



JESUS

PRINCE
OF PEACE

DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT

POPE FRANCIS & POPE LEO XIV

After this Christmas season we end our Jubilee year of hope with the closing of the Holy Door of St. Peter's in Rome. This year has been a journey of our transformation into better followers of Christ. This year we also experienced Pope Francis's death and Pope Leo's election. Now Advent invites us to consider the comings of Jesus—past, present and future—to walk with us on our earthly journey. And one goal of that journey is to continue to proclaim the gospel message of a new world, not as it is now, but as God desires it to be: a kingdom of dignity and truth, justice and peace, right relationships and harmony in which God's blessings are distributed to all God's children.

As Pope Francis noted, "We need to cultivate a strong sense of justice, to discern and to do God's will. Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns ruthless, our style of life should instead be devout, filled with empathy, compassion and mercy, drawn daily from the wellspring of prayer." And Pope Leo reminded us that "The path to peace demands hearts and minds trained in concern for others and capable of perceiving the common good in today's world. The road to peace involves everyone and leads to the fostering of right relationships between all living beings."

So each day this Advent, using these reflections of Popes Francis and Leo, our meditation on the selected Scripture passages, our prayer of intimate conversation with God, and our actions in imitation of God and Jesus, we hope you draw closer to the One who calls us to intimacy, who always walks with us, and who wants desperately to be with us. Jesus, the "Prince of Peace." (Is 9:6.)

—Steve Mueller, *Editor*

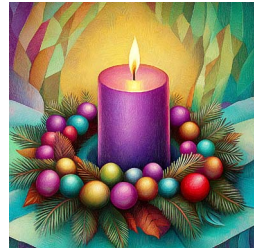
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

All reflections from Pope Francis and Pope Leo are adapted from their papal encyclicals, bulls, apostolic exhortations, weekly audiences, addresses, messages, homilies, letters and books.

ADVENT: A SEASON OF EXPECTATION & HOPE

*“Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.”
(Romans 5:5)*

Advent, which prepares us for Christmas, is a time of expectation and hope in which we focus our attention on our encounter with Jesus, first during our life and then at its end when we will meet him face to face. For a Christian the most important thing is the continuous encounter with the Lord, our being with the Lord until we ultimately meet him at our death. The Lord comes every day, so that, with his grace, we might accomplish good in our own lives and in the lives of others.



Our God is a God-who-comes continually. Our waiting will not be disappointed by God who never disappoints. God might perhaps make us wait a few moments in the dark to allow our expectation to ripen, but God never disappoints. The Lord always comes to be by our side. At times God does not make himself seen, but God always comes.

Thus, particularly in this season of Advent, which is the time of waiting, in which we prepare ourselves to welcome once again the comforting mystery of the Incarnation and the light of Christmas, it is important to reflect on hope. We must not let hope abandon us, because God, with his love, walks with us. Let us allow the Lord to teach us what it means to hope.

—Pope Francis

*What do I most want to happen this Advent
to deepen my experience of God in my life?*

HOPING AND WAITING FOR CHRIST TO COME

*“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope.
For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what
we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:24-25)*

Jesus’ parable of the laborers waiting to be hired (Matthew 20:1-16) gives us hope in our Advent waiting. At times we cannot find meaning for our lives: we feel useless, inadequate, just like the laborers waiting for someone to hire them to work. Perhaps they did not arrive in time, others appeared before them or problems held them up elsewhere. Jesus tells us though that this particular landowner goes out several times during the day to hire those who are waiting. The laborers still waiting had probably given up all hope. That day had come to nothing.

But someone still believed in them. What point is there to take on laborers only for the last hour of the working day? And yet, even when it seems we are able to do little in life, it is always worthwhile. There is always the possibility to find meaning, because God loves our life. God wants to give his Kingdom, that is, full, eternal and happy life, to everyone. And this is what Jesus does with us: he does not establish rankings, he gives all of himself to those who open their hearts to him. So respond enthusiastically to the Lord who calls us to work in his vineyard. Even in the dark moments of life, when time passes without giving us the answers we seek, let us ask the Lord who will come out again and find us where we are waiting for him. He is generous, and he will come soon!

