

ADVENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
WISDOM

— *from* —

POPE FRANCIS

Daily Scripture and Prayers Together
With Pope Francis' Own Words

John Cleary



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Day

1



We Are a Gift to One Another

We cannot live without facing challenges, without responding to challenges. Whoever does not face challenges, whoever does not take up challenges, is not living. Your willingness and your abilities, combined with the power of the Holy Spirit who abides in each of us from the day of baptism, allow you to be more than mere spectators, they allow you to be protagonists in contemporary events. Please do not watch life go by from the balcony! Mingle where the challenges are calling you to help carry life and development forward, in the struggle over human dignity, in the fight against poverty, in the battle for values and in the many battles we encounter each day....May the commitment to journeying in faith and behaving in a manner consistent with the Gospel accompany you this Advent Season.

FRANCIS' HOMILY, CELEBRATION OF VESPERS WITH STUDENTS OF
ROMAN ATHENUMS, VATICAN BASILICA, FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT,
NOVEMBER 30, 2013

SCRIPTURE

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be serious and sober for prayers. Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 PETER 4:7–11

PRAYER

Good and generous God, you give me everything I have and everything I need. You have loved me into existence as part of your divine plan, you have blessed me with unique gifts, and you have graced me with patience and perseverance as I have honed and developed these gifts so as to praise your name, comfort others, and glorify your creation on earth. May I be a gift from you to everyone I meet. I pray that the challenges I encounter deepen my bond with you as I employ those gifts and talents with which you have graced me in overcoming these challenges. May my efforts require your grace all the more and, in doing so, bring me ever closer to you in the relationship we share. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

So often we hear (or say to ourselves) that the Christmas season has become so commercialized through the buying and giving of presents that its true meaning has been lost. That point is well made, as commercials tell us to hustle to the mall and buy jewelry for her, a bike for him, or the latest-and-greatest techno gadget for them. However, let us remember that Christmas is indeed about gift giving. What gift was given to us beneath a star in a manger more than 2,000 years ago? Forget about the material gifts and remember the *real* gift: God giving himself to us through the Incarnation.

For the next five to ten minutes, reflect on yourself as a gift to those in your life. In how many ways and to how many people can you—throughout this Advent and Christmas season—become a gift from God to those you know and to those you do not?



Day

2



Create an Open Space Within

The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor....

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord” (Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, May 9, 1975). The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step toward Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.

FRANCIS' APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 2–3,
NOVEMBER 24, 2013

SCRIPTURE

*A clean heart create for me, God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit.
Do not drive me from before your face,
nor take from me your holy spirit...
For you do not desire sacrifice or I would give it;
a burnt offering you would not accept.
My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;
a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn.*

PSALM 51:12–13; 18–19

PRAYER

God of action and passionate love, your grace surrounds us, awaiting the smallest crevice by which to enter and break down the walls that divide us. Our free will is a great gift from you. It allows us to freely choose the good—the greatest good—over everything that is less. Let us seek our pleasure in the Lord, the greatest of all goods, and not in lesser things that wither and die. You desire action from me, love in action; not words and empty promises. Lord, may my life be one of action, where everything I have to give I give with a commitment to you, with an aim toward the ever-deepening communion you seek between you and your creation. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

A quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is this beauty: “Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.” Whether he actually said this or not is open to question, but what a challenge to those of us who enjoy dispensing advice, talking incessantly about what we could do or should do, and judging the words and actions of others. How much harder is it to evangelize without words or open our hearts to God’s grace and allow that power to energize and activate our love for God?

Today or tomorrow, open your heart and let God’s grace guide your actions and feed your courage when you see an opportunity to act as Jesus would toward a person in need. The grace of God’s love will guide you when the time is right; you need only be open to it.



Day

3



The Light of Faith Is Our Star

The light of Faith: this is how the Church’s tradition speaks of the great gift brought by Jesus. In John’s Gospel, Christ says of himself: “I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (John 12:46). Saint Paul uses the same image: “God who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 4:6). The pagan world, which hungered for light, had seen the growth of the cult of the sun god, *Sol Invictus*, invoked each day at sunrise. Yet though the sun was born anew each morning, it was clearly incapable of casting its light on all of human existence. The sun does not illumine all reality; its rays cannot penetrate to the shadow of death, the place where men’s eyes are closed to its light. “No one—Saint Justin Martyr writes—has ever been ready to die for his faith in the sun” (*Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo*, 121, 2: PG 6, 758)....Those who believe, see; they see with a light that illumines their entire journey, for it comes from the risen Christ, the morning star which never sets.

