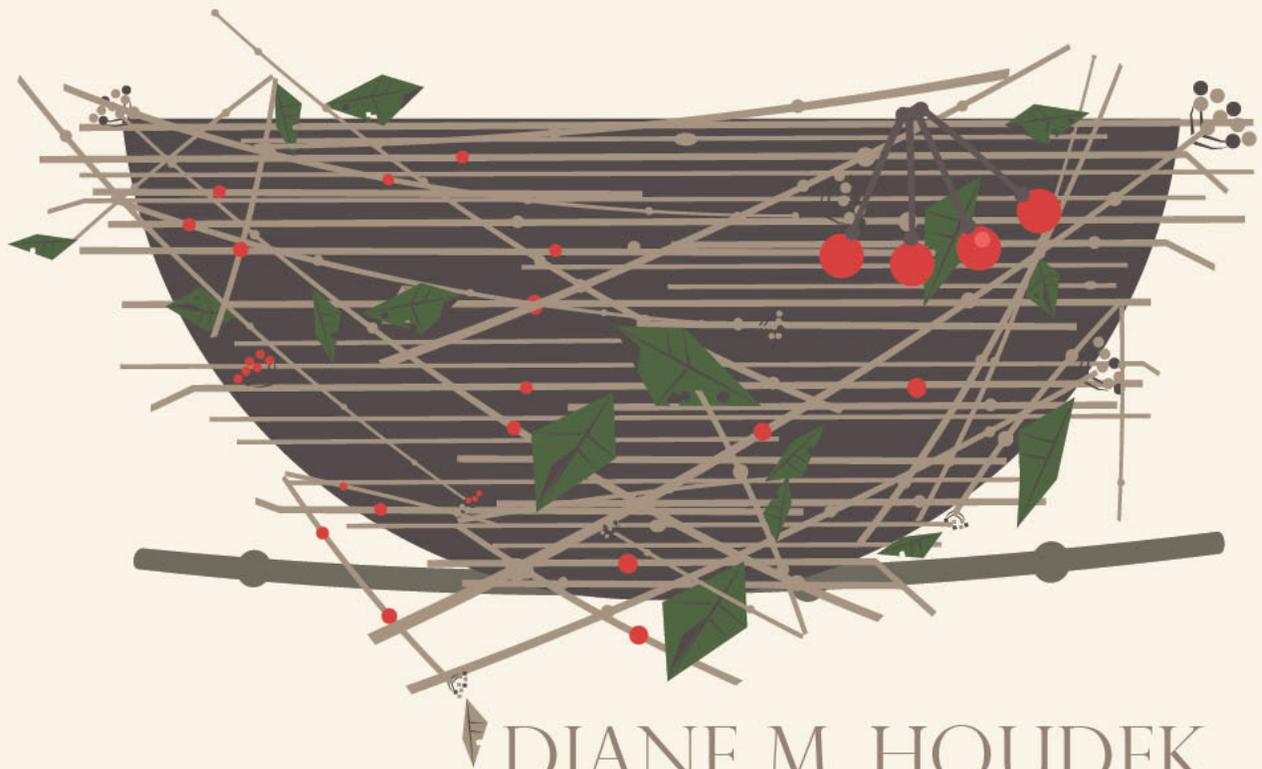


ADVENT 2022

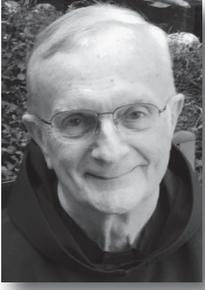


DAILY REFLECTIONS WITH

SAINT
FRANCIS



DIANE M. HOUDEK



It is my joy to share with you *Advent 2022: Daily Reflections with St. Francis*, written by inspiring author Diane M. Houdek of Franciscan Media. I am happy you will join us Franciscans and friends across the world in prayerful reflection during this holy season. I hope that reading this booklet of daily reflections will help you prepare for the gift of Emmanuel and our celebration of Christmas.

Thank you also for helping to share God's love through Franciscan Media's print and digital resources. It is through your compassionate faithful support that we continue Jesus' ministry in building up God's Kingdom here on earth.