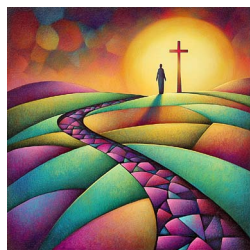
—Pope Leo

*What do I most hope for as a result of Christ’s presence
in me and my life now?*

DRAW NEARER TO JESUS THIS ADVENT

*“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:20)*

In Advent we recall that Jesus no longer belongs to the past, but lives in the present and is projected towards the future. God’s newness appears to us as victory over sin, evil and death, over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human.



Let the risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk. You won’t be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don’t be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you. He is with you and will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.

We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. It is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his gospel as to try to do so by our own lights.

—Pope Francis

*What most keeps me at a distance and afraid
to let Jesus’ presence change my life?*

LISTENING CAREFULLY TO GOD'S WORD

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." (Matthew 7:24)

The Risen Christ, present among us, protects and guides the Church, and continues to fill her with hope through the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). It is up to us to be docile listeners to his voice and faithful ministers of his plan of salvation, mindful that God loves to communicate himself, not in the roar of thunder and earthquakes, but in the "whisper of a gentle breeze" (1 Kings 19:12) or, as some translate it, in a "sound of sheer silence" or "a light silent sound."

It is important for all of us to learn how to listen more, to enter into dialogue. First and foremost, with the Lord: always listen to the Word of God. Then also listen to others, to know how to build bridges and to know how to listen without judging, not closing the doors thinking that we have all the truth and no-one else can tell us anything. It is very important to listen to the voice of the Lord, to listen to it, in this dialogue, and to see where the Lord is calling us towards. Peace begins with each one of us: in the way we look at others, listen to others and speak about others.

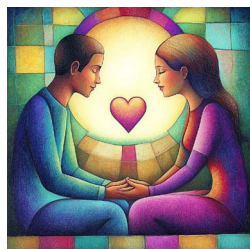
—Pope Leo

How might I listen more attentively to those who speak to me today?

THE ART OF LISTENING AND NOT JUST HEARING

*“O that today you would listen to God’s voice!
Do not harden your hearts.” (Psalm 95:7-8)*

Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompanying others, are familiar with processes that call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit. We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God’s love and to bring to fruition what God has sown in our lives



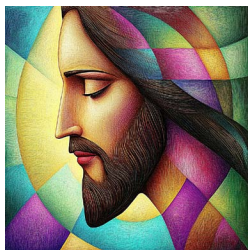
All evangelization is based on God’s Word—listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the Word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity. God’s Word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the gospel in daily life.

—Pope Francis

*How might I set aside more time to listen to God’s Word
and use it to guide my life?*

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)



In response to Jesus' question, Peter expressed for himself and all the disciples, the claim that the Church has preserved, deepened and handed on for two thousand years. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He is the one Savior, who alone reveals the face of the Father. In order to make himself close and accessible to men and women, God revealed himself to us in the trusting eyes of a child, in the lively mind of a young person and in the mature features of an adult, finally appearing to his disciples after the resurrection with his glorious body.

Jesus thus showed us a model of human holiness that we can all imitate, together with the promise of an eternal destiny that transcends all our limits and abilities. Peter, in his response, understands both of these things: the gift of God and the path to follow in order to allow himself to be changed by that gift. They are two inseparable aspects of salvation entrusted to the Church to be proclaimed for the good of the human race. For we are the people whom God has chosen as his own, so that we may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

—Pope Leo

How would I answer Jesus' question right now in my life?

HOW TO LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

*"Let my cry come before you, O LORD;
give me understanding according to your word." (Psalm 119:169)*

The first step, after calling upon the Holy Spirit in prayer, is to give our entire attention to the biblical text. Whenever we stop and attempt to understand the message of a particular text, we are practicing "reverence for the truth." This is the humility of heart which recognizes that the Word is always beyond us, that we are neither its masters or owners, but its guardians, heralds and servants. This attitude of humble and awe-filled veneration of the Word is expressed by taking the time to study it with the greatest care and a holy fear lest we distort it.

To interpret a biblical text, we need to be patient, to put aside all other concerns, and to give it our time, interest and undivided attention. We must leave aside any other pressing concerns and create an environment of serene concentration. It is useless to attempt to read a biblical text if all we are looking for are quick, easy and immediate results. We only devote periods of quiet time to the things or the people whom we love; and here we are speaking of the God whom we love, a God who wishes to speak to us. Because of this love, we can take as much time as we need, like every true disciple: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9).

