

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

Advent Week 1

Monday in the First Week of Advent

Collect for Advent 1

GRANT your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Reading

Isaiah 2:1-5 (RSV)

The Future House of God

2 The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,

3 and many peoples shall come, and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵ O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD.

Reflection

WE BEGIN the midweek readings for Advent with the vision of Isaiah that Mount Zion (Jerusalem) should become a focus for the whole world, with all nations looking towards the house of the Lord, set on the highest of mountains, a place of peace, that is wholesomeness as well as a place where there is no strife. It is a place where the instruments of war are turned into the tools of a prosperous agricultural economy. For Christians, this vision speaks of the Heavenly Jerusalem and the End-Time events are the Second Coming of the Messiah, the Christ, and the Last Judgment. This Second Coming – Second Advent - will bring about a new heaven and a new earth and the end of war. The vision is of everyone walking with the House of Jacob in the light of the Lord.

Tuesday in the First Week of Advent

Reading

Isaiah 11:1-10

The Peaceful Kingdom

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

- ⁵ Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist,
and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.
- ⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
- ⁷ The cow and the bear shall feed;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
- ⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.
- ¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples;
him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.

Reflection

READING Isaiah is a traditional Advent task in many lectionaries. Some work their way through some of it in *lectio continua*, one chapter leading to another. Our weekday Mass lectionary stays with Isaiah until 16th December, after which we are in the direct lead-up to Christmas. Obviously, having 66 chapters, the book of the prophet Isaiah is too long to read in its entirety and the Mass lectionary unsurprisingly chooses 'purple passages', passages which speak particularly of the dawning of the Light, the coming of the longed-for Messiah. In chapter 11 we have a vision of the peaceful kingdom where, under the benign reign of the Messiah, creation is restored to harmony. The wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf, the lion and the fatling, all peacefully co-exist, and the lion makes do with straw, like the ox. In this paradisaical vision, the leader is a little child, and neither asp nor adder harm children. We notice the savage contrast provided by the cruel execution of St Edmund Campion which we commemorate this week and we notice also, in passing, that the pouring out of the Spirit upon the Lord's Anointed is the substance of the prayer used at Confirmation, when the candidates receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday in the First Week of Advent

Reading

Isaiah 25:6-10

The Feast on the Holy Mountain

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. ⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.

⁹ It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'

¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain, and Moab shall be trodden down in his place, as straw is trodden down in a dung-pit.

Reflection

THE VISION of the day of the Lord and the feast on the Holy Mountain paints a picture starkly contrasting with the subsistence economy in which most people lived in the ancient world. Food was meagre and scarce and the vision of feasting, 'fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined', would be very enticing. As a sign of God's greatness, this feast is to be open to people of every nation – the veil having been pulled aside. The day of salvation and the overcoming of death marks the victory of the Hebrew God over the Canaanite god of the underworld, Mot, whose Hebrew name means 'Death'. Overcoming death implies the triumph of fertility and, with it, bountiful harvest. It is in 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 that St Paul takes the phrase 'He will swallow up death for ever' in verse 8 to mean the relevance of the Resurrection to human life. The phrase 'wipe away tears from all faces', also in verse 8, is also used in the Book of Revelation (7:17). Similarly, the feast on the Holy Mountain links us well to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, the final vision of Heaven in Revelation and the meal of which we receive a foretaste at Mass.

Thursday in the First Week of Advent

Reading

Isaiah 26:1-6

The Song of the Redeemed

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

- 'We have a strong city;
he sets up salvation
as walls and bulwarks.
² Open the gates,
that the righteous nation which keeps faith
may enter in.
³ You keep him in perfect peace,
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.
⁴ Trust in the LORD for ever,
for the LORD GOD
is an everlasting rock.
⁵ For he has brought low
the inhabitants of the height,
the lofty city.
He lays it low, lays it low to the ground,
casts it to the dust.
⁶ The foot tramples it,
the feet of the poor,
the steps of the needy.'

Reflection

A STRONG biblical theme is the triumph of the weak over the strong. There are many examples: the story of Gideon (Judges 6-8), Sampson (Judges 13-16), David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17), and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isaiah 50, 53). The same principle is at work in the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) and indeed in the message of the Crucifixion, the saving work of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). In today's reading, the prophet is seeing victory for the redeemed, those who trust in the Lord. The walls and gates of Jerusalem, which have kept the enemy out, will securely enclose the faithful. The emphasis is on trust in the Lord: those whose minds are stayed on him will find peace.