Despite troubled times, please take to heart and remember: *Christ is coming. Hope is returning to the world. Christmas is on its way.*

Wishing you blessed Advent, merry Christmas, and happy New Year.

Peace and blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan Kroger, OFM". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Fr. Dan Kroger

Publisher

Franciscan Media

ADVENT WITH SAINT
FRANCIS

RESCRIPT

In accord with the *Code of Canon Law*, I hereby grant the *Nihil Obstat* for the booklet of daily reflections titled *Advent with St. Francis of Assisi*.

Reverend Steve J. Angi

Chancellor

Vicar General

Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Cincinnati, Ohio

July 13, 2022

The *Nihil Obstat* (“Permission to Publish”) is a declaration the book or pamphlet is considered to be free of doctrinal or moral error. It is not implied that those who have granted the *Nihil Obstat* agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

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November 27

ISAIAH 2:1-5; ROMANS 13:11-14; MATTHEW 24:37-44

“Let us begin again, for until now we have done nothing.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Conversion is never a single moment but a life-long journey. We constantly need to renew our commitment to Christ, to following the Gospel, to drawing closer to God. Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year, is a perfect time to begin again, a fresh start for each of us. Advent is a wake-up call, a time when we're prodded into beginning again, taking more notice of our spiritual surroundings, once again getting going on the work of the kingdom in the world. The promise of the Second Coming contains an insistent challenge. The Gospels show us the way to work for the fullness of the kingdom.

Prayer

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”

—PSALM 122:1

November 28

ISAIAH 4:2–6; MATTHEW 8:5–11

In all [Francis’s] preaching, before he proposed the word of God to those gathered about, he first prayed for peace for them, saying: “The Lord give you peace.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

The creative power of God draws people together. We recognize that creative power stirring in our lives and respond to it. “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,” the people say in the First Reading from Isaiah. They are drawn by what they see there. From the beginning, Francis encouraged this inviting approach. Francis used gentle persuasion and good example rather than bullying and condemnation to lead people to Christ. Peace is the greatest promise the Lord offers his disciples. It’s the great promise of this season.

Prayer

For the sake of my relatives and friends

I will say, “Peace be within you.”

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,

I will seek your good.

—PSALM 122:8–9

November 29

ISAIAH 11:1-10; LUKE 10:21-24

“As St. Francis held out his hand to receive the pledge, the wolf also raised its front paw and meekly and gently put it in St. Francis’s hand as a sign that it was giving its pledge.”

—*Little Flowers of St. Francis*

Isaiah 11 contains one of the iconic images of the Kingdom of God, in which all creatures live in peace with one another: We love the image from Isaiah and the story of Francis and the wolf of Gubbio precisely because we know how difficult it is to overcome the natural fear and anger that rise up in us when we lose touch with God’s spirit within us. Draw on your past experiences in seeking to resolve some conflict in your circle of friends or within your own soul.

Prayer

In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

—PSALM 72:7

November 30

ISAIAH 25:6–10; MATTHEW 15:29–37

“The brothers hurried and placed upon the table all they had in their storeroom, namely, a little bread, not much wine, and...some vegetables. Meanwhile the table of the Lord had compassion on the table of his servants.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

The Scriptures describe the fullness of God’s reign as a banquet of rich food and choice wines. And the Gospels tell of Jesus feeding the five thousand a simple meal of barley loaves and fish, the essential stuff of life. Francis’s first biographer, Thomas of Celano, tells a story of Francis inviting his doctor to dinner when the brothers had nothing to eat and were ashamed to invite a guest. The many feasts we share this season can bring us closer to one another and to God. In your feasting, be mindful of those who go hungry.

Prayer

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

—PSALM 23:5

December 1

ISAIAH 26:1-6; MATTHEW 7:21, 24-27

“Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling completely to ruin.”

We smile at the Gospel story of the man who built his house on sand, only to have it washed away in the first heavy storm. We know better than that, surely. But when we face a crisis, do we feel as if our lives have been washed out from under us? At the very beginning of Francis’s conversion, the Lord taught him the importance of a good foundation. But he also encouraged him to rebuild and repair what has been neglected. Perhaps we need to do some work on our foundation.

Prayer

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!