—Pope Francis

*How might I turn my full attention to God's Word
in my prayer and reflection?*

GUIDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

“The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.”
(John 14:26)



Jesus assures us that we are not alone in making our decisions in life. The Spirit sustains us and shows us the way to follow, “teaching” us and “reminding” us of all that Jesus said to us. First, the Spirit teaches us the Lord’s words by impressing them deep within us, written, as the biblical image would have it, no longer on tablets of stone but in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). This gift helps us grow and become “a letter of Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:3) for one another.

We reflect in our hearts upon what we have experienced and learned, in order to understand more fully its meaning and to savor its beauty. Naturally, the more we let ourselves be convinced and transformed by the Gospel—allowing the power of the Spirit to purify our heart, to make our words straightforward, our desires honest and clear, and our actions generous—the more capable we are of proclaiming its message. Let us live our faith, feeling in our heart that Jesus Christ is present and to know that He always accompanies us on our journey.

In Advent we are deeply aware of this closeness of God, of his Spirit who joins our lives to that of Jesus. We are caught up in the new things that God brings about, so that his desire for the fullness of life will prevail over the power of death.

—Pope Leo

What and how has the Holy Spirit been teaching and guiding me during my prayer and reflection this Advent?

LISTENING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth...it remains with you, and will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

The Holy Spirit teaches us to see with the eyes of Christ, to live life as Christ lived, to understand life as Christ understood it. That is why the living water, who is the Holy Spirit, quenches our life, why he tells us that we are loved by God as children, that we can love God as his children and that by his grace we can live as children of God, like Jesus. And we, do we listen to the Holy Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit tell us? He says: God loves you. God likes you. Do we truly love God and others, as Jesus does?

Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, let us allow him to speak to our heart and say this to us: God is love, God is waiting for us, God is Father, who loves us as a true father loves, who loves us truly, and only the Holy Spirit can tell us this in our hearts. Let us hear the Holy Spirit, let us listen to the Holy Spirit and may we move forward on this path of love, mercy and forgiveness. We must listen to the Holy Spirit who is within us, hear him. What is he telling us? That God is good, that God is Father, that God loves us, that God always forgives us. Let's listen to what the Holy Spirit is teaching us.

—Pope Francis

How has the Holy Spirit been prompting me to draw nearer to Jesus this Advent?

THE GIFT AND CHALLENGE OF PEACE

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”
(Matthew 5:9)*

All too often we consider peace a “negative” word, indicative only of the absence of war and conflict, since opposition is a perennial part of human nature, frequently leading us to live in a constant “state of conflict” at home, at work and in society. Peace then appears simply as a respite, a pause between one dispute and another, given that, no matter how hard we try, tensions will always be present, a little like embers burning beneath the ashes, ready to ignite at any moment.

From a Christian perspective peace is first and foremost a gift. It is the first gift of Christ: “My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). Yet it is an active and demanding gift. It engages and challenges each of us, regardless of our cultural background or religious affiliation, demanding first of all that we work on ourselves. Peace is built in the heart and from the heart, by eliminating pride and vindictiveness and carefully choosing our words. For words too, not only weapons, can wound and even kill. This effort, in which all of us are called to take part, can begin to eliminate the root causes of all conflicts and every destructive urge for conquest. It demands a genuine willingness to engage in dialogue, inspired by the desire to communicate rather than clash.

—Pope Leo

*How might I make more sure that my words are not weapons
to wound and hurt others today?*

GOD WANTS TO HEAL US

*“As you go, proclaim the good news:
‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” (Matthew 10:7)*

Jesus does not want to act alone, he came to bring the love of God into the world and he wants to spread it in the style of communion and brotherhood. That is why he immediately forms a community of disciples, which is a missionary community. He trains them straight away for the mission to go forth.



But pay attention: their purpose is not to socialize and spend time together but to proclaim the God's Kingdom, and this is urgent! And it is still urgent today! There is no time to be lost in gossip, no need to wait for everyone's consensus but to go out and proclaim. To all people you bring the peace of Christ, and if they do not welcome it, you go ahead just the same. To the sick you bring healing, because God wants to heal us of every evil. Do not live for yourselves, but live to go forth and do good! Everyone must be a missionary, everyone can hear that call of Jesus and go forth and proclaim the Kingdom!

