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Our Lady of the Redwoods Abbey

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Second Sunday of Advent, Year C

Come, O Lord, visit us in peace, that we may rejoice before you with a perfect heart.
(Antiphon, Canticle of Mary)

Welcome to the Second Sunday of Advent in the glorious month of December dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. May Our Lady, Queen conceived without original sin, cover us in her protective veil.

One week into the liturgical year 2024/2025, how is it going? There is not much time this year to get things together. Salvation is on His way.

We, the faithful, that is, do not always associate the holy season of Advent with penance. We often reserve penance for the holy season of Lent. However, Advent has been called a “little Lent.” So, Advent must have some penitential characteristics. If “crazy” John, as Simon Peter calls the Baptist in the series *The Chosen*, is busy proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, then we are called to repent; to turn away from sin and turn towards God. John is, after all, a voice crying out in the wilderness:

*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths ...
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*
(Luke 3:4,6)

Along with penitential then, Advent may be understood as a season of preparation. Preparation for what, though? First, we prepare for the Solemnities of Christmas, when we remember the First Coming of Jesus, the Son of God, who came to us in the flesh. At the same time, we tune our hearts and minds to look forward to Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. So, as the Church teaches us, Advent is a privileged period of devout and expectant delight.¹ We again are privileged in that we can truly enter this holy time of the year here in this monastery, with each other, in this rather obscure corner of the world.

If John the Baptist, then, is proclaiming a baptism of repentance in order to prepare the way for Jesus both in His First Coming and His Second Coming, what are some things we might do to better attune our hearts and minds? What are some ways in which our love might increase ever more in knowledge and every kind of perception, as joy-filled Saint Paul prays, to discern what is of value, so that we might be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, so to be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God?² You may know some ways. Here are some of my thoughts.

We certainly want to be ready to meet the Lord as He comes to us, in the daily and not so daily, in both our hearts and our minds. We join one another, and all the faithful, and strive to clear our minds and hearts of “stumbling blocks, briars, and dust, that we may travel in freedom and joy

¹ See *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year*, 39.

² See Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11.

and that we may not hinder the Lord's coming to us,"³ in any way, whatsoever. We are penitent in our preparation. We want to listen to Jesus, that He may instruct us in His ways, and we may walk in His paths.⁴ And this work is not in vain, not just for our benefit in other words, but for the whole Church, and the whole world—all flesh. We just might, as one commentator put it, through one small act of kindness lead an unfortunate human being into the light of God's holy Church, and ultimately into the sunshine of eternal glory.⁵

We pray to the Lord to visit us in peace, so we want to faithfully and wholeheartedly conduct ourselves in His presence, to do what is pleasing to Him.⁶ If we pray, then, for peace and healing for all flesh, to remove from our hearts all deceit, to not act in anger or nurse a grudge (See *Rule of Saint Benedict*, 4:22-24), for the winding roads to be made straight, and the rough ways smooth (See Luke 3:5), we must work for it. So doing, we prepare the way of the Lord. As Blessed Karl of Austria (1887-1992) asserted: "If everyone simply did his Christian duties, we would not have so much hate and misery in the world." At the same time, as Servant of God Willi Graf (1918-1943) pronounced: "To be a Christian is perhaps the hardest thing to ever become in life." We heed the words of Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582): "Let the Christian be valiant."⁷

Yes, preparing the way of the Lord by simply doing our Christian duties challenges us—moves us beyond our comfort zones—some ways are hard; valiant we must be in our efforts to turn away from sin and turn towards God. We want to dwell in the tent of God's kingdom, so we run there by doing good deeds. For the Lord patiently waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, His holy teachings (See *RB* Prologue). And what are some of them, by way of small acts of kindness? I offer some ideas.

- ✓ Affirm another sister in private. Thank her or express gratitude for something specific and do so with sincerity and pure intention.
- ✓ Devote an entire day to praying for one sister in particular. Start with the sister with whom you have the most difficulty. You may even pray for a weakness she has; not the one you think she has. At the same time, pray for yourself, for the grace not to be envious of her because she was given something not given to you (See *RB* 55:21). After all, "Everyone has his own gift from God, one this and another that" (*RB* 40:1).
- ✓ Something I started doing some time ago was to create a novena for someone who asked for my prayers. At the moment I am in a rosary novena for a friend with pneumonia.
- ✓ Devout an entire day to praying for some random person who does not have anyone to pray for them, or a random person who will die today. Or a person who was in the waiting room with you, as you both waited for a medical appointment.

And it occurs to me that these are some of the greatest acts of kindness we can give to anyone. Just think of the rippling effects of these seemingly small gestures of kindness; such powerful ones. So influential now and for ages to come.

³ See *Magnificat*, December 7, 2014, p. 105.

⁴ See Isaiah 2:3.

⁵ See Monsignor Edward Betowski, SJ (1915-2002), in "Advent Faith," *Magnificat*, December 2, 2024, p. 44.

⁶ See Psalm 106:4/Isaiah 38:3.

⁷ See Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, Chapter I, 13.

Encouraged by the great Doctor, the “golden mouthed,” Saint John Chrysostom, we keep going.

Do not say: it is impossible for me to influence others. If you are a Christian, it is impossible for this not to happen. Things found in nature cannot be denied; so here, for it is a question of the nature of a Christian. Do not insult God: If you say that the sun cannot shine, you have insulted Him. If you say that a Christian cannot help others, you have insulted God and called Him a liar. It is easier for the sun not to give warmth or shine than for the Christian to not shed his light. It is easier for the light to be darkness than for this to happen. Do not say that it is impossible. The opposite is impossible. Do not insult God. If we have put our affairs in order, these things will certainly come to be, and will follow as a natural consequence. The light of a Christian cannot escape notice. So bright a lamp cannot be hidden.⁸

Together then, we proclaim it the peoples, we make it heard: “Behold, God our Savior is coming.” He will dwell in our midst. Yes, may we live justly in this age and may our hearts and minds be full of devout and expectant delight. Shine on.

⁸ See Saint John Chrysostom, from a homily on the Acts of the Apostles, in *Office of Readings*, Common of Holy Men.