—PSALM 118:1

December 2

ISAIAH 29:17-24; MATTHEW 9:27-31

“My brother fire, that surpasses all other things in beauty,...I have loved you in the past in the Lord. I beseech the great Lord who made you that he temper your heat now so that I may bear it when you burn me gently.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

St. Francis contracted a serious eye disease when he was traveling in the east. He willingly underwent an extreme treatment that involved cauterizing his eyes with a hot iron. Although he wasn't healed, he found peace and even joy in the process, knowing that he was in God's hands. We marvel at stories of Jesus healing those who cannot see. When we hear stories of people we know who have their sight restored through cataract surgery, do we also marvel at the way God continues to work miracles in today's world?

Prayer

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

—PSALM 27:1

December 3

ISAIAH 30:19–21, 23–26; MATTHEW 9:35 — 10:1, 6–8

“Followers of most holy poverty, because they had nothing, loved nothing, they feared in no way to lose anything.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

Jesus sends his disciples out to do as he had been doing: preach the Kingdom of Heaven, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. But he was careful to remind them that they did this because they themselves had been healed and graced by God: “You received without payment; give without payment” (Matthew 10:8). This is the ideal that the early brothers of Francis strived to live each and every day. We know that we can’t always meet this ideal, but that doesn’t mean it’s not worth trying!

Prayer

How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
...He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.

—PSALM 147:1, 3–4

December 4

ISAIAH 11:1-10; ROMANS 15:4-9; MATTHEW 2:1-12

“We lose everything which we leave behind us in this world; we can bring with us only the right to a reward for our charity and the alms we have given.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Prophets don't come into our lives every day, and they don't always make the sort of impression that John the Baptist and the biblical prophets must have made. Prophets are gifted with an intense personal awareness of God's love for his people. Their call both inspires and compels them to preach this word to those who will listen—and to those who close their ears. St. Francis's sharper edges have been somewhat softened by time and the popular imagination. But he would have understood John the Baptist. As he preached in the streets, he didn't hesitate to call people to repentance. But he always tempered his words with the mercy and love of God.

Prayer

All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

—PSALM 98:3-4

December 5

ISAIAH 35:1-10; LUKE 5:17-26

Why should we wonder that a man who is full of the Holy Spirit should show forth in himself the wonderful deeds of all the just?

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Francis*

Isaiah tells us that the desert will bloom and the parched land will rejoice. People who live in dry, hot climates see this happen again and again. But we've all seen a dry plant perk up when it gets some water. This isn't limited to the plant world. Have you also seen someone's face light up when you've done some small act of kindness for them? Try it today.

Prayer

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

—PSALM 85:10-12

December 6

ISAIAH 40:1-11; MATTHEW 18:12-14

There should be no friar in the whole world who has fallen into sin, no matter how far he has fallen, who will ever fail to find your forgiveness for the asking, if he will only look into your eyes.
—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Christmas specials tug at our heartstrings with stories of long-separated loved ones being reunited. God tells the prophet Isaiah: “Give comfort to my people.” And Jesus tells of a shepherd leaving his flock and going in search of a stray sheep, lost and vulnerable to wolves. Francis held his brothers to high standards, but, like Jesus in whose footsteps he followed, he was always ready to forgive. He made this forgiveness part of his instructions to those who would lead the order after him.

Prayer

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
—PSALM 103:8, 10

December 7

ISAIAH 40:25-31; MATTHEW 11:28-30

When, therefore, while he was pressed by some business or was intent upon a journey, he felt little by little certain touches of grace.... with his companions going on ahead, he would stand still, and turning the new inspiration to fruitfulness, he would not receive the grace in vain.

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

Isaiah tells us those who hope in the Lord “will run and not grow weary.” We might have trouble believing these words when we’re running in a hundred different directions trying to get everything done. It’s hard not to get caught up in the frenetic activity of the season. We want this kind of boundless energy. We can find it by keeping God as our central priority and reminding ourselves that life will go on and people will still love us, even if our errands go unfinished.

Prayer

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits.

—PSALM 103:1-2

December 8

ISAIAH 41:13–20; MATTHEW 11:11–15

He removed from the road little worms, lest they be crushed under foot; and he ordered that honey and the best wines be set out for the bees, lest they perish from want in the cold of winter.

