Advent: Awaiting the arrival of Christ

The advent wreath inside Holy Name Catholic Church in Ketchikan lit for the first Sunday of Advent (Photo by Fr. Augustine Minn, KMS)
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SVDP of Juneau distributes over 200 food baskets for Thanksgiving

Friends of the Shrine Dinner

Saturday, January 19th
6:45 PM at St. Paul’s Parish Hall in Juneau
Free will offering for event to support the National Shrine of St. Therese
For more information call 586-2227 x 24
December Letter from
Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Come, Lord Jesus!

With the first Sunday of Advent, the Church begins the new liturgical year. This year we are reading the Gospel of Luke. It is Luke’s gospel which provides us with the account of the Annunciation and one of two accounts of the Nativity of Jesus. It is Luke who emphasizes both the humble circumstances of Jesus’ birth and his great love and compassion for the poor, the marginalized and the excluded.

Each year during the season of Advent, we hear these words by the prophet Isaiah: “The people who live in darkness have seen a great light!” Through the voices of the prophets, especially Isaiah and St. John the Baptist, we are called, in the light of our hope in Christ Jesus, our Savior and our Messiah, to face the darkness of sin in our world, in our Church and in each of our lives, and repent. We can be confident that the light has overcome the darkness as we look back with gratitude and rejoicing at the first coming of Jesus when he was born in the flesh in Bethlehem so long ago, and look forward in expectation and hope to the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time.

These past three months have been a period of intense preparation and activity for me personally. In September, I traveled to Rome to attend a course of instruction on the ministry of bishops. There were 140 newly ordained bishops from around the world in attendance, including 17 from the United States. For me as a new bishop, there were two highlights of my time in Rome. The first was becoming acquainted with and learning from these newly appointed men striving to be holy and with fire in their hearts to serve the people of God.

The second highlight was the opportunity to meet personally with our Holy Father, Pope Francis. After a private audience with the pope, we each had the opportunity to greet him. As you can imagine, with 140 bishops attending, my time with him was very short, about one minute, but it is a moment I shall cherish for myself and for all of us in the Diocese of Juneau. I felt as if you were all there with me when I greeted him. Much to my amazement, he recalled that I had most recently served in Anchorage before he appointed me to Juneau. I assured him of our prayers and support and he offered his prayers and blessing for us. This underscored for me that unity with the successor of St. Peter is essential to our life, as in the words of the Nicene Creed, we are “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”.

Beginning in October, in response to the sexual abuse crisis, I initiated ten listening sessions throughout the diocese beginning with the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Juneau. I was able to visit each of our parishes. I finished in early December with visits to Sacred Heart in Haines and St. Therese in Skagway. I want to express my gratitude to all of the faithful who took the time to participate in the listening sessions, as well as the many people who have written to me or have seen me privately. I am edified by your faith in Jesus during these difficult and challenging days for our Church as you have continued to “follow him on the way” (cf. Mark 10:52c).

May these weeks of Advent preparation and the celebration of Christmas be a graced and joyful time for you and your family! Please be assured of my prayers for you as I ask you to pray for me.

Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year!

Sincerely in Christ,

Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M.

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You and your family are cordially invited to the Bishop’s Christmas Reception

Friday, December 21st
4:30-7:00PM

at

St. Ann’s Hall - Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
430 5th St, Juneau, AK

Enjoy an evening with Bishop Andrew, parishioners, family and friends.
Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M. appoints commission to review personnel files

TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF JUNEAU
A letter from Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M. about the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church

December 12, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul exhorted the believers: “Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light.” (Ephesians 5:11-14a)

If there is anything positive that can be said about these past six months, it is that the hidden sins and crimes of some ministers in our Church have finally come to light, and have become visible for everyone to see. For this I am grateful.

Let me speak first to the victim-survivors of clerical sexual abuse, especially in our diocese. Our Church and our society owe you an enormous debt of gratitude. With great fortitude you have come forward to expose the life-long harm inflicted on you as children and adolescents by those who had every right to expect would cherish and protect you. Even when no one wanted to believe you, you courageously told your story and by so doing eventually forced the Church to face up to the crimes committed against children and young people by abusive bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay ministers. In too many cases these crimes were denied and covered up by the Church’s leaders. It is my hope that the Church’s efforts to truly repent, to bring you the peace and the healing you deserve.

To all of the faithful in our diocese, I want to say to you that I have been angry, sad and disheartened to read the shocking but necessary reports from dioceses all over the country detailing how my brothers in ordained ministry sexually abused, assaulted and grievously harmed so many children and young people over the past seventy years. After recently concluding ten listening sessions throughout the diocese, I know that many of you share these feelings and have expressed to me directly deep anger and outrage that these criminal, sinful and immoral behaviors have been tolerated and hidden. Many have shared a diminished, if not a complete lack of trust in the bishops. And, as one person succinctly put it at one of the listening sessions with great exasperation, “just get it fixed!”