Don't be afraid of joy! That joy which the Lord gives us when we allow him to enter our life. Let us allow him to enter our lives and invite us to go out to the margins of life and proclaim the Gospel. Don't be afraid of joy. Have joy and courage!

—Pope Francis

*What one thing might I do today to spread the joyful message
of Christ's healing power?*

YEARNING FOR THE GIFT OF PEACE

*“Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give it to you as the world gives it.” (John 14:27).*



Christ's peace is not the sepulchral silence that reigns after conflict; it is not the fruit of oppression, but rather a gift that is meant for all, a gift that brings new life. Let us pray for this peace, which is reconciliation, forgiveness, and the courage to turn the page and start anew.

Now is a time of conversion and renewal and, above all, an opportunity to leave conflicts behind and embark on a new path, confident that, by working together, each of us in accordance with his or her own sensibilities and responsibilities, can build a world in which everyone can lead an authentically human life in truth, justice and peace.

This effort, in which all of us are called to take part, can begin to eliminate the root causes of all conflicts and every destructive urge for conquest. It demands a genuine willingness to engage in dialogue, inspired by the desire to communicate rather than clash. Thank God for all those who, in silence, prayer and self-sacrifice, are sowing seeds of peace.

—Pope Leo

*How might my daily life most change because of my desire
for greater union with God?*

THREE ACTIONS FOR DEEPENING OUR CHRISTIAN JOY

*“I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice,
and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16:22)*

For almost two weeks already, the season of Advent has been calling us to spiritual vigilance in preparation to welcome the Lord who is to come. Today, we note another interior attitude by which to live out this time of waiting for the Lord—joy. The Church looks forward to the joy of Christmas and so in order to have this joy in preparation for Christmas, first, pray: “Lord, let me live this Christmas with true joy.” Not with the joy of consumerism that leads me to Christmas with anxiety, because “ah, I’m missing this, or I’m missing that.” No, this is not the joy of God. Second, give thanks to the Lord for the good things God has given us. Third, think of how we can go to others, to those in difficulty or sick or with other problems—to bring a little healing, peace, joy. This is the joy of the Christian.

We have just over two weeks left, so in these days, let us pray asking for the joy of Christmas. Let us give thanks to God for the good things that God has given us, above all our faith. This is a wonderful grace. Let us think where we can go to bring a little relief, a little peace, to those who suffer. Pray, give thanks and help others. And so we will arrive at the birth of the Anointed One, the Christ, as ones anointed in grace, prayer and acts of grace and help towards others.

—Pope Francis

*How might I practice these 3 actions to deepen my Christmas joy
and share it with others?*

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

“Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!” (Mark 1:15)

Today we see too much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference, and an economic paradigm that exploits the Earth’s resources and marginalizes the poorest. For our part, we want to be a small leaven of unity, communion and fraternity within the world. We want to say to the world, with humility and joy: Look to Christ! Come closer to him! Welcome his word that enlightens and consoles! Listen to his offer of love and become his one family: in the one Christ, we are one.

This is the path to follow together, among ourselves but also with our sister Christian churches, with those who follow other religious paths, with those who are searching for God, with all women and men of good will, in order to build a new world where peace reigns! This is the missionary spirit that must animate us; not closing ourselves off in our small groups, nor feeling superior to the world. We are called to offer God’s love to everyone, in order to achieve that unity which does not cancel out differences but values the personal history of each person and the social and religious culture of every people.

—Pope Leo

What peace and reconciliation do I most long for to occur this Advent?

NOTHING CAN TAKE AWAY OUR JOY

*“Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn,
but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain
will turn into joy.” (John 16:22)*

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent, called *Gaudete* Sunday, the Sunday of joy. The joy of the gospel cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything. The evils of our world—and those of the Church—must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervor. Let us look upon them as challenges that can help us grow. With the eyes of faith, we can see the light that the Holy Spirit always radiates in the midst of darkness, never forgetting that “where sin increased, grace has abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20).