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

The biblical prophets have an unrelenting message: God will always be present to those who are in need, to those whose needs have gone unmet by the people around them. God calls on all creation to meet the needs of his people. In return, we are called to care for all of creation. For Francis, this seemed to be deeply embedded in his nature. Contemplating such love and mercy might give us a warm, cozy feeling, yet we are also challenged to extend this same care to others.

Prayer

All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.

—PSALM 145:10

December 9

ISAIAH 48:17-19; MATTHEW 11:16-19

“Few things pained St. Francis as much as seeing his brothers criticize the people to whom they ministered and among whom they worked.”
—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

Jesus tells the crowds that there seems to be no way to please them. He compares them to children sitting in the marketplace, saying, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance, we wailed, and you did not mourn.” Like Ebenezer Scrooge, sometimes we can’t enter into the spirit of the season. If you feel this way, don’t blame the season itself or even other people’s activities. Look within your heart to see what shadow may be keeping you from a wholehearted response.

Prayer

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
—PSALM 1:1-2

December 10

SIRACH 48:1-4, 9-11; MATTHEW 17:9A, 10-13

“We should all realize that no matter where or how a man dies, if he is in the state of mortal sin and does not repent, when he could have done so and did not, the devil tears his soul from his body.... All the talent and ability, all the learning and wisdom which he thought his own, are taken away from him.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

People on fire with zeal for justice can make us uncomfortable. We'd just as soon close our eyes to the Elijahs in our midst. But if we don't recognize Elijah, chances are we'll miss the Messiah. Christmas celebrates the birth of a baby in difficult circumstances a long way from home. Remember this today through acts of charity and justice. The challenging aspects of the Gospel may not make your life easier, but your life will be better for your openness. Francis was such a humble, gentle man that we forget that he could be as fierce and fiery as Elijah in defense of the Gospel.

Prayer

Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

—PSALM 80:3

December 11

ISAIAH 35:1-10; JAMES 5:7-10; MATTHEW 11:2-11

“We can never tell how patient or humble a person is when everything is going well with him. But when those who should cooperate with him do the exact opposite, then we can tell. A man has as much patience and humility as he has then, and no more.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Advent is a time of waiting. It is a time of preparation for Christmas, but it's also a reminder of all that awaits us in the fulfillment of the kingdom. In our daily lives during December, we wait for package deliveries; we wait in checkout lines and at customer service counters. In his writings, St. Francis consistently counseled both patience and joy. Do we reflect those qualities in our everyday encounters?

Prayer

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

—PSALM 146:6-7

December 12

NUMBERS 24:2-7, 15-17; MATTHEW 21:23-27

“When you see a poor man, Brother, an image is placed before you of the Lord and his poor mother. So too in the sick consider the infirmities which the Lord took upon himself for us.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

The Scriptures invite us to see the world through the eyes of God. The book of Numbers tells us that God looks at the world “enraptured and with eyes unveiled.” What do we see around us when we do this? Try it for one day: Look at everything and everyone around you and imagine how a creating and loving God would see what you see. Love the good; do what you can to change what needs to be changed.

Prayer

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

—PSALM 25:4-5

December 13

ZEPHANIAH 3:1-2, 9-13; MATTHEW 21:28-32

“The devils cannot harm the servant of Christ when they see he is filled with holy joy. When, however, the soul is wretched, desolate, and filled with sorrow, it is easily overwhelmed by its sorrow or else it turns to vain enjoyments.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Sometimes being able to say no frees us to see things from a new perspective. Many of the things we do at this time of year can seem like burdens. Give yourself permission to not do joyless tasks this year. You may end up doing them anyway because you discover that they have a real value after all. But you also may find a sense of freedom in realizing that you don't have to do everything after all. St. Francis maintained that the safest remedy against the thousand snares and wiles of the enemy is spiritual joy.

Prayer

I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.