Catholics around the country and in our diocese rightly expected that the Bishops of the United States would take effective and timely measures at their November meeting. Among the proposals for the meeting were a code of conduct for bishops and a system to report allegations of sexual abuse against bishops. However, Pope Francis directed the US bishops to delay voting on such proposals until after the Holy Father’s February meeting in Rome with the Presidents of the Bishops Conferences of the Catholic Church from around the world on the theme of “protection of minors”. As frustrating as this intervention by Pope Francis was, I trust in his wisdom and his larger perspective as the leader of the Universal Church. But while prayerfully awaiting the results of the meeting in February, I have identified important actions that can be taken in our diocese right here, right now.

Holiness, honesty, integrity and fidelity together with competency, accountability and transparency are at the heart of the credibility of the Church’s leadership. Guided by these virtues and the many interventions from the listening sessions, I have determined that one of the most pressing needs in this diocese is to conduct a thorough, independent review of our present and past clergy personnel files going back to the beginning of our diocese in 1951. We need to - and we will - publish the names of anyone credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor.

As was announced recently, I have appointed three lay professionals with expertise in the law and criminal investigation to serve on an independent commission to do this. They will have full and unfettered access to diocesan records and my complete cooperation and that of my staff. It is crystal clear that the people of God want and deserve to know the truth. Jesus tells us, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32).

I have also ordered a review, updating and improvement of our current Diocese of Juneau Policy Regarding Sexual Misconduct and the Code of Pastoral Conduct for Clergy, Religious, Lay Employees and Volunteers of the Diocese of Juneau. They were written in 2003 and were last updated in 2015. More effective policies and procedures are vitally important but at the core of the matter is our call to holiness through a continual conversion to Christ. This is especially true for our leaders in ordained ministry. The ordained must live with integrity, fully embracing their commitment to live a chaste life, and to exercise their ministry according to the heart of Jesus. This includes me and all bishops.

From what I heard again and again at the listening sessions, you want your bishops to be holy and caring good shepherds; to lead with strength by example, and to defend their flocks. You want bishops to preach and proclaim the Gospel and the teachings of the Church clearly and with steadfast...
resolve. In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2:1-4, we read, “When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.” The apostles went forth to proclaim boldly the truth of the Word of God. It’s that type of holy and powerful, Spirit-driven, fearless leadership the people of God need and expect from the successors of the apostles.

In closing, I believe that this moment in all of our lives is an opportunity to draw closer to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, by living in the truth he has revealed to us in his life, teachings, death and resurrection. I invite you to pray especially for the victim-survivors of clerical sexual abuse, both in our diocese and throughout the Church, that God will sustain and heal victims, their spouses, children and families. Please pray too for all those in our Church who have been so scandalized that they struggle to trust the Church’s leaders or who have left the practice of our Catholic faith entirely. And finally, I ask your prayers for me and my brother bishops.

Sincerely in Christ,
Bishop Andrew Bellisario, C.M.
December 10th marks the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Thomas Merton in a tragic accident while attending a monastic conference in Bangkok in 1968. Two months prior to his trip to Asia, Merton visited Alaska and the Diocese of Juneau. His visit to southeast Alaska is confirmed by a journal entry dated September 27th, 1968.

He wrote:

... flew in rain to Juneau which turns out to be a fascinating place clinging to the feet of several mountains at the edge of a sort of fjord. I never saw such torrential rain as met us when we got out of the plane.

Thomas Merton was a 20th-century Trappist monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani, near Louisville, Kentucky. He was first and foremost a contemplative, but was a poet, was active in the civil rights and Catholic peace movement of the 1960s, was a student of comparative religion and the author of many works on contemplation, Christian mysticism and the monastic life. He wrote over sixty books, but his best-known work is, “The Seven Storey Mountain”. It is the story of his conversion to Christ and his saying ‘yes’ to the monastic vocation.

Despite, (or perhaps because) of his isolation in the monastery and influence by the papal encyclical “Pacem in Terris” and the example of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, Merton was deeply concerned about the state of the world and about issues such as the threat of nuclear war, racial equality, the Vietnam war and the disparity between the rich and the poor. All of which led him to advocate, especially as a writer, on behalf of non-violence and peace.

Influenced as well by the Second Vatican Council, Merton became a proponent of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and understanding and was a pioneer in establishing spiritual dialogue between Christian and Buddhist monks. This led to his friendships with the Tibetan Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama: the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh and the Japanese Zen master D. T. Suzuki.

Merton traveled to Alaska in September of 1968 as the first leg of his journey to Asia. From September 18th–21st he gave several retreat conferences to priests and religious in Anchorage.

During a brief visit to Juneau, he gave a conference for the priests of the diocese (including Fr. Peter Gorges) in the kitchen (the present day sacristy) of the Cathedral rectory.

More than anything else, Merton felt called by God to the solitary life. He was allowed by his superiors to live alone in a hermitage on the grounds of Gethsemani Abbey, but he became dissatisfied with its many interruptions and distractions. In 1968 when he visited Alaska, he was searching for a place where he could build a hermitage and live in much more complete solitude.

Merton noted that while visiting Yakutat, Frank Ryman, a St. Ann’s parishioner offered him a quarter acre on which he could build a hermitage, but Merton declined, confiding to his journal that given the pastoral need he would inevitably find himself as the de-facto parish priest. At the time of his death, he was still exploring the possibility of building a hermitage outside of Cordova following his return from Asia.

