

ADVENT

NEWSLETTER

Advent is for walking

in living memory with our Hebrew ancestors who longed for deliverance from their enemies

Advent is for walking

with Mary, little, powerless, unknown but trusting in the promises of God to be with her.

Advent is for walking

with all the suffering of this world who long to be delivered from those who exploit them

Advent is for walking

with our own brothers and sisters who feel a great emptiness in their lives and who hunger for God.

WALK IN THE SALVATION OF GOD

The past fifteen years have seen the revival of the medieval pilgrimage, the Santiago de Campello (the Camino). This was a pilgrimage walk about seven hundred and fifty kilometers from Southern France, across northern Spain to the shrine of the apostle St. James. It was a pilgrimage of prayer and turning toward God. It died out for about six hundred years and has caught the imagination of Christians, spiritual people and non-religious people alike. It is in the walking that people discover God and a deeper meaning of life.

Advent needs to be compared to a walk with God. Now, pity the person who thinks that God will walk with them like their mother did when they were a child. If they slowed down, she slowed down. If they fell and skinned their knee she soothed the pain away.

This is a the walk of salvation. God has come to bring his people to live in harmony with himself. Listen to the pain of God in the Advent readings when he sees the people suffering in Babylon. They learnt through the prophets that they were in deep trouble because they had walked away from practicing the justice and compassion that God had demanded of them.

Listen to the pain and turmoil that was in the heart of God when he heard his people cry out in pain and loneliness. Too often we think that God has no feelings and therefore does not actually care what is going on.

When you walk close to someone else you pick up on their heartbeat, the strength of their breathing and the sweat on their foreheads. This is hard work. Much is learnt walking side by side.

Walk close to God so that you can hear his heart beat over the troubles of his exploited people. Hear his breath bringing consolation and support to the suffering people.



When you take a walk monitor the thoughts that move through your mind. This gives us time to rework many of the issues, discussions and problems that have cropped up in the past few days. God's mind is never a vacuum. Ask yourself what goes through the mind of God when God walks in the cool of the evening.

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WALK WITH MARY

It is crucial to our faith that we wrestle with the faith of Mary. We too often sit back and take it for granted without realizing what has happened.

God selected this young person (illiterate and without power), a female on top of that, in the backwoods of the world to become the Mother of God. God was asking of her the impossible. This is where we need to walk with Mary in her struggles to believe, to trust in the power of God.

The angel came and announced to her the good news that she was to bear a son: "you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High." (Lk. 1,31-32)

In the culture of Mary to be pregnant outside of wedlock was a death sentence. No one would ever want her. She would be rejected by family and clan. Look what an impossible situation she was in.

In all this, she said yes to God. She would accomplish the impossible.

This is why the Church wisely teaches that she conceived this son, 'in her faith and in her body!'

This sets the standard for our life of faith. There are many times that we are asked to live, believe and walk in the impossible. There are many times when the only thing on which we can rely is the power of God. Walk with Mary. Believe as she did!

WALK WITH JOHN BAPTIST

John the Baptist will always stand in our minds as a person with questions. We know that he was powerful. He raised the issue of turning back to God. People followed him because he was credible. Where does he stand in relation to Jesus?

When we suggest that you walk with John the Baptist begin with his first mark of identification. He is first of all the messenger of God. He is not the real thing but only the one who is to prepare the way for the Messiah, the one sent by God.

Messengers are people whose face we forget. They have a purpose, but once it is complete they disappear from the scene.

John comes to prepare the way. He challenges people to prepare their hearts for the in-breaking of God. God will come in new ways that they have not expected. The people must turn from their sinful practices and turn toward God.

He established his relationship to Jesus. "I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mk. 1,7-8)

Spend some time trying to walk in the sandals of John the Baptist. What does it mean to be the messenger preparing the way for the Messiah?

WALK WITH ISAIAH

The first reading from the Old Testament in our Sunday readings does not gain the attention it deserves. It is in competition with the Gospel reading which is always more important and significant. It stands as the overlooked sibling of the three readings.

On this third Sunday of Advent we read Isaiah, chapter 61. This passage is very significant to our entire Christian faith for it is the way that Jesus identifies himself, his mission and his place in salvation history. If we know this passage we can begin to understand Jesus.

Take out your Bible. Read today's first reading (Isaiah 61, 1-4, 8-11).

First of all, he recognizes that the Spirit of God is upon (this means he has been specially chosen). The Lord has designated him for mission. Now, what has he been designated to do?

"He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners; to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." Is. 61,1-2

Why do we need to walk with this part of Isaiah? This is the only way we can understand the mission of Jesus.