—PSALM 34:2-3

December 14

ISAIAH 45:6–8, 18, 21–25; LUKE 7:18–23

“There was at that time among his fellow prisoners a certain proud and completely unbearable knight whom the rest were determined to shun, but Francis’s patience was not disturbed. He put up with the unbearable knight and brought the others to peace with him. Capable of every grace, a chosen vessel of virtues, he poured out his gifts on all sides.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

John the Baptist, imprisoned for his efforts at preaching conversion and the Kingdom of God, felt disillusioned and may even have begun to doubt whether Jesus was the Messiah at all. Jesus assured him that the signs of compassion and healing going on around them were indeed proof that the Kingdom was at hand. Offer encouragement to all those you meet today.

Prayer

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

—PSALM 85:11–12

December 15

ISAIAH 54:1-10; LUKE 7:24-30

“Francis was not ashamed, when he had failed in something, to confess his failing in his preaching before all the people.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

The Lord of mercy says, “My steadfast love shall not depart from you.” If you know this kind of love in your own life, you know that it frees you to reach out to others with the same kind of unconditional love. When we are reconciled with God, we feel expansive toward the world and each other. And when we are reconciled with ourselves and one another, we find God. Find an opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. We think of the saints as models of perfect virtue, but they would be the first to admit their failings.

Prayer

All praise be yours, my Lord,
through those who grant pardon
For love of you;
through those who endure sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace,
By you, Most High, they will be crowned.
—“Canticle of the Creatures”

December 16

ISAIAH 56:1-3, 6-8; JOHN 5:33-36

“The sultan tried to bend Francis’s mind toward the riches of the world. But when he saw that Francis most vigorously despised all these things... he was filled with the greatest admiration.... He was deeply moved by his words and he listened to him very willingly.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

Almost without fail, it seems, this season is marred by a dispute somewhere over a religious display on government property, whether it’s a Christmas crèche or a Hanukkah menorah. We don’t all pray in the same way or believe the same creed. Let Isaiah’s vision of a world where all people pray to a God of love and compassion inspire you to respect those who do not share your beliefs. And make sure that your own prayer and worship radiate the kind of joy and sincerity that will draw others to want to share in your celebration.

Prayer

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations.

—PSALM 67:1-3

December 17

GENESIS 49:2, 8-10; MATTHEW 1:1-17

Where there is Love and Wisdom, there is neither
Fear nor Ignorance.

Where there is Patience and Humility, there is
neither Anger nor Annoyance.

Where there is Poverty and Joy, there is neither
Cupidity nor Avarice.

Where there is Peace and Contemplation, there is
neither Care nor Restlessness.

Where there is the Fear of God to guard the
dwelling, there no enemy can enter.

Where there is Mercy and Prudence, there is
neither Excess nor Harshness.

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

As Christmas approaches and the lists of things
to do overwhelm us, tension and anxiety increase.
The wisdom of Advent helps us find our way
through the expectations of the season. We find
our way to a deeper source of peace and joy that
we can hold on to when everything around us
seems to argue against it.

Prayer

May God defend the cause of the poor of the
people, give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

—PSALM 72:3-4

December 18

JEREMIAH 23:5-8; MATTHEW 1:18-24

“The preacher must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons; he must first grow hot within before he speaks words that are in themselves cold.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

“O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.” We sometimes do what we do during the holidays only out of a sense of duty. Like Moses, we need to experience the burning bush of God’s loving and liberating presence among us. We need to let the true spirit of Christmas restore the fire of love to actions that have grown cold and empty.

Prayer

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.

Blessed be his glorious name for ever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.

—PSALM 72:18-19

December 19

ISAIAH 7:10-14; ROMANS 1:1-7; MATTHEW 1:18-24

“Our Lord Jesus Christ is the glorious Word of the Father, so holy and exalted, whose coming the Father made known by St. Gabriel the Archangel to the glorious and blessed Virgin Mary, in whose womb he took on our weak human nature. He was rich beyond measure and yet he and his holy Mother chose poverty.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

For St. Francis, the incarnation was the turning point of human history. Francis’s commitment to poverty and humility had its roots in the incarnation. His love for the Mother of God was based on her role in giving birth to the incarnate Lord. We can take Francis’s reverence for the Nativity as our guide in all the ways we celebrate God’s love.

Prayer

Mary, Mother of God,

Ever Virgin;

Chosen by the most holy Father in heaven,

Consecrated by him,

With his most holy beloved Son

And the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

On you descended and in you still remains

All the fullness of grace and every good.