After Merton’s accidental death in Bangkok, a Benedictine monk wrote this of his friend shortly after his death:

The sermon I gave [the morning after Merton’s death] was a moment of talking about Merton’s search for God. When a monk enters a monastery, what is asked of him is: “Are you truly seeking God?” The question isn’t “Have you found God?” The question is, “Is he seeking God? Is his motivation highly involved in that search of who and what God is in relationship to us?”

Select Works By and About Thomas Merton

Biographies and Memoirs

The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton
Michael Mott Harcourt, Brace, Jovanich, New York, NY 1993

Living With Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton

We Are All Poets Here: Thomas Merton’s 1968 Journey to Alaska, a Shared Story about Spiritual Seeking
Kathleen Witkowska Tarr VP&D House, Anchorage, AK 2018

Autobiography

The Seven Storey Mountain: An Autobiography of Faith
Harcourt Brace and Jovanich, New York 1948

This is probably the best known of Merton's writings. Critics have compared his autobiography to the Confessions of St. Augustine. Translated into over twenty languages, it tells the story of Merton’s spiritual journey from unbelief to Catholic faith and his call to the monastic life as a Trappist monk.

Anthology

Thomas Merton Reader
Doubleday, New York 1974

A helpful introductory anthology of work by Thomas Merton on prayer and contemplation, scripture, monasticism, war and peace, social criticism as well as his poetry, letters and journal entries.

Continued on page 13
Liturgical living at home

BY: ANJANETTE BARR

Liturgy – a word that has come to refer to the order of worship during our religious gatherings – means literally, “the work of the people.” The Liturgy provides structure for our time at Mass, moving us actively through the story of our salvation through God’s compassionate gift of His son. It is not a time for merely receiving God’s graces through the sacraments, but of participating as a priestly people in God’s work of redemption through Jesus Christ.

The Liturgical Calendar provides that same structure for us as we go about our daily lives all year long – and invites us to intentionally live the small role our great author has written for us in His story.

“In the Liturgical Year, the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ from the Incarnation until the day of Pentecost and the expectation of Christ’s second coming.” United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.

I love that the Church provides us with tools that help us focus, every day, on the eternal things. And I love that our culture as a whole still joins with the Church in community during at least this one liturgical season of Advent and Christmas. People of diverse religious and even secular backgrounds celebrate and embrace the birth of our Savior during the month of December. It is a special oasis in the calendar year for Christians who desire to live their faith more visibly.

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year,” and we all sense the atmosphere of anticipation during this season. Waiting is difficult, and Christmas decorations seem to appear in stores earlier and earlier each year. The whole world waits with bated breath – but only Christians understand what our hearts are truly yearning for. We long to say, with Zechariah:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David.” Luke 1:68-69

As Catholics, we celebrate the Advent – which means the coming – of God Incarnate at Christmas by preparing our hearts for four weeks prior to Christmas Day. During Mass, we read Scripture that reminds us of the events leading up to Christ’s birth and that foretell his second coming. We light advent candles, display special colors, and sing carols.

But Advent isn’t just a special time of festivities to close the year out on a happy note. Advent actually marks the beginning of the Christian liturgical year, which includes Advent, Lent, Eastertide, and Pentecost. Even during what is called “ordinary time,” the Church calendar is full of feasts and traditions.

Through the feasts and observations of the Liturgical Year, we are able to actively participate in prayer, worship, and service alongside the faithful all over the world – and even in Heaven. What a beautiful gift!

Measuring our time with remembrances - of the life of Christ and of the lives and deeds of those who have gone before us - is an antidote to getting caught up in consumption. We often find ourselves rushing through these moments we’ve been blessed with, even as we wish we could slow time and capture the memories we’re making - devouring rather than savoring them. The liturgical calendar helps us to order our days, just as the liturgy of the Mass orders our worship, moving ever forward toward what matters most - God’s selfless love for us. It reminds us of His desire that we participate in, rather than just consume, the time He has gifted us with.

“Christmas isn’t just a temporal celebration or the memory of a beautiful (event); Christmas is more … Christmas is an encounter!” – Pope Francis

And that’s what we are truly longing for an anticipating, isn’t it? The chance to encounter our God. To feel connected to the source of our hope – the source that can easily be obscured by the fog of busyness we are surrounded by in our fast-paced lives. Living liturgically – not just on Sunday, but every day – gives us practical ways to encounter Christ every season.

Take the time today to re-evaluate your plans for the holidays. How can you use this season to re-orient your life and home toward Christ? If you decorate your home, can you make your nativity the focal point of your decorations? Or incorporate the liturgical colors of purple and pink along with your greens and reds?

Rich traditions inspired by the Church calendar this season include displaying and lighting advent candles at home, saying the Saint Andrew novena each day until Christmas, telling the story of Saint Nicholas and leaving small gifts in children’s shoes on December 6th, putting special ornaments on a “Jesse Tree” to tell the story of Jesus’ lineage, pray or sing the O Antiphons each of the seven nights before Christmas, caring for the poor as Good King Wenceslas did on the feast of St. Stephen (December 26th), reading the Christmas story together from one of the gospels, and blessing your home on Epiphany (January 6th).