Friday in the First Week of Advent

Reading

Isaiah 29:17-24

The Day the eyes of the blind will see

- ¹⁷ Is it not yet a very little while
until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?
- ¹⁸ In that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.
- ¹⁹ The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the poor among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.
- ²⁰ For the ruthless shall come to nought and the scoffer cease,
and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,
- ²¹ who by a word make a man out to be an offender,
and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.
- ²² Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the
house of Jacob:
- 'Jacob shall no more be ashamed,
no more shall his face grow pale.
- ²³ For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.
- ²⁴ And those who err in spirit will come to understanding,
and those who murmur will accept instruction.'

Reflection

WE ARE in a discussion about Jerusalem's judgment and salvation and we continue to focus on the Day of the Lord, a day when all will be transformed. The deaf will hear and the blind will see, and we are including here both spiritual deafness and spiritual blindness. The meek and the poor will find their joy in the Lord. Some of those who go astray will learn to improve their ways and some of the grumblers will learn to look at things differently. Evil-doers however will have no place. In this company of the redeemed,

God's name shall be declared holy and his will shall be done. We are seeing here not only wholesale moral and spiritual improvement but an end to economic injustice and misery.

Saturday in the First Week of Advent

Reading

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26

The LORD will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry

Yes, O people in Zion who dwell at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. ²⁰ And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. ²¹ And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.... ²³ And he will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and grain, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. In that day your cattle will graze in large pastures; ²⁴ and the oxen and the asses that till the ground will eat salted provender, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork. ²⁵ And upon every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. ²⁶ Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the hurt of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

Reflection

TODAY'S reading is seen by the Church as a prophecy: it is Jesus who will be the promised 'Teacher' and who will show himself to be the LORD as he goes about preaching and teaching, blessing and healing.

Saints' Days

St Andrew, Apostle

30th November

St Andrew was born at Bethsaida and worked as a fisherman. He is called the *Protokletos* ('the First Called') because, originally a disciple of St John the Baptist, he was the first to become a disciple of Jesus, bringing with him Simon Peter, his brother. After Pentecost he preached the Gospel and was crucified at Patras (Greece), hence becoming the patron of first the Greek and then the Byzantine Orthodox Church.

Collect for St Andrew's Day

WE HUMBLY implore your majesty, O Lord, that, just as the blessed Apostle Andrew was for your Church a preacher and pastor, so he may be for us a constant intercessor before you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Reading

Romans 10:9-18

Faith comes from what is preached and what is preached comes from the Word of Christ.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. ¹³ For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.'

¹⁴ But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!' ¹⁶ But they have not all heeded the gospel; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' ¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.

¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for

**Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world.**

Reflection

TODAY'S First Reading is taken from a discussion by St Paul of whether Israelites, relying on the Jewish Law, can be saved. His view is that everyone – Jew and Gentile – needs only call upon the name of the Lord to be saved. The name of the Lord, for St Paul, is of course 'Jesus'. Separated from its context in that particular discussion, the passage is essentially about the apostolic commission to preach. This is the particular vocation of an apostle – amongst whom St Andrew was the *Protokletos* ('First Called'). St Andrew's greatness was that he effectively evangelised Simon Peter his brother. He didn't persuade him, as far as we know, but ushered him into Jesus' presence. This, for us, is a model of evangelism. It is a work of sowing and not of reaping. We broadcast the seeds which others cause to grow. The apostolic ministry is a matter of tradition: A hands on to B who hands on to C. And there is, if you like, a variable evangelistic 'R number'. So, instead of A handing on to B, we have A handing on to B and C, who hand it on to D, E, F, and G. This exponential growth explains the formidable success of the Early Church and the continuing success of the Church nowadays in various parts of the world.

St Edmund Campion, Martyr

1st December

ST EDMUND CAMPION SJ (1540-1581) was captured at nearby Lyford Grange. Convicted of high treason, he was hung, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn. He was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1886 and canonised in 1970 as one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

Collect

ALMIGHTY and ever-living God, who gave your martyr Edmund Campion courage to witness to the Gospel of Christ, even to the giving of his life: grant that, by his prayers, we may endure all suffering for love of you, and may seek you with all our hearts, for you alone are the source of life. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

St Francis Xavier

3rd December

St Francis Xavier

ST FRANCIS XAVIER SJ (1506-1552) was born in Spain and studied in Paris, where he became a founding member of the Society of Jesus. He travelled to India, Borneo, Indonesia, and Japan, and died of fever on Shangchuan Island, en route to China.

Collect for St Francis Xavier

GRANT us, we pray, O Lord our God, the constant gladness of being devoted to you, for it is full and lasting happiness to serve with constancy the author of all that is good. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
