

## **Friday (Pope Paul VI)**

Is the Christian life happy or sad? Does the fact that we are Christians make us happy, or does it pile up limits, duties and burdens on our shoulders? Jesus, as a man, experienced the simple, everyday joys of life. The depth of his inner life did not lessen his sensitivity nor make his vision of the world any less realistic. The simple human joys are so real for Jesus that they speak to him of the joys of the kingdom of God.

### **Scripture (Philippians 1:3-9)**

***I pray with joy remembering how you have helped to spread the Good News. I am quite certain that the One who began this good work in you will see that it is finished in the Day of Christ Jesus comes. You have a place in my heart, since you have all shared together in the grace that has been mine, both my chains and my work defending and establishing the Gospel. It is my prayer that your love for one another may grow more and more with the knowledge and complete understanding that will help you to come to true discernment.***

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## *2nd Week of Advent*

### ***Changing a world that isn't ready***

*John the Baptist's appearance marks a significant point in human history. The Old Testament prophets promise that God will, at some stage, send a Messiah, John's urgent call to repent is because the time has come when God will fulfil those promises. The longed-for Messiah was arriving and 'all mankind would see the salvation of God.' As this is part of Isaiah's prophecy a few hundred years before, God has clearly been planning this intervention in our history for some time. Reading the first part of Luke 3, it would be reasonable to question God's timing or his luck, since Luke's list of characters include Caesar, Pilate, Herod, and Philip, (who represent the all-powerful Roman Empire), and the religious authorities all of whom will oppose and ensure the death of Jesus and his forerunner, John. Of course, God chooses the timing and doesn't rely on luck, so the question should be 'Why would you choose this time and this place to intervene – why not choose more receptive people, or wait for a better time?' Looking back to the Old Testament when the promises of the Messiah were made, it seems that God has a habit of choosing times in history when worldly powers and his people's failings made his promises that he would be the ruling force in the world seem rather overly optimistic and, if I may say, naïve. The prophet Baruch wrote whilst the Babylonians were the 'super power' and the Israelites were in exile in Babylon. Although the Babylonians showed no sign of weakness, Baruch joyfully tells the people that their time of captivity will end and they will return to Jerusalem 'jubilant that God has remembered them' (5:1-9). God's promise that he will remove all obstacles is a reminder of how he led their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt (another super power that couldn't subdue God) to live as Covenant people in the Promised Land. The description of Jerusalem taking off her dress of sorrow, and her new name, 'Peace through integrity and honour through devotedness', describes the new relationship the Israelites could now live in with God. They had gone into exile because they had broken the relationship with God and become alienated from him. In short, they, had sinned. The repentance John called for used this imagery of being freed from slavery, of debts being cancelled. The rule of the Romans over God's chosen people was, to them, a sign of sin and of evil ruling the world. Now, John promises, salvation – being restored and freed from the rule of sin and evil – is at hand. The Christians in Philippi showed how this was possible, living as they did in a bustling city with a significant Roman presence and suffering persecution. Paul is confident that God, who 'began this good work in you will see that it is finished'. Paul is writing while he is in prison, but his prayer is full of joy and confidence as he prays that that they will love each other more and more, and that they will grow in 'understanding of what is important', i.e. be able to discern God's ways whilst living in the world. For him and the Philippians, the Holy Spirit can't be locked up or subdued. As we prepare for Christmas in our secular world, we should heed the call to repent by becoming more aware where we can live more wholeheartedly – and confidently – according to the example and teachings of Jesus. Voices of caution and ridicule will compete with prayer and the presence of the Spirit, but this is nothing new. The Philippians life based on love allowed them not only to be able to discern between these voices, but also to be the witnesses to God's presence in the world. Martin Bennett*

### **Monday (Jean Vanier)**

Jesus was sent by the Father not to judge us and even less condemn us to the prisons, limitations and dark places of our beings, but to free us, by planting the seeds of the Spirit in us. To grow in love is to allow this spirit of Jesus to grow in us. Growth takes on another dimension when we allow Jesus to penetrate us, to give us new life and new energy.

### **Scripture (Baruch 5: 1-2, 6-9)**

*Jerusalem, take off your dress of sorrow and distress, put on the beauty of God's glory for evermore, wrap the cloak of God's saving justice around you, put the diadem of the glory of the eternal on your head. Though you left on foot with enemies for an escort, now God brings them back to you like royal princes carried back in glory. For God has decreed the flattening of each high mountain, the everlasting hills, the filling of the valleys to make the ground level so that Israel can walk in safety under the glory of God; for God will guide Israel in joy by the light of his glory with his mercy and integrity for escort.*

### **Tuesday (C.S.Lewis)**

Now what sort of 'hole' has man got himself into? He had tried to set up on his own, to behave as if he belonged to himself. In other words, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. This process of surrender is what Christians call repentance. Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than simply eating humble pie. It means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years.

### **Scripture (John 8:31-36)**

*To the Jews who believed in him, Jesus said "If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will come to know the truth and the truth will set you free. In truth I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now a slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.*

### **Wednesday (St. John of the Cross)**

Mary Magdalene, in spite of her past, paid no heed to the crowds of people, prominent as well as unknown, at the banquet. She did not consider the propriety of weeping and shedding tears in the presence of our Lord's guests. Her only concern was to reach him for whom her soul was already wounded and on fire, without any delay and without waiting for another, more appropriate time.

### **Scripture (2 Cor. 1:18-22)**

*As surely as God is trustworthy, what we say to you is not both Yes and No. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us, was never Yes and No: his nature is all Yes. For in him is found the Yes to all God's promises and therefore it is through him that we answer "Amen" to give praise to God. It is God who gives us a sure place in Christ and has both anointed us and marked us with his seal, giving us as pledge the Spirit in our hearts.*

### **Thursday (Council of African Churches)**

We are not required to wait for a distant 'heaven' when all problems will be solved. What Christ has done, he has done already. We can accept his work or reject it; we can hide from it or seek to live by it. Our task is to work for the expression of God's reconciliation here and now.

### **Scripture (Isaiah 57:14-15)**

*Then it will be said: Level up, level up, clear the way, remove the obstacle from my people's way, for thus says the High and Exalted One who lives eternally and whose name is holy, "I live in the holy heights, but I am with the contrite and the humble, to revive the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite."*