Ifling the Liturgical Year is a new concept for you or one that you haven’t really explored, start now - the beginning is a very good place to start – and start small. Choose just a few Christ-centered traditions to incorporate into this Christmas season, and use the momentum as motivation to look for and learn about the tools our tradition gives us for living liturgically all year long.

When you hang your 2019 wall calendar, mark your favorite saint days down right away, just like you mark the dates of family birthdays and anniversaries. Make it a habit to begin each month – or each new season – by brainstorming ideas for making liturgical dates special. It can be as simple as getting a picture book about a saint from the library to read to your children, or preparing a meal from the home country of the saint you are remembering together.

Our brothers and sisters in the secular world are looking forward to New Year’s Day for a clean slate, the chance to start over. But brothers and sisters in Christ, our new beginning is now! Now is the time to re-center our focus on the story God is telling and has been telling throughout all the ages.

“Let us rediscover the beauty of being together along the way: the Church, with her vocation and mission, and the whole of humanity, the people, the civilizations, the cultures, all together on the paths of time.” Pope Francis

Anjanette Barr is a parishioner at St. Paul the Apostle in Juneau, Alaska. She is a wife, mother, writer, and recent convert to the Catholic Church. Anjanette can be reached at www.anjanettebarr.com
St. Vincent de Paul distributes over 200 Thanksgiving food baskets

Members of the St. Paul's middle school youth group help organize Thanksgiving food baskets.

Middle school youth assemble Thanksgiving food baskets.

(Photos bottom row left to right)
St. Vincent de Paul volunteers distribute turkeys and pies to people in Juneau from a refrigerated AML trailer.
A volunteer hands out a Thanksgiving food basket.
St. Vincent de Paul volunteers organize food baskets to be distributed to families the Saturday before Thanksgiving.
St. Vincent de Paul Society of Juneau

Thanksgiving food baskets

Cathedral middle school youth volunteer to help put together food baskets for St. Vincent de Paul
Advent Atrium Reflection

BY: KIMBERLY WATT
ST. PAUL’S DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A few years ago, on a particularly dark morning in December, some of my level one atrium (3-6-year-old) students were gathered around the purple-swathed prayer table, listening as I read from Isaiah 9:2, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in a land of gloom, a light has shone.” They were listening for clues as to what great gift God would send to the people of Israel.

“What would it be like to walk in darkness?” I asked.

Suddenly, the white twinkle lights in the trees that line the room were all extinguished, leaving only dim light filtering in from the sleet-streaked window in the corner. I checked the hallway and confirmed that the power had gone out.

“Um, Miss Kimber,” one boy said from the art table, “will you please turn the lights back on?” In vain, he flipped the switch on the lamp next to him.

“I can’t turn them back on,” I explained.

“The power is out.”

“When will it come back?”

“I don’t know,” I replied as I lit the candles of the Advent wreath to give us more light. “Now we are sort of like the people who walked in darkness, aren’t we?”

We went about our class time, but it was peppered with little voices asking when the lights would come back on and my reply that we would have to wait and see.

“Waiting is hard,” one boy sighed as he held the icon of the prophet Isaiah. We were indeed like the people of Israel, waiting for the lights just as they had waited. Anticipating not mere twinkle lights, but the Light of the World, who would dispel the darkness of sin. They didn’t know when He would come, but they waited, hoped, and prayed for His coming. They took heart from the words of the prophets.

Another verse we meditate on with our level one atrium students is Isaiah 9:6 which reads, “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Eventually, the lights came back on to much rejoicing, we all gathered around our prayer table to sing and pray, and the students went home. As I was tidying up after they left, I glanced at chapter nine of Isaiah again. My eyes focused on the phrase, “a son is given to us.” To us. To me, God gives His Son.

What a gift! I thought of John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” I began to substitute my name and the names of my loved ones for “the world.” For God so loved Kimber that He gave His only Son...

Now Advent is coming again, and we’ll put up our purple tablecloths and light purple and pink candles while singing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” all as a reminder that “He comes.” Just as He came to the people of Israel, for them, but also for us, He comes to us each time we go to Mass, in the humble disguise of bread and wine, which contain His true presence. We wait, like Israel waited, for He has promised to come again in His glory.

I pray that this season of Advent will be a reminder that God so loves you that He gives you the gift of His only begotten Son, so that when He comes in His glory, you may have eternal life with Him.

Religious Education program brings new life to Wrangell Parish

BY: DOMINIQUE JOHNSON

Sometimes getting the courage to begin a new ministry just takes a nudge from a fellow parishioner. That’s how Erica Tlachac decided it was time to revive the Religious Education program at St. Rose of Lima in Wrangell.

Tlachac, a parishioner of St. Rose of Lima since 2011, shared how for the longest time her children were the only ones consistently attending Mass, “We wanted to bring more kids to Mass.” So, last December Tlachac decided to put together a simple Christmas program. The program consisted of a few carols and the kids sharing a few lines from the Nativity story, performed by Tlachac’s two children and a few grandchildren of other parishioners.

The program was successful and Tlachac wanted to keep the children involved and attending Mass regularly. In January, she started an afterschool program where volunteers would share Bible stories and take part in an activity related to the story. This was the first time in at least 10 years that the parish held a Religious education program and the kids kept coming back, which encouraged Tlachac, “And we decided we wanted something more.”