One of the more serious temptations that stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism that turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “sourpusses.” While painfully aware of our own frailties, we have to march on without giving in, keeping in mind what the Lord said to St. Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross that is at the same time a victorious banner borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil. The evil spirit of defeatism is brother to the temptation to separate, before its time, the wheat from the weeds. It is the fruit of an anxious and self-centered lack of trust.

—Pope Francis

*What most keeps me from living more joyfully
because of God’s presence in my life?*

CALLED TO WITNESS THE PROMISE OF TRUE PEACE

“The kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit; whoever serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by others.” (Romans 14:17-18)

We are living in times that are both difficult to navigate and to recount. But each of us, in our different roles and services, must face the challenges posed by the times. Our world, wounded by war, violence and injustice, needs to hear the Gospel message of God’s love and peace and to experience the reconciling power of Christ’s grace.

Evangelization is not our attempt to conquer the world, but to offer an example that radiates from lives transformed by the Kingdom of God. It is the way of the Beatitudes, a path that we tread together, between the “already” and the “not yet,” hungering and thirsting for justice, poor in spirit, merciful, meek, pure of heart, men and women of peace. Jesus himself chose this path.

We are all increasingly called to open ourselves to the world, to proclaim the word and to become a leaven of harmony for humanity. This does not set us apart but unites us to humanity like the yeast in a mass of dough, which causes it to rise. In a divided and troubled world, the Holy Spirit teaches us to walk together in unity, not greedily exploiting this world, but cultivating it and protecting it so that once we no longer act as predators but as pilgrims the earth will rest, justice will prevail, the poor will rejoice and peace will return.

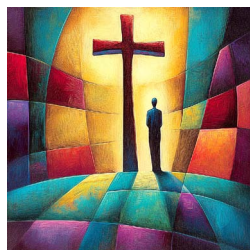
—Pope Leo

*How might my example most proclaim the good news
of God’s ruling presence in our world?*

STANDING BEFORE JESUS WITH AN OPEN HEART

"We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us." (1 John 1:3)

The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus that we have received, the experience of salvation urging us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, point him out, make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence.



Standing before Jesus with open hearts, letting him look at us, we see that gaze of love that the disciples glimpsed when he called them. How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life!

The best incentive for sharing the gospel message comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. We need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us realize anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure that makes us more human and helps us lead a new life. There is nothing more precious that we can give to others.

—Pope Francis

*How might I set aside more time each day to read
and pray over the Gospels?*

CALLED TO BE FISHERS LIKE JESUS

“Jesus saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, who were fishermen. He said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’”

(Matthew 4:18-19)



Jesus began the mission he received from the Father to be a “fisher” of humanity in order to draw it up from the waters of evil and death, by walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. There he called Peter and the other first disciples to be, like him, “fishers of men.” After the resurrection, it was up to them to carry on this mission, to cast their nets again and again, to bring the hope of the Gospel into the “waters” of the world, to sail the seas of life so that all may experience God’s embrace.

Their ministry was never a question of capturing others by force, by religious propaganda or by means of power. Christian life is not a set of rules to be kept, but the marvelous experience of encountering Jesus who gives himself to us. As Jesus’ followers today, we are also called to participate in this same ministry and to cast our nets into the sea and become “fishers” of families, of couples, of young people, of children, of women and men of all ages and circumstances, so that all may encounter the one Savior. Let us learn how to walk with them and to help them embrace the faith and become in turn “fishers” of other families.

—Pope Leo

*How might I find some way to share my experience
of encountering Jesus with someone today?*

GROWING IN CHRIST

*“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43:7)*

The Christian life calls for ongoing formation and maturation. Evangelization aims at a process of growth which entails taking seriously each person and God’s plan for his or her life. All of us need to grow in Christ. Evangelization should stimulate a desire for this growth, so that each of us can say wholeheartedly: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

It would not be right to see this call to growth exclusively or primarily in terms of doctrinal formation. It has to do with “observing” all that the Lord has shown us as the way of responding to his love. Along with the virtues, this means above all the new commandment, the first and the greatest of the commandments, and the one that best identifies us as Christ’s disciples: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

This process of response and growth is always preceded by the Father’s free gift which makes us his sons and daughters, and the priority of the gift of his grace enables that constant sanctification which pleases God and gives him glory. In this way, we allow ourselves to be transformed in Christ through a life lived “according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:5).

