



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Advent | December 10, 2017

Putting Our House in Order

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the weeks before Christmas, preparations for the holiday seem all-consuming. We cook, we shop, we clean; we buy or make presents for our families and friends. Sometimes we break into song, and often we give more generously than at other times. We'll probably have guests, and we'll want to do a little extra to make ready for them.

Today's readings turn our gaze to a more significant kind of preparation for Christmas and remind us that Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem more

than two thousand years ago, waits to come again in the fullness of time. More to the point, he waits for us to open our hearts and our lives to him. What does that take exactly?

Think about the way we clean house for special guests. Not content with simple wiping and dusting, we get out the polish, clean the top of the refrigerator, and even check for dust bunnies that have wandered to the corner under the bed. That's a fine metaphor for what we need to do with our souls.

Advent is the time to check the dark recesses for thoughts and actions that indicate we're less than ready to meet Christ face to face. Advent is the time to sweep away the cobwebs and put our inner house in order, knowing that Christ is on his way.

Maybe in the midst of cooking and cleaning the house we live in, we can find the time for prayer and reconciliation so that when he comes, we can stand before him with doors open wide in welcome. +

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Sunday Readings

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs.

2 Peter 3:8-14

The Lord...is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish.

Mark 1:1-8

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way."

A Word From Pope Francis

Isaiah's invitation must resound in our hearts: "Comfort, comfort my people" (40:1) and this must lead to mission. We must find the Lord who consoles us, and go to console the people of God....People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord, which...rekindles hope, and attracts people toward the good.

—Mass with seminarians, novices, and those discerning their vocation, July 7, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What distractions am I setting aside to make this Advent time like my little wedding preparation?
- The Church invites me to a special time of repentance, fasting, and almsgiving. How is it going?



The Christian Consumer— a Contradiction?

By Jim and Susan Vogt

Bottled water, home computers, and cell phones. Today, most of us take these items for granted, and they can make life easier. However, with more choices and conveniences also come complexities and moral dilemmas. How can things so helpful be bad, we ask?

Bottled water was once a traveler's safeguard against impure water or sometimes a lifesaver in areas where the tap water is not safe. But tap water in U.S. municipalities generally meets higher standards and eliminates the waste of throwaways. Sure, water is an improvement over soda to quench a thirst, but is it so difficult to put safe tap water into a reusable container?

Home computers—love them when they work, curse them when they crash or introduce a virus. And that doesn't include separating beneficial content from pornography or marketing scams that computers bring into our homes.

Yes, a cell phone is a wonderful safety device when the car breaks down. Yes, it helps family members keep in touch. And yes, it causes auto accidents, distracts from face-to-face conversations, and annoys bystanders.

How did we function without technological conveniences? In some ways better and in others worse. Certainly a lot of paper was used on snail mail, and before cell phones parents

couldn't always find their teenagers. The point is not that we should discard all conveniences, but that we should use modern technology wisely and not buy just because we can.

Guard Against Greed

These are subjective, thorny lifestyle decisions. Although Jesus isn't posted at the checkout lane prompting us on the morality of our purchases, he does speak to us through Scripture. He said, "Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26). And remember that disturbing passage about the rich man whom Jesus told, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor" (Matthew 19:21).

How do we take these challenges? To say they are only metaphors that are unrealistic for today seems intellectually dishonest. Likewise, to quit our jobs, sell our possessions, and move to Haiti seems irresponsible. After all, we might have a family to support, a job that benefits society, and people who depend on us.

Living Simply

We propose focusing on the spirit of Jesus' words and keeping close enough to the poor to let them check our conscience for rationalization.

- Travel light through life. Free your household of unnecessary possessions. We asked ourselves whether we really needed cable TV, two cars, three cell phones, and four computers. We didn't. It's good for our souls, psyches, and pocketbooks to live with less.
- Evaluate the impact of purchases on God's creation. How much of the earth's resources are used in overpackaging? A hybrid car may cost more, but it puts less stress on the earth's resources. Driving less is even better, and walking makes gym memberships less necessary.
- Resist advertising. Realize that the goal of marketing is to persuade us to spend our way to happiness. Remember the birds in the sky? True happiness comes from the contentment of a life well-lived in harmony with God's design, not by accumulating goods.
- Recover values like frugality. It comes naturally to some but not others. To paraphrase Jesus' words to the rich man, consider that what we own is probably more than we need. Take steps to let go.

We should go beyond thinking our worth is measured by how much we consume and make our lifestyle consistent with the spirit of the Gospels. +



Lord, you are the compassion of God in the world. You never forget any of your people. Give me the courage to be the compassion of God for others.

From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 11-16

- Mon. Advent Weekday:
Is 35:1-10 / Lk 5:17-26
- Tue. Our Lady of Guadalupe: Zec 2:14-17
or Rv 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab /
Lk 1:26-38 or Lk 1:39-47
- Wed. St. Lucy: Is 40:25-31 / Mt 11:28-30

- Thu. St. John of the Cross:
Is 41:13-20 / Mt 11:11-15
- Fri. Advent Weekday:
Is 48:17-19 / Mt 11:16-19
- Sat. Advent Weekday:
Sir 48:1-4, 9-11 / Mt 17:9a, 10-13