In the spring the parish admin assistant Peggy Mitchell approached Tlachac about starting the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS), an international Catechesis program for ages 3-12, at St. Rose. After doing some research, Tlachac and Mitchell traveled to Kodiak to receive their CGS training. Tlachac admits that she didn’t know what she was getting into when she left for the training, “but once I finally saw what it was (CGS) I knew it was going to be wonderful.”

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord.
And let perpetual light shine upon them.
And may the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

CGS students learn about the season of advent at St. Rose of Lima in Wrangell
VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which mirrored that of the indigenous people of the time, is a sign of Mary's closeness to those who are marginalized, Pope Francis said.

Like St. Juan Diego, who felt of no importance at being chosen by Mary because of his indigenous heritage, marginalized people in today's world are often made to feel worthless by conditions imposed upon them, the pope said in his homily during a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica Dec. 12, 2017, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

"Among them are the indigenous and Afro-American communities, who often are not treated with dignity and equality of conditions; many women who are excluded because of their sex, race, or socioeconomic situation; young people who receive a poor education and have no opportunities to advance in their studies or to enter into the labor market so as to move ahead and establish a family; many poor people, unemployed, migrants, displaced, landless peasants, who seek to survive on the informal market; boys and girls subjected to child prostitution, often linked to sex tourism," he said, quoting a 2007 Latin American bishops' council document he helped write.

Processing into the basilica dressed in white, the symbol of purity, Pope Francis made his way to a replica of St. Juan Diego's tilma, which bears the image of Mary, who appeared to the indigenous saint in 1531. The pope stood before the image, bowing reverently and censing it three times.

In his homily, Pope Francis reflected on the reading from St. Luke's Gospel, in which the angel appears to Mary, informing her that she is with child.

"And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God," the angel said.

Elizabeth's sterility, the pope said, was considered at the time "a divine punishment for her or her husband's sin" and a sign of shame and guilt "for a sin she did not commit ... (she was) made to feel small for being unable to fulfill what was expected of her.”

However, in Elizabeth -- who was the first to recognize the child in Mary’s womb -- Christians can find a woman who is “fruitful and amazed” upon experiencing in her life “the fulfillment of a promise made by God.”

“In her, we understand that God’s dream is not nor will be sterile or to stigmatize or fill his children with shame, but rather bring forth through and from them a song of blessing,” he said.

This fruitfulness can also be seen in St. Juan Diego, who was chosen by Mary to bear on his “tilma the image of the Virgin.”

Mary, shown “with dark-skin and mestizo appearance,” reflected a “mother capable of taking on the traits of her children to make them feel a part of her blessing,” the pope said.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, he added, remains a symbol of the wealth and cultural diversity of Latin America and the Caribbean that must not only be cultivated, but also defended from every attempt to impose a way of thinking that “makes everything we inherited from our elders invalid or sterile.”

“In short, our fruitfulness requires us to defend our people from an ideological colonization that cancels out the richest thing about them, whether they be indigenous, Afro-American, mestizo, farmer, or suburban,” the pope said.

Pope Francis called on Christians to look to Mary and learn from her, to become a church with a “mestizo appearance, an indigenous appearance” that takes the form of the little ones.

It is “the appearance of a person who is poor, unemployed, of a boy or girl, old or young, so that no one may feel sterile and infertile, so that no one feels ashamed or worthless,” the pope said.

A Prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe

Most merciful mother, you came to tell us of your compassion through St. Juan Diego, whom you called the littlest and dearest of your sons. Give your strength and protection to all who live in poverty today, especially the young, elderly, and vulnerable. Plead for them to the Father, that they might experience the Divine Love tangibly in their daily lives, and that all who work for justice on behalf of the poor might grow in fortitude and humility. In these ways, manifest your charity and concern in our lives, that the weeping of humanity may be heard, and all our suffering, pain, and misfortune may be filled with divine comfort and healing. May we always know the peace of being in the cradle of your arms, and bring us safely home to your son, Jesus.

Amen.

The feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is December 12th.
Visitors are most important things about shrines, pope says

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- People who visit Catholic shrines must find a place of warmth and welcome, as well as good priests who enjoy being with and listening to the faithful, Pope Francis said.

“It is sad,” he said, whenever visitors arrive and “there is no one there who gives them a word of welcome and receives them like pilgrims who have accomplished a journey, often a long one, to reach the shrine,” and it is even worse if they find the place is closed.

“It cannot happen that more attention is paid to material and financial demands, forgetting that the most important part is the pilgrim. They are the ones who count,” he said.

The pope spoke Nov. 29 to hundreds of priests, religious and laypeople attending the first International Convention of Rectors and Pastoral Worker of Shrines, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization. The convention, held in Rome Nov. 27-29, focused on the way shrines are “an open door to the new evangelization.”

Pilgrimages and visits to shrines are a key part of popular traditions, and Pope Francis told the group that keeping such popular piety alive was very important.

“It is the immune system of the church. It protects us from many things,” he said.

Welcoming groups and visitors is very important, he said, so make sure they are made to feel “at home, like a family member who has been expected for a very long time and has finally come.”

