

PASTORAL LETTER 8/2



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

24 November 2020

Daily Prayers for the weeks of Advent

SECOND WEEK: from Sunday 6 December

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:

6 December – **Second Sunday of Advent** – Read *Psalm 119.41* [or Gospel: *Mark 1.1-8*]

Longing for Your Love

O GOD, open my heart to the one who knocks, to accept Christ into the very depths of my being. The deepest longing of my heart is for love—for human love and divine love. Help me not to shut it out or slam the door so that even you cannot enter. Amen. (William Johnston)

7 December – Monday, Week 2 – Read *Psalm 146.8* [or Gospel: *Luke 5.17-26*]

Heal my blindness

O JESUS, you come to heal my blindness, and blindness in regard to sin is my chief blindness. Help me to choose to see myself, my life, my past and present as they are, and keep me from choosing not to see—or not to see very much. Amen. (Ruth Burrows, OCD)

8 December – Tuesday, Week 2, **Immaculate Conception** – Read *Psalm 79.8* [or Gospel: *Luke 1.26-38*]

Meet me now

O GOD, you speak to me in ways I can understand and can meet me at any time, no matter how things may seem. If you meet me where I am, then where I am is a place to meet you. I don't have to wait because you are ready to meet me – now. Amen. (James Martin, SJ)

9 December – Wednesday, Week 2 – Read *Romans 12.9-10* [or Gospel: *Matt 11.28-30*]

Seeking a new way

O GOD, help me to treasure your Word and look to it for alternatives to what the world and nations say should be my response to any situation. Help me to tell stories of hope, of resurrection and new life, of justice and peace, and refuse to be caught in the trap of criticism or violence. Amen. (Megan McKenna)

10 December – Thursday, Week 2 – Read *Psalm 9.1* [or Gospel: *Matt 11.11-15*]

Come to me anew

O GOD, I praise and thank you for all your blessings and gifts, especially Christmas. You come to us in Jesus made flesh in the womb of Mary. May your Holy Spirit enlighten me to see that you love me and give me the great gift of your own Son. Amen. (Charles E. Miller, CM)

11 December – Friday, Week 2 – Read *2 Corinthians 5.17* [or Gospel: *Matt 11.16-19*]

Seeking a new beginning

O GOD, I hope for a new creation, a new beginning. The future is open-ended. When everything I value seems to be falling apart, you may be moving me toward a future I cannot imagine. The destruction of one shape my life has taken, so as to give it a new shape. Amen. (Macrina Scott, OSF)

12 December – Saturday, Week 2 – Read *Ephesians 3.16-17* [or Gospel: *Matt 17.10-13*]

Change my heart

O JESUS, so often I forget that you never want human suffering, but peace. By your Spirit you dwell in me. Let it penetrate the harsh and rocky ground of my heart, and prepare me to be a bearer of reconciliation wherever you may place me, to let a ray of hope shine through in our world. Amen. (Brother Roger of Taizé)

Week 2 The prayers have been drawn from the following published works: William Johnston, *Christian Mysticism Today* (Harper & Row, 1984) Ruth Burrows, OCD, *The Watchful Heart* (Dimension Books, 1998) James Martin, SJ, *The Jesuit Guide to (Practically) Everything* (HarperCollins, 2010) Megan McKenna, *And Morning Came: Scriptures of the Resurrection* (Sheed & Ward, 2004) Charles E. Miller, CM, *Opening the Treasures* (Alba House, 1982) Macrina Scott, OSF, *Bible Stories Revisited* (Tau Books, 2013) Brother Roger of Taizé, *Awakened from Within* (Doubleday, 1987)