keep them faithful, we learn, because God is faithful. Yes, God is faithful, as a parent is faithful. Will we put our trust in this loving God this Advent?



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 1, 2014

A Humble Encounter

Today's Gospel is the story of the Lord healing the centurion's paralyzed servant. Central to the text of the Gospel are the words "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed" (Matthew 8:8). The centurion was humbled at the thought of Jesus coming to his home. Do you approach the Sacrament of the Eucharist with humility, in awe that Christ will enter us? How do you prepare for Communion? Today's Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4c-d-5, 6-7, 8-9; Matthew 8:5-11.

Tuesday, December 2, 2014

Peace in Our Time

In the 1983 US bishops' document *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, the bishops tell us "the human person is the clearest reflection of God's presence in the world" (15). As we keep the days of Advent in the midst of a culture already celebrating Christmas, consider how we reflect God's presence. Do we take the time to rejoice "in the Holy Spirit," as stated in today's Gospel? Do we seek God's presence in each person encountered? Such awareness will help bring about the Kingdom of God. Today's Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Luke 10:21-24.

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

Memorial of St. Francis Xavier, Priest

Francis Xavier ministered to the people of Malaysia and Japan and lived with the poor, sharing their food and rough accommodations. Inspired by his example, let us reflect on how we care for those in need. Would the homeless shelter in your community appreciate a meal or dessert your family provided for its residents? Or could your family donate to the food pantry or help out in a soup kitchen? Could such donations be a regular part of your family life? Today's Readings: Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6; Matthew 15:29-37.

Thursday, December 4, 2014

St. John Damascene, Priest and Doctor

Consider the practice of *lectio divina*, or divine reading of Scripture. The practice consists of reading a biblical passage, meditating on a word or phrase from the passage, prayer flowing from the text, and contemplation. The reading and meditation can be repeated before moving to the prayer and contemplation. John Damascene defended the Church's regard for images. In a way, he practiced *lectio divina* by gazing upon images of Christ and the saints, icons that open us to contemplation, meditation, and prayer. Today's Readings: Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalm 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a; Matthew 7:21, 24-27.

Friday, December 5, 2014

Open Your Eyes

Today's Gospel tells of Jesus opening the eyes of two blind men. Advent is the time for us to open our eyes, to look around and wait for the light that shatters the short days and long nights for those of us who live in the Northern Hemisphere. Consider lighting a candle of the Advent wreath each night at the family dining table. Accompany the lighting with a reading from one of the Scripture passages of the day. Pray that the Scriptures will open your eyes this Advent. Today's Readings: Isaiah 29:17-24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; Matthew 9:27-31.

Saturday, December 6, 2014

Optional Memorial St. Nicholas, Bishop

Honoring St. Nicholas's concern for the poor, place coins in a baby bottle and share what you collect on January 22, 2015, (the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children) with an organization that advocates for unborn children. In today's Gospel, Jesus asks the master of the harvest to "send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38). The Gospel calls us to go out and proclaim the Good News. One way in which we do this is to uphold the dignity of each person. Today's Readings: Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26; Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5a, 6-8.



Planned Giving

Q: I am looking for a way to say "Thank You" to St. Cecilia so others after me may enjoy the same faith formation opportunities I've enjoyed. How can I leave a portion of my estate to St. Cecilia?

A: You may designate specific assets, amounts or percentage in your will or revocable trust. You may designate St. Cecilia as a partial beneficiary of your life insurance, IRA, 401K or annuities. If you have the means and are concerned about income or capital gains taxes, you may consider outright gifts of stocks, bonds, cash or real estate to have a possible tax deduction for current tax year.

Reduce Tax Liability

Q: I am grateful to St. Cecilia and I am interested in ways I can reduce my tax liability and provide for St. Cecilia parish financially. Are there ways I can financially help St. Cecilia now and possibly reduce my tax liability?

A: Yes, under current law donations to St. Cecilia while you are alive should result in an income tax deduction and any donation now or at your death would reduce your taxable estate. Contact your attorney or other financial planning professional for assistance in changing your estate plan and regarding specific assets before making a contribution.

Leaving a Legacy

Q: I am no longer able to participate in St. Cecilia activities in the ways I have enjoyed in the past. I am eternally grateful for past parishioners who came and gave before me and started this parish many decades ago. I still want to give and be a good steward. Besides my daily prayers, how can I do this?

A: First, thank you for your giving, praying and caring. One person said "I can't give much in my weekly offering but at my death, my estate can make a one-time gift that I cannot do now." If you have limited means to give now, you should consider planned giving: include St. Cecilia Church as a beneficiary of your life insurance, retirement account, or will.

Estate Planning

Where there is a will, there is a way to be an angel for our parish. Please remember St. Cecilia in your will and other estate planning. Ask your lawyer and other financial advisors how you can make a legacy for yourself through your will or beneficiary designations on other assets. Your dollars given now will continue to give for years to come, just as the work of those who gave much to start St. Cecilia many years ago.

For more information please contact our Planned Giving committee:
Frank Oppold, Chair 515-290-1163

Act Against Human Trafficking

The Problem

Human trafficking, sexual and otherwise, is a serious and growing problem in Iowa, but one which you can help to counter. Iowa is a favorable location for traffickers for several reasons, with 300 reports per year and some towns considered safe havens in which to operate undetected. Traffickers are proficient at identifying vulnerable youth and pressing them into service (average age 11 -14).

Your Role

To support the work of law enforcement and find expert help for the victims:

1. Become aware of signs of human trafficking (page 2) and
2. Know where to report. Do not intervene yourself, as traffickers are dangerous people with vast amounts of money at stake.

Sources of help

Victims of trafficking are deterred by fear and manipulation from seeking help. Report suspected cases to one of the following.

- National Human Trafficking Hotline, 1-888-373-7888.
- FBI Omaha, 1-402-493-8688. FBI victim specialists have knowledge and experience in crisis intervention, social services, and victim assistance.
- Local police. Operation Iowa hopes to train police departments to make Iowa the most hostile place for human trafficking.

More information

The Polaris Project operates the national hotline. <http://www.polarisproject.org/>

The Network against Human Trafficking is Iowa-based. <http://www.iowanaht.org/>

Possible Signs of Human Trafficking

A trafficking victim often

- Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous
- Is unusually fearful or anxious about law enforcement
- Avoids eye contact
- Has poor physical health, lacks health care
- Appears malnourished
- Shows signs of physical or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture
- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is not in control of his/her own money, has no financial records or bank account
- Is not in control of his/her own identification documents (ID or passport)
- Is not allowed or able to speak for him/herself (a third party may insist on being present or translating)
- Claims of just visiting and inability to clarify where he/she is staying/address
- Lacks knowledge of whereabouts or does not know what city he/she is in
- Has poor sense of time
- Has numerous inconsistencies in his/her explanations
- Is not free to leave or come and go as he/she wishes
- Is in the commercial sex industry and is under 18 or has a pimp/manager
- Is unpaid, poorly paid, or paid only through tips
- Works excessively long or unusual hours
- Is not allowed breaks or suffers under unusual restrictions at work
- Owes a large debt and is unable to pay it off
- Was recruited through false promises concerning the nature and conditions of his/her work
- Works or lives under high security measures such as opaque windows, boarded up windows, bars on windows, barbed wire, security cameras