Sometimes visitors are people who have distanced themselves from the church, but they made the trip because they are attracted to the shrine’s artistic treasures or its beautiful natural surroundings, the pope said.

“When they are welcomed, these people will become more willing to open their hearts and let them be shaped by grace. A climate of friendship is the fertile seed our shrines can toss on pilgrim soil, allowing them to rediscover that trust in the church” that might have been lost because of having been met with indifference, he said.

No one must ever feel like a stranger or an “outsider, above all when they get there with the burden of their own sins.”

If the sacrament of reconciliation is offered at a shrine, the priests should be “well-formed, holy, merciful” and able to help the penitent experience “the true encounter with the Lord, who forgives,” he added.

“Shrines should be places of prayer, but also a place where an individual can pray in silence,” he said. He added that priests serving the shrine must be ministers who love being with and understand the people of God. If not, “the bishop should give him another mission, because he is not suitable for this, and he will suffer greatly, and he will make the people suffer.”

Christmas Eve Mass
at the National Shrine of St. Therese

Carols begin at 9:30 PM
Mass at 10 PM
Celebrated by Fr. Pat Casey, OMI

21425 Glacier Highway
Juneau, Alaska 99801

www.shrineofSainttherese.org
Thomas Merton:
Continued from page 6

It’s not philosophical – it’s existential. And Merton, to me, was a great searcher: He was constantly unhappy, as all great searchers are. He was constantly ill at ease, he was constantly restless, as all searchers are – because that’s part of the search. And in that sense, he was the perfect monk. Contemplation isn’t satisfaction – it’s search.

In Thoughts in Solitude, Merton wrote fifteen lines which have come to be known as the “Merton Prayer.”

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you in that desire. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

CNS News Briefs

Pope: Prepare for Christ’s birth by recognizing mistakes, sowing peace

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Advent is a time for people to think about what they can change about themselves so that they can sow the seeds of peace, justice and fraternity in their daily lives, Pope Francis said. The Advent season is a call for personal conversion, “humbly recognizing our mistakes, our inhabilities, our failure” to do one’s duty, he said Dec. 9 before praying the Angelus with visitors gathered in St. Peter’s Square. Celebrating the second Sunday of Advent, the pope said the attitudes of vigilance and prayer that characterize the Advent season and preparations for Christmas include a journey of conversion. “Let each one of us think, how can I change something about my behavior in order to prepare the way of the Lord?” the pope said. Preparing the way entails making straight “his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low,” the pope said, citing the day’s Gospel reading according to St. Luke.

Pope expresses condolences for death of former President Bush

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Pope Francis expressed his condolences for the death of the 41st president of the United States, George H.W. Bush. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, sent a telegram to the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, telling him the pope was “saddened to learn of the death” of the former president. “Pope Francis offers heartfelt condolences and the assurance of his prayers to all the Bush family,” he said in the telegram published by the Vatican Dec. 5. “Commending President Bush’s soul to the merciful love of almighty God, His Holiness invokes upon all who mourn his passing the divine blessings of strength and peace,” Cardinal Parolin wrote.

Catholic groups push for strong climate deal at U.N. summit in Poland

KATOWICE, Poland (CNS) -- Catholic representatives worked to keep negotiations on track for a comprehensive deal to address global warming as the U.N. climate change conference entered its second and final week in Katowice, Poland. The effort was complicated by the actions of U.S., Russian, Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti delegates, who objected to a note by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or COP24, “welcoming” an October report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The report warned that greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of fossil fuels would need to be reduced by 45 percent by 2030 for global warming kept to a maximum of 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit under the 2015 Paris climate accord or risk worsening drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty. After hours of negotiations Dec. 8 and with no consensus reached, the note was dropped under U.N. protocol. Still, the church continued to press for sustained action on climate change. “The church is exerting pressure and showing really significant commitment. We must hope countries match this,” said Rebecca Elliott, communications director of Global Catholic Climate Movement, a coalition of more than 650 Catholic organizations. “Besides acting as a moral voice and providing a robust faith-based response, Catholic organizations are relating stories about the experiences of people from Latin America, Africa, India and the Pacific islands who are gravely affected by climate change.”

Woman who once assisted with abortions to address March for Life Jan. 18

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Abby Johnson, who early in her career assisted in carrying out abortions, will be among the speakers during the 2019 March for Life rally Jan. 18 on the National Mall in Washington. Johnson, a one-time Planned Parenthood clinic director, is the founder of And Then There Were None, a ministry that assists abortion clinic workers who have left their position. “Unique From Day One: Pro-Life Is Pro-Science” is the theme of the 2019 march, Jeanne Mancini, March for Life president, said during a media briefing Dec. 5 in Washington. Mancini said this year’s events will focus on the scientific discoveries that have led to new understanding about life in the womb. “Science and technology are on the side of life in large because they show the humanity of the child at a very young age,” Mancini told Catholic News Service after the briefing. “We can hear and see a baby’s heartbeat now at six weeks. There are blood tests to know a baby’s gender at seven weeks. Now that’s changed enormously over the course of the last few years,” she said. Details of events are online at http://marchforlife.org/mfl-2019/rally-march-info/.