—Pope Francis

*How have I most experienced growing in Christ during
this Advent season?*

IMITATING JESUS' NONVIOLENT WAYS

*"You have heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father."
(Matthew 5:43-45)*

All too much violence exists in the world and our societies. Amid wars, terrorism, human trafficking and widespread aggression, our children and young people need to be able to experience the culture of life, dialogue, and mutual respect. Above all, they need the witness of men and women who embody a different and non-violent way of living. From local and everyday situations up to the international order, whenever those who have suffered injustice and violence resist the temptation to seek revenge, they become the most credible agents of non-violent peacebuilding processes.

Non-violence, as a method and a style, must distinguish our decisions, our relationships and our actions. The Gospel and the example of Jesus are a constant source of support for Christians in this effort. They can also act as a compass for everyone, since the fostering of a culture of peace is a task entrusted to us, who must advance it through reflection and actions inspired by the dignity of the person and the common good. Let us always seek to be ourselves the witness that offers hope to the world. A world that suffers a great deal of pain due to wars, violence and poverty! But the Lord asks us as Christians always to be this living witness. Let us live our faith, feeling in our heart that Jesus Christ is present and to know that He always accompanies us on our journey.

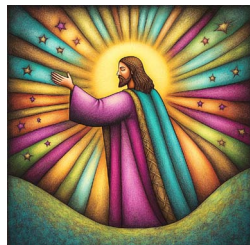
—Pope Leo

*How might I extend myself to reconcile
with someone hard to get along with?*

ALL THINGS ARE ONE IN CHRIST

“Christ is our peace....He came and preached peace to those far off and those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” (Ephesians 2:14, 17)

Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners. They lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, resolve it and make it a link in the chain of a new process.



Christ has made all things one in himself: heaven and earth, God and humanity, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society. The sign of this unity and reconciliation of all things in him is peace. The Gospel message always begins with a greeting of peace, and peace at all times crowns and confirms the relations between the disciples.

Peace is possible because the Lord has overcome the world and its constant conflict “by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). But this reconciliation of differences must first be within ourselves, in our own lives, ever threatened as they are by fragmentation and breakdown. If hearts are shattered in thousands of pieces, it is not easy to create authentic peace in society.

—Pope Francis

*What conflicts in my life must I face more openly
so as to resolve them and bring peace?*

EMBARKING ON THE PATH TO PEACE

“By the tender mercy of our God the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79)



The path to peace demands hearts and minds trained in concern for others and capable of perceiving the common good in today’s world. For the road to peace involves everyone and leads to the fostering of right relationships between all living beings. In an age like our own, marked by speed and immediacy, we need to recover the patience required for this process to occur.

History and practical experience have taught us that authentic peace takes shape from the ground up, beginning with places, communities and local institutions, and by listening to what they have to tell us. In this way, we come to realize that peace is possible when disagreements and the conflicts they entail are not set aside, but acknowledged, understood and surmounted.

The Gospel and the Church’s social doctrine are a constant source of support for Christians in this effort. They can also act as a compass for everyone, since the fostering of a culture of peace is a task entrusted to all, believers and non-believers alike, who must advance it through reflection and a praxis inspired by the dignity of the person and the common good. *If we want peace, we must prepare institutions of peace* at the concrete service of individuals and the common good. In this way, we generate hope.

—Pope Leo

*How have I tried to bring Christ’s peace
to those closest to me this Advent?*

JESUS IS OUR PEACE

“Keep your tongue from evil, your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” (Psalm 34:14-15)

Faith is not a decorative or ornamental element. Living faith does not mean decorating life with a little religion, as if it were a cake and we were decorating it with cream. Faith means choosing God as the criterion and basis of life, and God is not empty, God is not neutral. God is always positive. God is love, and love is positive!

After Jesus has come into the world it is impossible to act as if we do not know God, or as if God were something that is abstract, empty, a purely nominal reference. No, God has a real face, God has a name: God is mercy, God is faithfulness, God is life which is given to us all. Jesus is our peace, he is our reconciliation! But this peace is not the peace of the tomb, it is not neutrality, Jesus does not bring neutrality. This peace is not a compromise at all costs.