The next step: this is the only way that we can understand our own Christian vocation. We now must be the good news to the oppressed. We must bring liberty to the captives.

Walk with Isaiah. Hold this text very close to your muscles. Breathe in their full impact.

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WALKING WITH YOUR EYES OPEN

Too often Advent is a nice season with the Advent wreath and nice stories but it does not connect with our lives.

Walk with your eyes open, your mouth closed and your heart alert to the life of others.

Walk slowly by your aged aunt who cries every night because her two daughters have such a strong dislike for each other. She longs for healing, understanding and new bridges built within her own family. Here is her call for salvation in her family life.

Walk slowly by the new Canadian family from Somalia who are trying to send some financial help to the brother and his family in the refugee camp in Northern Kenya. Their life is very vulnerable. Here in Canada we hope that their

children will have enough to eat this winter!

Walk with all the families that had to flee their country because of civil war. They walked out of their houses and fled to another country for safety. Think of the insecurity they must experience: will our house be looted or trashed? What future will our children have? This is a true longing for salvation.

Walk with all people who fear that their sins and evil deeds will haunt them to the grave. This is the longing for the salvation that only Jesus can bring. This is the salvation that means God will forgive our sins and break the bonds of evil in our lives. We are given a new opportunity for life with God. The forgiveness of our sins is salvation.

Walk with people who see life as very dark and meaningless. God will be their light of hope. The star in the sky that we speak of in the

Bethlehem story is meant to be the star of hope for those who may drown in their hopelessness.

Advent is very much our own story. The cries for salvation are very close to our house.

Walk with purpose this Advent. Hear what God hears from the hearts of your brother and sisters. Listen in solidarity with your fellow human beings.

HOW TO DO YOUR ADVENT WALK

- Have the first step walking step in step with Jesus.
- Have the second step on the footprints of your fellow human being who is suffering
- Have the third step in heaven (our final destination) You are moving toward glory.

Lord walk with me in the night

When life becomes very dark and uncertain, and I feel like the lost child in the night, walk close by me in support. May your presence be my courage.

Lord walk in front of me

When I make excuses not to give of myself to follow you in service and compassion, be the direction that does not put up with my selfish excuses.

Lord walk with me to Bethlehem

You came among us as the poor and displaced. Move my feet to care for the little ones of this world.

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ADVENT IS HAPPENING WHEN.....

You know your parish is trying to live in an Advent frame of mind when you examine how God has been working with his people through the ages. Hear the challenges and the support that God gives his people through the prophets.

You know that your parish is living in an Advent frame of mind when you gather and prepare hampers of food for those who are a little short at this time of year.

You know that your parish is living in an Advent frame of mind when the couple who sit next to you deliberately take off part of their Sunday afternoon to visit an old co-worker that they have not spoken to in some time. Now he is trying to survive in the nursing home. Your visit affirms his worth and brings a much needed smile.

THERE IS DANGER THAT YOU WILL MISS IT....

Did you know that taking too many vitamins is useless. Your body self-regulates. When it has enough vitamins it moves all the unnecessary vitamins through your kidneys. This is a very good control system.

Too much religion means too often means that everything is just pushed aside in people's lives. They do not have to work hard enough for it; they cast it aside, all the while staunching claiming to be spiritual.

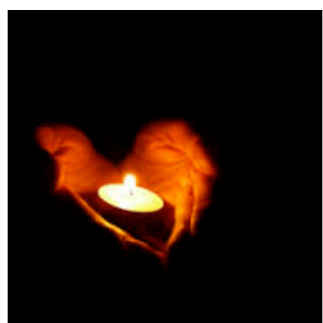
Advent needs the warning sign. "You might miss God this year." "Be alert."



Rubbing your feet at the end of the day

When we have been out running or working for a few hours our feet get sore. We need to spend a few moments at the end of the day rubbing down our feet. We want to get all the circulation going.

But, Lord, may my feet be sore at the end of the day because I walked to visit my elderly aunt, who no longer knows me, but it was so good just to sit with her in silence and hold her hand. May my sore feet come from human compassion.



Walk toward Bethlehem

The real Bethlehem was nothing like the Christmas crib we have created under our Christmas tree. The birth in Bethlehem also marked suffering and oppression. Mary and Joseph were forced to make this journey, to be registered for the sake of taxation.

Walk to the real Bethlehem wherever people are being exploited. Stand with the thousands of refugee families who have no country to move into. Stand with the parents who have lost their young adult children in senseless car accidents. Stand with families who have lost daughters that have never been located. Walk with the suffering to the real Bethlehem.