English bishop says miracle of U.S. woman could make Newman a saint

MANCHESTER, England (CNS) -- Catholic bishops have expressed hope that Pope Francis will canonize Blessed John Henry Newman in 2019 after Vatican mediics said the inexplicable healing of a U.S. mother was a miracle attributable to his intercession. The cardinal was beatified in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI in Birmingham, England, after the miraculous healing of Boston Deacon Jack Sullivan. Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham said the English and Welsh bishops were informed during their “ad limina” visit to Rome in September that the second miracle needed for the canonization of Blessed Newman had been found. “I understand that the medical board responsible for assessing a second miracle has now delivered a positive assessment to the congregation,” he told Catholic News Service in a Nov. 29 email. The archbishop said members of the congregation will meet early next year “to consider the medical board’s assessment and to make its own recommendation” to Pope Francis, who will make the final decision and possibly the saint. nuevas rutas
Advent as an invitation to practice hospitality

BY: HOSFFMAN OSPINO
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

It is interesting that Catholics and other Christians dedicate entire seasons to reflect about “waiting.” Advent is one of them. So is Lent, which will soon be upon us! What are you waiting for this Advent? What to do while we wait?

The term Advent -- “Adventus,” in Latin -- reminds us that something is imminently coming. As a child, my sense of that imminent coming laser-focused on Christmas Day and the gifts that I knew I would receive. My focus, actually, was more on the gifts than on anything else.

Eventually, I learned, thanks to good catechesis at home and at my parish, that Advent was much more than waiting for material gifts. As in the case of every other liturgical season, Advent is about Jesus Christ.

That Advent is about Jesus Christ may sound commonsensical to well-catechized Catholics. But let’s be honest, many Catholics out there seem more concerned during Advent about gifts and shopping and fancy meals than on anything that has to do with Jesus Christ.

I learned that Christians are permanently waiting for Jesus, longing for his return on the last day. We constantly say, “Come, Lord Jesus.” During Advent, we intensify that plea.

I must say that it took me a while to embrace the idea. Once I did, it has mesmerized me ever since. My present life and history are important. The coming of the Lord, however, will bring such life and history to fulfillment in God. I long for it. I wait for it with the rest of the church.

What do we do while we wait? I think that the Advent tradition of las posadas among U.S. Hispanic and Latin American Catholics gives us a good clue: Practice Christian hospitality.

The tradition is inspired by the biblical passages describing the journey of Mary during the last days of her pregnancy, and her husband Joseph searching for an inn (Posada, in Spanish) to stay. Many places rejected them for various reasons. Eventually, they found space at a stable.

Las Posadas are often structured as an Advent novena. Each day Mary and Joseph, usually children playing those roles, go to a home or to a group searching for a place to stay. The sojourners sing a popular tune. After several rejections, they are finally welcomed in one place. Then everyone prays and celebrates with a profound sense of fiesta.

Two things we learn from las posadas during Advent.

One, life is a long and complex journey that often places people in difficult situations. Their last resource many times is the openness and generosity of others who are better off.

Two, to be Christian is to welcome others, especially those most in need, with a sense of urgency as if welcoming a mother about to give birth or a child to be born. One cannot wait long.

Yes, as we go through life waiting for history’s final moment, we have a responsibility to welcome one another, to take care of each other, especially those who are most vulnerable. They are the face of Jesus Christ among us.

One cannot genuinely claim to long for Christ’s coming, whether in the mystery of Christmas or on the last day and reject his real presence in the immigrant, the refugee, the poor, the child and the most vulnerable. The first presupposes the others.

Openness to embracing others, especially those most in need, is a core trait that defines us as a nation. We live in historical circumstances that demand renewing that choice; a profoundly Christian choice. May Advent be an opportunity to embrace the invitation to practice hospitality.

Hosffman Ospino, a professor of theology and religious education at Boston College, writes the “Journeying Together” column for Catholic News Service.

Questions & answers

BY FATHER KENNETH DOYLE, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Confessing a murder

Q I am an old-time Catholic. We were taught that, to be forgiven in confession, we had to: 1) be truly sorry; 2) resolve firmly never to commit the sin again; and 3) make it right (e.g., give the money back, tell people that the gossip was a lie, etc.).

On television and in the movies, sometimes a murderer confesses to a priest who is unable then to break the seal of confession. My question is this: Are murderers forgiven if they do not turn themselves into the police and serve prison time for the crime? Or is the sin forgiven with no strings attached? (Milwaukee)

A With regard to the conditions for forgiveness, you learned your catechism well. In fact, the present-day Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries)” (No. 1459).

You are right, too, about the seal of confession; a priest is bound to absolute secrecy. The church’s Code of Canon Law could not be more clear: “The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner and for any reason” (Canon 983).

A later canon stipulates that a priest who would violate the seal is to be excommunicated (Canon 1388). (In 2017, when an Australian government commission recommended that Catholic priests become mandatory reporters on child sexual abuse, the Catholic Church strongly objected as applied to the sacrament of penance.)

As to your specific question, forgiveness in the sacrament is contingent on a person’s genuine sorrow and sincere resolve not to commit the sin again; those are the “strings attached.” Beyond that, a priest has no power to condition absolution on the sinner’s turning himself in to the police.