December 20

ISAIAH 7:10-14; LUKE 1:26-38

“Finally, with his spirit fixed on God, the holy father enjoyed so much the sweetness in that melodious song that he thought he had been transported to another world.... ‘The Lord who consoles the afflicted has never left me without consolation.’”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

At this festive time of year, when all our attention seems focused on gathering with loved ones, those who are grieving face a most difficult challenge. They may feel locked out of the brightness around them. Be the key that releases those who are grieving, while still respecting their own journey. Reach out to those who have lost special people in their lives. Be creative. Spending a quiet evening with a friend may be more consoling than an invitation to share in festivities with a heavy heart.

Prayer

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.

—PSALM 24:3-4

December 21

ZEPHANIAH 3:14-18; LUKE 1:39-35

“At times he would read the sacred books and what he put into his mind once he wrote indelibly in his heart. His memory substituted for books, for he did not hear a thing once in vain, for his love meditated on it with constant devotion.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

People in all times and cultures have celebrated the shortest day of the year, clinging to the belief that the sun will not continue to diminish. In a sense, we may share in this primal sense of hope and fear any time we experience a long stretch of gray cloud cover. Christ, like the rising sun dispelling gloom and dreariness, cheers us immeasurably. If today is cloudy, hold on to the hope that the sun is still there. If today is sunny, do something outside to celebrate the radiant Son of God.

Prayer

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous.

Praise befits the upright.

Praise the Lord with the lyre;

make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.

Sing to him a new song;

play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

—PSALM 33:1

December 22

I SAMUEL 1:24–28; LUKE 1:46–56

“Why then are you seeking the servant in place of the Lord?” And Francis said: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” And the Lord said to him: “Go back to the place of your birth for through me your vision will have a spiritual fulfillment.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

We celebrate Christ as the King of all the nations, the prince of peace. Conflict in the world seems like an affront to our faith, particularly at this time of year. Conflict in our families can be heightened because of stress. Rather than lose heart, we need to look for possibilities for reconciliation. Christ joins heaven and earth, bridging the distance that separates people from one another.

Prayer

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.

—I SAMUEL 2:7, 8

December 23

MALACHI 3:1-4, 23-24; LUKE 1:57-66

“He considered the feast of John the Baptist to be more illustrious than the feasts of all the other saints, for the dignity of his name left a mark of mystic virtue upon him.”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

Because Francis often characterized himself as the herald of the Great King, it's not surprising that his biographers would see in his mother's desire to name him Giovanni (John) a sign of his identification from birth with John the Baptist. For a people who longed for the Messiah through the centuries, Emmanuel—God with us—named the fulfillment of all their dreams. We believe that God is with us today and every day. Think about your deepest desire for this Christmas season. How is God's presence part of the fulfillment of that desire?

Prayer

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

—LUKE 1:76-79

December 24

ISAIAH 9:1-6; TITUS 2:11-14; LUKE 2:1-14

“If you want us to celebrate the present feast of our Lord at Greccio, go with haste and diligently prepare what I tell you. For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed.”

—FRANCIS OF ASSISI

We take nativity scenes and Christmas crèches for granted today, but in fact St. Francis was the first to imagine that first Christmas in such humble detail. Spend some time praying near your family or parish creche and reflect on how this tradition has shaped your belief in Jesus’s humanity.

Prayer

O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

December 25

ISAIAH 52:7–10; HEBREWS 1:1–16; JOHN 1:1–18

“On this day Francis wanted the poor and the hungry to be filled by the rich, and more than the usual amount of grain and hay given to the oxen and asses. ‘If I could speak to the emperor,’ he said, ‘I would ask that a general law be made that all who can should scatter corn and grain along the roads so that the birds might have an abundance of food on the day of such great solemnity, especially our sisters the larks.’”

—THOMAS OF CELANO, *Life of Saint Francis*

From Christmas Eve through the feast of the Epiphany, we celebrate the incarnation. For Francis, the wonder of the Son of God becoming a vulnerable human child shaped his approach to all of creation. During these next days of celebration, wonder at the many signs of God’s presence in our midst.

Prayer

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

—JOHN 1:1, 5

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