

- Well...a happy new year to all of you!...this being the beginning of a new Church year.
- What a great time for New Year's resolutions, too...as we begin Advent and begin to look forward to our celebration of the birth of Jesus on Christmas morn.
- Advent is, after all, a penitential season—kind of a minor Lent, but still a time to do some housecleaning in our souls—to sweep out some of the rottenness that's been hanging around in our spirits--as we once again await Christ come into the world.
- ...A most excellent time to wash our souls in confession...to practice more mindfully those virtues of faith, hope and charity.
- ...To make that often-postponed effort to visit the lonely elderly family friend or relative...to help the poor or the sick, or a poor monastery or convent...
- ...To let loose of those grudges which burn our souls...forgiving, as God is so ready to forgive us...
- ...To make the habit of reading the Bible if we do not do so regularly—maybe a chapter or two a day out of the Gospels, which takes maybe 15 minutes.
- God wrote to us; shouldn't we take time to read it. As Isaiah tell us in the first reading:
 - *“Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths.”*
- ...To spend real time with God in prayer daily, perhaps taking an hour in the Blessed Sacrament chapel once a week.
- Do these things, and you may find yourself singing once again our responsorial psalm of today:
 - *I rejoiced because they said to me,
“We will go up to the house of the LORD.”*
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- These are the things that make our peace...because these are the things that are right and good.

- Doing these things, and things like them, help us to live for others rather than only ourselves...and only in that way can we come to a true sense of self-value...a true sense of self-worth.
- Child psychologists and counselors are always preaching the need for self-esteem.
- But self-esteem does not come from simply winning sports contests or making good grades... or having a successful career or a fancy car.
- Achievement is not the same as worth. We've all known very intelligent and outwardly successful people who were miserable.
- True self-esteem is a sense of personal worth—which comes only from doing the right...from service to God and to others.
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- And this is the very heart of our Catholic faith.
- In our faith and prayer we seek to follow God...doing what IS right and good.
- In serving others we place another's good above our own advantage—and that is why charity and almsgiving is considered the highest form of the worship of God:
- Scripture tells us: “...*almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fullness of life...*” (Tobit 12:9 RSV)
- What does this have to do with Advent?
- Because with Advent we remember and celebrate God coming to us in the flesh—born as a little child in Bethlehem. In a mysterious way, both God AND man forever united in those two natures.
- And in Jesus God does not simply dictate, but he does. He does not only tell us how to live, but he comes and shows us how to live perfectly—in total devotion to God and in total self-giving to others.
- There can be no greater act of humility to self than God come in the flesh—He who created Heaven and earth becoming become one of his creatures...allowing himself to be humiliated and

abused by his creatures—we who depend upon Him for our very existence.

- And there can be no act of obedience greater than the Son's acceptance of the Father's will to suffer these things.
- ...no greater charity or act of love than for Jesus—the Son of God—to endure these things so that we might be with him in Heaven.
- God does not simply tell us what to do...he *shows* us what to do.
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- This idea brought to mind a story I heard in the seminary...
- Most of you who are older know the reputation of Dr. Joseph Mengele—the Nazi SS doctor known as the “Angel of Death” who became infamous for his tortures and human experimentations at Auschwitz.
- The story I heard related that one of his experiments was to see who loved more—mother or daughter.
- A mother and daughter were given electric controllers. If the daughter squeezed the handle, it would send a powerful electric current through the mother; if she did not, the current would flow through herself.
- The mother also was given a switch. She could cut off the current to herself if she squeezed the handle, but in doing so the current would go through her daughter.
- Which one, Mengele wondered, would show the greater love?
- It was the mother who, when she realized she could only live if her daughter died, chose to stop squeezing her handle...to sacrifice and die herself for love of her daughter.
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- This is what Christ does for us—he comes to sacrifice himself for us...to take the punishment upon himself that divine and perfect justice demands for our sins...though He has no sin whatsoever.
- And he does this freely...and therefore in total selfless love. He was not ignorant of his eventual fate; He knew exactly what would happen—that He would be tortured and die on the cross in agony.

- And let loose the handle...that we might live.
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- So in awe and thanksgiving and gratitude let us prepare ourselves this Advent season for the coming of our Lord and Savior.
- As Paul told us in our second reading: “...*it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep...Let us then throw off the works of darkness*”—selfishness, sexual promiscuity, drunkenness and evil “...*and put on the armor of light...[to] put on the Lord Jesus Christ*”...not some physical likeness, but the likeness of love of God and love of neighbor.
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- The magi traversed deserts and braved hardships to follow the star and find the King of the Jews.
- We travel the desert of this world by following the star which is Christ—and, through faith and charity...by our successful crossing of the wilderness of our world which often seems so devoid of grace...devoid of Godliness.....devoid of selfless love...
- ...at the end of OUR journey awaits the King of Heaven.

[Is 2:1-5](#)

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz,
saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
In days to come,
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest mountain
and raised above the hills.
All nations shall stream toward it;
many peoples shall come and say:
"Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths."
For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and impose terms on many peoples.
They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
one nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.
O house of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the Lord!

[Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#)
Responsorial Psalm

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.
I rejoiced because they said to me,
"We will go up to the house of the LORD."
And now we have set foot
within your gates, O Jerusalem.
R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.
Jerusalem, built as a city
with compact unity.
To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD.
R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.
According to the decree for Israel,

to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

In it are set up judgment seats,
seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your walls,
prosperity in your buildings.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Because of my brothers and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
Because of the house of the LORD, our God,
I will pray for your good.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

[Rom 13:11-14](#)

Reading 2

Brothers and sisters:

You know the time;

it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep.

For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed;
the night is advanced, the day is at hand.

**Let us then throw off the works of darkness
and put on the armor of light;**

**let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day,
not in orgies and drunkenness,
not in promiscuity and lust,
not in rivalry and jealousy.**

**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.**

[Mt 24:37-44](#)

Gospel

Jesus said to his disciples:

"As it was in the days of Noah,
so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

In those days before the flood,
they were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,
up to the day that Noah entered the ark.

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They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away.
So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man.
Two men will be out in the field;
one will be taken, and one will be left.
Two women will be grinding at the mill;
one will be taken, and one will be left.
Therefore, stay awake!
For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.
Be sure of this: if the master of the house
had known the hour of night when the thief was coming,
he would have stayed awake
and not let his house be broken into.
So too, you also must be prepared,
for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”