Following Jesus entails giving up evil and selfishness and choosing good, truth and justice, even when this demands sacrifice and the renunciation of our own interests. And this indeed divides. As we know, it even cuts the closest ties. However, be careful: it is not Jesus who creates division! Jesus establishes the criterion: whether to live for ourselves or to live for God and for others; to be served or to serve; to obey one's own ego or to obey God.

—Pope Francis

*What most hinders me from choosing good,
truth and justice in my everyday life?*

JESUS, THE GOD WHO GIVES HIMSELF TO US

“I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me... For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 6:38)

ur The merciful face of God the Father has been revealed and continues to be revealed in his incarnate Son, the ultimate hope of all who sincerely seek truth, justice, peace and communion with one another. Faith is primarily a response to God's love, and the greatest mistake we can make as Christians is not to recognize the gift of God's person in Jesus.

How often, even in the not too distant past, have we forgotten this truth and presented Christian life mostly as a set of rules to be kept, replacing the marvelous experience of encountering Jesus—God who gives himself to us—with a moralistic, burdensome and unappealing religion that, in some ways, is impossible to live in concrete daily life.

So for all of us there is a great need to promote an encounter with God. This does not mean giving hasty answers to difficult questions, but drawing close to people, listening to them, and trying to understand together with them how to face their difficulties. And this requires a readiness to be open, when necessary, to new ways of seeing things and different ways of acting, for each generation is different and has its own challenges, dreams and questions. So if we want to help others experience joyful paths of communion and be seeds of faith for one another, we must first cultivate and renew our own identity as believers.

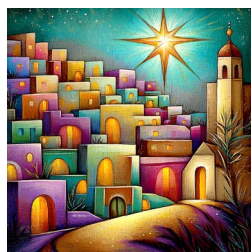
—Pope Leo

*How would I describe my personal encounter with the risen Jesus
and how that changed my life?*

ENLIGHTEN OUR MINDS

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.” (Is 9:2)

In Jesus, God himself became Emmanuel, God-with-us, the God who walks alongside us, who gets involved in our lives, in our homes. The prophet Isaiah can guide us in the process of “learning to see” by the light which is Jesus. He presents Jesus to us as “Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah (9:5).



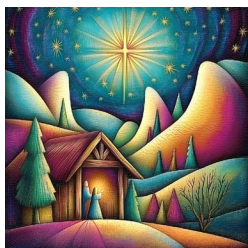
In this way, he introduces us to the life of the Son, so that his life can be our life. Knowing that Jesus still walks our streets, that he is part of the lives of his people, that he is involved with us in one vast history of salvation, fills us with hope and urges us to go out to others and share the good news that God, our Father, walks at our side. He frees us from anonymity, from a life of emptiness, and brings us to the school of encounter. He removes us from competition and self-absorption, and he opens before us the path of peace, that peace which is born of accepting others, that peace which fills our hearts whenever we look upon those in need as our brothers and sisters. God and the Church present in our cities need to be like yeast in the dough, to relate to everyone, to stand at everyone’s side, proclaiming the marvels of the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Eternal Father, the Prince of Peace.

—Pope Francis

How does the Light of Jesus and his message most illuminate the true reality of our world?

PEACE BE WITH YOU ALL!

“And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:13-14)



These are the first words spoken by the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for God’s flock. I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world. It is the peace of the risen Christ. A peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. A peace that comes from God, the God who loves us all, unconditionally.

Allow me to extend that same blessing to you and to all: Peace be with you! God loves us all, and evil will not prevail! All of us are in God’s hands. So, let us move forward, without fear, together, hand in hand with God and with one another ever pursuing peace and justice, ever seeking to act as men and women faithful to Jesus Christ, in order to proclaim the Gospel without fear, to be missionaries. We are followers of Christ. Christ goes before us. The world needs his light. Humanity needs him as the bridge that can lead us to God and his love. Help us, one and all, to build bridges through dialogue and encounter, joining together as one people, always at peace.