The confessor can encourage, plead with, urge the penitent to do exactly that -- he might even offer to accompany the penitent to the police station -- but having judged the penitent to be truly sorry, the absolving priest has no authority to impose this further step as a prerequisite to absolution.

Possible to confess online?

Q Is Catholic confession available online? This would be so convenient. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)

A Certainly at this time, there is no provision in the church’s sacramental practice for online confession and absolution. Implicit in the church’s Code of Canon Law (Canon 959 ff.) is the notion that the penitent is in the personal presence of the confessor.

In fact, in 2011, when the Vatican gave qualified support to a new app designed to help people examine their consciences, then-Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi was careful to tell reporters, “It is essential to understand well the sacrament of penance requires the personal dialogue between the penitent and the confessor and the absolution by the confessor.”

“This cannot in any way be substituted by a technology application. One cannot talk in any way about ‘a confession via iPhone,’” he said.

The sacrament of penance is designed to be, for the penitent, an encounter with Jesus Christ through the person of the priest. It is difficult for me to see how the internet would permit that close personal contact with the Lord. The additional concern I would have is for the privacy that is so integral to the sacrament of penance, the danger that an internet confession could be recorded or hacked.

Having said this, I do not think that the physical presence of the absolving priest is necessarily by divine mandate; so online confession could conceivably be permitted by the church sometime in the distant future, provided that the privacy concerns could be addressed -- but I wouldn’t wait for that to happen before confessing my sins!
“You'll get different answers. For example, if you asked that question to the authors of *Exodus, Deuteronomy,* or *Numbers,* they would have answered that what was central to their faith was a proper religious practice, keeping the Commandments and being faithful to the other prescribed codes of religious practice of their time.

However, when the great prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel) came along they painted a different picture. For them, true religiosity was not identified simply with fidelity to religious practice; it was judged rather on how one treated the poor. For them, the quality of your faith is to be judged by the quality of justice in the land; and the quality of justice in the land is always to be judged by how “widows, orphans, and strangers” fare while you are alive. For the prophets, the practice of justice took priority over proper religious belonging and fidelity to religious practice.

We see numerous sayings by the prophets that warn us that what God wants from us is not sacrifice on altars but fair wages for the poor, not the recitation of prescribed prayers but justice for widows, not the honoring of religious festivals but the giving of hospitality to strangers.

It should be noted, of course, that, after the prophets, we have the great wisdom figures in Jewish history. For them, the essence of religion was neither faithful religious practice nor simple outreach to the poor, but having a wise and compassionate heart, out of which you would then be faithful to both proper religious practice and outreach to the poor.

This is the tradition that Jesus inherits. What does he do with it? He ratifies all three. For Jesus, true religiosity asks for all of these: faithful religious practice, outreach to the poor, and a wise and compassionate heart. For Jesus, you don’t pick between these, you do them all. He tells us clearly: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14); but he also tells us that we will ultimately be judged on the basis of how we treat the poor (Matthew 25); even as he tells us that what God really wants from us is a wise, compassionate heart. (Luke 6 & 15)

For Jesus, we are true disciples when we have compassionate hearts out of which we keep the commandments, humbly worship our God, but make it a religious priority to reach out to the most vulnerable groups in our society. Indeed, on this latter point, Jesus’ warnings are much stronger even than those of the great Jewish prophets. The prophets affirmed that God favors the poor; Jesus affirmed that God is in the poor (“whatsoever you do to the least, you do to me”). How we treat the poor is how we are treating God.

Moreover (and I doubt we’ve ever taken this seriously) Jesus tells us that, at the final judgment, we will be judged for heaven or hell on the basis of how we treated the poor, particularly on how we treated the most vulnerable among them (“widows, orphans, and strangers”). In Matthew 25, he lays out the criteria upon which we will be judged, for heaven or for hell. Notice that in these particular criteria there aren’t any questions about whether we kept the commandments, about whether we went to church or not, or even whether our sexual lives were in order. Here we’re to be judged solely on how we treated the poor. It can be rather frightening and confusing to take this at face value, namely, that we will go to heaven or hell solely on the basis of how we treated the poor.

I highlight this because today so many of us, sincere, church-going, Christians do not seem to have either an eye or a heart for the “widows, orphans, and strangers” around us. Who are the most vulnerable groups in our world today? Who today, as Gustavo Gutierrez defines the poor, does not have a right to have rights?

Let me risk stating the obvious: Among the “widows, orphans, and strangers” in our world today are the unborn, the refugees, and the immigrants. Happily, most sincere Christians are not blind to the plight of the unborn. Less happily, too many of us are religiously blind to the plight of millions of refugees looking for someone to welcome them. Every newscast we watch tells us that we’re not much welcoming the stranger.

How soon we forget God’s warning: “You are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners.” (Deuteronomy 10, 18-19)
The eleventh annual Blue Mass was celebrated Sunday, November 18th, at St. Paul the Apostle parish in Juneau. The Mass celebrated by Father Mike Galbraith was organized by the Juneau Knights of Columbus to honor active duty and retired service men and women in the community. Before the final blessing Fr. Mike blessed the men and women in uniform and after the Mass he blessed the service vehicles in the church parking lot.