FRANCIS’ ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LUMEN FIDEI*, 1,

JUNE 29, 2013

SCRIPTURE

After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

MATTHEW 2:9–11

PRAYER

Innocent and holy Infant Jesus, as we await the celebration of your birth, we see there are many lights in the night sky that attract our attention, sometimes enticing us away from you. When we see a dazzling array of gifts, our selfish nature shifts our attention back onto ourselves and away from you. During this holy season of Advent we ask that you keep our eyes trained on the star that leads to you, where we might contemplate the holy mystery of the Incarnation, that moment in history when God reunited with man and overcame the rift of sin that had divided us for so long. May we find Jesus where we seek him and may we do him homage when we find him. May we always follow the true light of Christ and never the lesser or artificial lights that lead us astray. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

This Advent season, pay particular attention to those “false lights” that often insidiously distract us from the True Light, the coming of the Christ Child. Stay alert! Beware! It’s more than just television commercials, the demands of our electronic devices, and window shopping. Sometimes it’s gossip masquerading as idle parish conversation. There are myriad bells and whistles, enticements and desires that draw our attention away from what should be the priority of this liturgical season—the deepening of our relationship with Jesus.

Before you react to an enticement, ask yourself if this is something that brings you closer to God and deepens your intimacy with him as your friend.



Day

4



*Jesus Is With Us in Our
Suffering and Sorrow*

*J*he presence of God among men did not take place in a perfect, idyllic world but rather in this real world, which is marked by so many things both good and bad, by division, wickedness, poverty, arrogance and war. He chose to live in our history as it is, with all the weight of its limitations and of its tragedies. In doing so, he has demonstrated in an unequalled manner his merciful and truly loving disposition toward the human creature. He is God-with-us. Jesus is God-with-us. Do you believe this? Together let us profess: Jesus is God with us! Jesus is God with us always and forever with us in history's suffering and sorrow. The Birth of Jesus reveals that God "sided" with man once and for all, to save us, to raise us from the dust of our misery, from our difficulty, from our sins.

FRANCIS, GENERAL AUDIENCE, ST. PETER'S SQUARE,
DECEMBER 18, 2013

SCRIPTURE

*And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.*

JOHN 1:14

PRAYER

Holy Father, you sent your only Son for our salvation—that's how much you love us. That's how much you desired to make whole what was broken by man's original sin. Jesus arrived in this world as a person of very little means, into a humble family living among the poor, the uneducated, and the lost. We were sent a shepherd for lost sheep, a doctor for those in need of healing. He revealed your glory and your love for mankind throughout his life and by his death. By his resurrection, death and sin were defeated. Every aspect of human existence was made sacred, including death, and the Father's desire to share life with his creation after death was completed through the Son. For this love we proclaim the name and the love of God in word and deed. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Sometime today or tomorrow, find ten minutes of quiet time and reread John 1:6–18. Even though he only appears in the New Testament, John the Baptist is often referred to as the last prophet of the Old Testament. He is the final prophet to precede Jesus and he testifies to Jesus' glory. Reflect during this time on the deep, deep love our Creator has for you that he would share in our human condition through the Incarnation and dwell with us in his earthly life to reveal the love and desire of his Father in heaven, that—if only we have faith and believe in the Son—we will sit in the Father's presence for all eternity. Reflect on the desire for relationship God has for you, the love he has for you, and the want for intimate friendship in this life and in the next.



Day
5



*Growth in Communion Through
Sacraments, Charisms, and Charity*

We grow in unity, in communion, through the Sacraments, the charisms given to each of us by the Holy Spirit, and charity.

First of all, the communion of the Sacraments. The Sacraments express and realize an effective and profound communion among us, for in them we encounter Christ the Saviour and, through him, our brothers and sisters in faith....A second aspect of communion in holy things is the communion of charisms. The Holy Spirit distributes to the faithful a multitude of spiritual gifts and graces.... The charisms...are gifts that the Holy Spirit gives us, talents, possibilities....Gifts given not to be hidden but to be shared with others. [Then] we come to the third aspect of communion in holy things, that is, communion in charity, the unity among us that creates charity, love.

FRANCIS, GENERAL AUDIENCE, ST. PETER'S SQUARE,
NOVEMBER 6, 2013

SCRIPTURE

Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8–13

PRAYER

Lord God, we often speak of growing in communion, in intimate friendship, with you. Sometimes we view the world as too filthy a place for such unity. We might even believe such closeness with you can be fostered only within a vacuum, separate from this world with all of its shortcomings. Then we recall that you, as divine, entered this world, nurtured friendships, and revealed love daily among every sort of person. You showed us the way. Our communion with you is deepened through the pleasure of our communion with our brothers and sisters. Whether it is through the sacraments, charisms, or charity, when we deepen our communion with other believers we deepen our communion with you, the one in whose image we are all made. You show us how we are to love others, and you grace us with the ability to do so. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Fostering communion with our fellow brothers and sisters is at times gratifying, challenging, spiritually deepening, frustrating, fun, and just plain hard work.

Reflect on the ways in which you foster communion with your parish community. Are there any gifts of the Holy Spirit you're holding back for any reason? Perhaps you're not even aware you have certain gifts. Spend time in prayer today or tomorrow, considering all the gifts you've been given. Perhaps you focus more on some than others. Consider the simplest gifts you can offer another: your presence, your ability to listen, your support and encouragement, your smile, your prayer, your attention, or your caring.