—Pope Leo

*How might I be more ready to be a peacemaker
and bridge builder today?*

SAY “YES” TO THE PRINCE OF PEACE

“For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:5)



Christ is born for you! Rejoice, you who find no peace of heart, for the ancient prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled for your sake. In the Scriptures, the Prince of Peace is opposed by the “Prince of this world” (John 12:31), who, by sowing the seeds of death, plots against the Lord, “the lover of life” (Wisdom 11:26). We see this played out in Jesus’s birth which is followed by the slaughter of the innocents.

How many innocents are being slaughtered in our world! In their mothers’ wombs, in odysseys undertaken in desperation and in search of hope, in the lives of all those little ones whose childhood has been devastated by war. They are the little Jesuses of today, these little ones whose childhood has been devastated by war.

To say “yes” to the Prince of Peace, then, means saying “no” to war and the mindset of war, to every war which is an aimless voyage, a defeat without victors, an inexcusable folly, and to do so with courage. Isaiah looked forward and prophesied about the coming of a day when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation”, a day when men “will not learn war any more”, but instead “beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (2:4). With God’s help, let us make every effort to work for the coming of that day now and the advent of the Prince of Peace!

—Pope Francis

How will my saying “yes” to the Prince of Peace be most shown in my words and actions?

WITNESSING TO THE PRINCE OF PEACE

*“Near indeed is God’s salvation for those who fear him; glory will dwell in our land. Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss.”
(Psalm 85:10-11)*

The need for us to make every effort to live out the commandment of love, the call to Christian unity, and the mandate to serve others is certainly no easy task! Yet, it was precisely at particular moments of trial that Christ revealed the Father’s will: it was when challenged by the Pharisees that he taught us that the two greatest commandments are to love God and our neighbor (Mt 22:34-40). It was on the eve of his Passion that he spoke of the need for unity, “that all may be one...so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). My wish for each of us, then, is that we can say with St. Augustine: “My entire hope is exclusively in your very great mercy. Grant what you command, and command what you will” (*Confessions*, X: 29, 40).

Finally, in the context of our war-torn world, our ongoing journey of healing and of deepening union has a vital role to play, for the more united Christians are the more effective will be our witness to Christ the Prince of Peace in building up a civilization of loving encounter with God, whose tender love values and cares for every person as God’s own daughter or son!

—Pope Leo

*How will I carry forward into the new year my task
to witness and work for peace in my life?*

JESUS' BIRTH CHANGES EVERYTHING!

“Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not. See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:18-20)

The Son of God is born, and everything changes. The Savior of the world comes to partake of our human nature; no longer are we alone and forsaken. The true light has come to illumine our lives so often beset by the darkness of sin. Today we once more discover who we are! We have been shown the way to reach the journey's end. Now must we put away all fear and dread, for the light shows us the path to Bethlehem. We must not be laggards; we are not permitted to stand idle. We must set out to see our Savior lying in a manger.

This is the reason for our joy and gladness: this Child has been “born to us,” he was “given to us,” as Isaiah proclaims. The people who for two thousand years has traversed all the pathways of the world in order to allow every man and woman to share in this joy is now given the mission of making known “the Prince of peace” and becoming his effective servant in the midst of the nations. If we take his words to heart and let ourselves be embraced by him, he will bring us unending peace of heart. In a society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance, appearances and narcissism, this child calls us to act in a way that is simple, balanced, consistent, capable of seeing and doing what is essential.

—Pope Francis

How has my life most changed because Jesus has been born in my heart?

POPE FRANCIS'S PRAYER

Let us open our hearts to receive
the grace of this Advent season,
which is Christ himself,
whom God our Father
has revealed to the entire world.
Where God is born, peace is born.
And where peace is born,
there is no room for hatred and war.
God alone can save us and free us
from the many forms of evil
and selfishness in our midst.
Let us welcome God's mercy,
which Jesus Christ has bestowed on us,
so that we in turn can show mercy.
In this way, we will make peace grow!

POPE LEO'S PRAYER

Spirit of love and peace,
open borders, break down walls,
dispel hatred and help us to live
as children of our Father in heaven.
Give us the gift of your peace.
Christ the Prince of Peace goes before us.
Let us live our faith, without fear,
pursuing peace and justice.
The world needs his light.
Humanity needs him as the bridge
that can lead us to God and his love.
Help us, one and all, to build bridges
through dialogue and encounter,
joining together as one people,
always at peace.