

PASTORAL LETTER 8/I



from Bishop Jonathan Goodall
to the parishes and clergy of the See of Ebbsfleet

24 November 2020

Daily Prayers for the weeks of Advent

FIRST WEEK: from Sunday 29 November

Dear friends, dear brothers and sisters:

Each month now I have sent a letter to you to help encourage you and assure you of my prayers for you in our unprecedented situation. This month, the month of Advent, I want to invite you to do something different. I want to invite you, clergy and people of the parishes in the see of Ebbsfleet, to join in prayer with me as your bishop, prayer that is both personal and shared, so that we can be more united in heart and mind during the remaining weeks before Christmas. Each day—whatever the news, whatever is happening in daily life—please make space, either as part of your present prayer, or at another time, to read the daily Scripture verse from your Bible, and say the prayer ... slowly. (I've added in brackets the daily Gospel passage for those who prefer that). I shall say it each day at 12.00, perhaps after the Angelus, and I hope you will join me. May the Lord help us, despite all the fuss of our pre-Christmas lives, and the worries and bruises of the pandemic, *to focus our eyes on what is truly essential*. And I hope that this opening meditation will remain with you throughout.

Meditation

Every parent—especially every mother—yearns to see the face of any child that is being carried in the womb. It is a long process of expectation and waiting; it involves a longing and a desire that can no more be stifled than it can be stopped. Mary and Joseph and their small family circle must have longed and desired to see the face of Jesus in just this way – perhaps even more so given what had been prophesied about him. Mary was, we sing in one Christmas hymn, “Most blest to bring to human birth / *the Long-Desired of all the earth*’. During Advent, in some of our most loved hymns, the Church too remembers and sings about her longing and desire to see the Lord’s face when he comes again, and in our Christmas festivities we celebrate that we will not be disappointed: *we will* come to the goal of all human life — that is, to see God and be united with him for ever.

But for now it is like we are blind, like the ‘two blind men sitting by the roadside’ (in *Matthew* 20.30-34) who, ‘when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”’ Commenting on this passage in a sermon St Augustine says, the goal of ‘all of our work in this life’—all our Christian discipleship—is to restore to health the *eye of the heart* so that God may be seen”. Restoring to health the eye of our hearts. This is the purpose, he says, of the Sacraments, the preaching of the word, all our training and effort to live a good moral life, and all the changes that have to happen in our lives so that we may be rid of whatever prevents us from seeing God. That is also the purpose of these prayers.

Return to the Eucharist

From early Advent we will be able celebrate the Mass again together. Please go to church. Do not neglect to *gather together*: St Paul is always urging Christians *not to stay away* from the Eucharist. We need it! so that, although the Lord will come suddenly to those who cannot see, like a thief in the night (see *1 Thess* 5.4), ‘we shall see him as he is’ (*1 John* 3.2).

Yours devotedly:

29 November – **First Sunday of Advent** – Read *Revelation* 3.20 [or Gospel: *Mark* 13.33-37]

Open my heart

O JESUS, make my heart open to the word of God, make my heart open to goodness, make my heart open to the beauty of God every day, make my heart open to you. You knock at my heart to enter and grant me peace, peace of the soul. Let me open my heart to you! Amen. (Pope Francis)

30 November – Monday, Week I, St Andrew the Apostle – Read *St John* 3.16 [or Gospel: *Matt* 4.18-22]

Be my companion

O GOD, you gave us life and sent us your only Son to be with us at all times and in all places, so that we never have to feel lost in our struggles but always can trust that he walks with us. Let me not be afraid to let you—whose love is greater than our own hearts and minds can comprehend—be my companion. Amen. (Henri J M Nouwen)

1 December – Tuesday, Week I – Read *St Matthew* 24.43-44 [or Gospel: *Luke* 10.21-24]

Prepare for His coming

O JESUS, I am forever preparing for your arrival. I hunger for your presence, yet I do not take the time to wait for your coming, and to my great sorrow, you never arrive. Because I refuse to be silent, I cannot hear you. Because I refuse to wait for you, you cannot come. Amen. (Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB)

2 December – Wednesday, Week I – Read *St Luke* 3.4-5 [or Gospel: *Matt* 15.29-37]

Make straight His way

GRACIOUS GOD, inspire me this Advent to make straight my ways so that you can come to me and our world. Help me to be aware of the rough ways in my relationships with family, friends and strangers, and smooth out the bumps so that you can be more present in me. By all these Advent works may I prepare a way for a truly holy Christmas. Amen. (Edward Hays)

3 December – Thursday, Week I – Read *St John* 13.34 [or Gospel: *Matt* 7.21, 24-27]

Loving one another

LOVING FATHER, teach me to see Jesus in the members of my family, especially in any distressing disguise or need. May we love one another as you love each one of us, more and more each day, and forgive each other's faults as you forgive our sins. Help me to take whatever you give, and give whatever you take, with a big smile. Amen. (St Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

4 December – Friday, Week I – Read *St Mark* 4.9 [or Gospel: *Matt* 9.21.31]

Open my ears

O GOD, you speak to me in all the events of my life and not merely in times of formal prayer. Everything that happens, everything that I do, is a revelation of you. Help me learn to listen with attention and sensitivity, so my life becomes an encounter with you and all events become prayer. Amen. (Thomas H. Green, SJ)

5 December – Saturday, Week I – Read *Psalms* 139.13-14 [or Gospel: *Matt* 9.35-10.1, 6-8]

You know me Lord

O GOD, you know me through and through. You love me as I am. You also know what challenges me, how I need to continue to grow, to constantly be more transformed. Join my heart to the wideness of your love. Take me to all who await my compassion and attention. Amen. (Joyce Rupp, OSM)

Week I *The prayers have been drawn from the following published works:* Henri J.M. Nouwen, *¡Gracias!* (Harper & Row, 1983) Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB, *Seasons of Your Heart* (HarperCollins, 1991) Edward Hays, *Make Straight the Crooked Ways: Daily Reflections for Advent* (Forest of Peace/Ave Maria Press, 2005) Thomas H. Green, SJ, *Opening to God* (Ave Maria, 2006) Joyce Rupp, OSM, *A Simple Path* (Ballantine Books, 1995)