



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2011

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Make your way

Deserts and wildernesses can be beautiful, but they have an element of danger as well. They're good places to get lost for one thing, and in them you're vulnerable to forces of nature that are vastly more powerful than you. Sometimes, though, you have to travel through the trackless wastes to get where you want to go, and that's true spiritually as well. To reach the Promised Land, the Israelites had to walk through the desert; to return from Exile in Babylon they had to journey back to Jerusalem. John the Baptist called people out to the desert to repent. As you continue your Advent journey, remember that sometimes you have to walk through life's deserted stretches to arrive at the place where God is found.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8 (5)*

"Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!"

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5 ADVENT WEEKDAY

In praise of caretakers

When a person is seriously ill or injured, it is easy for the caretakers to get overlooked as we focus our sympathies and attention on the stricken person. But even when it is a labor of love, caretaking is hard work, unending and exhausting in many cases. Next time you visit an ill person, make it a point to offer the caretaker some concrete help: bring along a home-cooked meal, do the laundry, or spell them for an afternoon so they can run some errands or simply take some personal time. Let's take care of the caretakers in our midst—we will need them ourselves some day!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 5:17-26 (181)*

"Some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed."

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6 FEAST OF NICHOLAS, BISHOP

The people's bishop

Even if church leadership makes you tear your hair out sometimes, you've got to love this bishop. Nicholas was a fourth-century superhero: saving poor girls from prostitution by providing them with dowries, restoring murdered boys to life, advising sailors how to navigate through storms, rescuing men consigned to execution, feeding a city on the brink of famine—and in his spare time arguing against heresies at the Council of Nicaea. What a diocese this Turkish prelate must have run! Pray that your local leader might have the patronage and guidance of this great saint.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 40:1-11; Matthew 18:12-14 (182)*

"Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God."

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7

FEAST OF AMBROSE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

It's time for some fresh thinking

Like all great leaders, Saint Ambrose was an original thinker. He was an ardent advocate for the poor: "He who sent forth his apostles without gold had not need of gold to form his church. The church possesses gold, not to hoard, but to scatter abroad and come to the aid of the unfortunate." He also avoided rigidity when it was not helpful: "When I am in Milan, I fast; when I am in Rome, I do not." The answers to our current struggles with poverty and diversity are, like the kingdom of heaven, very near. We only need some original thinking to perceive them. In what

ways do "the ways things are" cloud our vision? How can we practice seeing with new eyes?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 40:25-31; Matthew 11:28-30 (183)*

"They will soar as with eagles' wings; they will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8 SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE

CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Conceive of this

The angel Gabriel addressed Mary as "full" of grace, with no place in her for sin, and while we are painfully aware that we are *not* full of love—that envy, pride, bitterness, and jealousy are within us as well—as Christians we believe that despite the sin-caused rift between humanity and God, God still chooses in our favor and gives us hope that all may yet be well. God's marvels not only enable virgins or elderly women to have babies but also let you and me respond to grace and ourselves become fertile with compassion and bearers of good news for the world.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (689)*

"I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9 ADVENT WEEKDAY

Get to know God's feminine side

Because we use the term "Father" so often to refer to God, we may forget that God is neither male nor female but rather ultimately beyond anything our human concepts and categories can express. Because we use words and images to communicate, however, it is good to remember that we have feminine as well as masculine ones we can use to talk about the divine. Feminine images primarily come from what's known as the Wisdom tradition, found in the latter half of Hebrew scripture in such books as Proverbs, Job, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon. In fact, *wisdom*, often portrayed as a woman, is mentioned 222 times in scripture, including by Jesus, so be sure to remember her in your own prayers!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 11:16-19 (185)*

"Wisdom is vindicated by her works."

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10 ADVENT WEEKDAY

Save a seat at the table

"The peculiar grace of a Shaker chair," Thomas Merton observed, "is due to the fact that it was made by someone capable of believing that an angel might come and sit on it." Merton was mystic enough not only to believe that but to describe to you the angel seated there. For centuries before Jesus, the people of Israel likewise waited for the return of a prophet who seemed more angelic than human: Elijah the wonderworker, who rode to heaven in a fiery chariot. At every Passover the Jewish community keeps a chair for Elijah at the table. How do you make room for the holy?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Matthew 17:9a, 10-13 (186)*

"In those days . . . there appeared the prophet Elijah whose words were as a flaming furnace."

©2011 by TrueQuest Communications, L.L.C. PHONE: 800-942-2811;

E-MAIL: mail@takefiveforfaith.com; WEBSITE: www.TakeFiveForFaith.com.

Licensed for noncommercial use. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotes come from the New American Bible.

Contributors: Alice Camille, Daniel Grippo, Father Larry Janowski, O.F.M., Ann O'Connor, Joel Schorn, Patrice J. Tuohy, Sister Julie Vieira, I.H.M.