



ADVENT: WEEK 2

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8 – SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

For the past 18 months the Diocese of Gaylord has been involved in an extensive process leading us to discern a Mutually Shared Vision for the Roman Catholic Church in Northern Lower Michigan. On November 24, 2013, which closed the “Year of Faith,” the diocese released a vision document titled, “Shining Christ’s Light; Sunrise to Sunset,” sharing insights gained through the process and revealing a plan for the future. The entire document is available at parish offices and on the diocesan website at www.dioceseofgaylord.org.

During this season of Advent, a time of waiting and preparation, this weekly series of daily reflections has been created to help us as we await the coming of Christ. In our diocese, we are also waiting and preparing for the appointment of a new bishop. Based on Holy Scriptures and drawing from the five core values highlighted in “Shining Christ’s Light: Sunrise to Sunset,” these materials may be used for personal or group study.

Catechesis: We go forth and teach all nations by deepening our knowledge of Christ and his teachings so as to share them faithfully as passed on by and through the Church since the time of the Apostles.

“Go, therefore and make disciples of all nation ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19)

While excelling in liturgical prayer, the Church in our part of Northern Michigan also has a rich catechetical tradition, placing a high priority on the transmission of the teachings of Christ and preparation for the sacraments, a task involving not only clergy and religious but also laity. When Venerable Frederic Baraga first arrived at Harbor Springs, accompanied by the Bishop of Cincinnati, he marveled that the Bishop was immediately presented with twenty-four candidates for Baptism and thirty candidates for Confirmation, all “humbly and competently prepared” by “their own Chief Assiginak.”

While it is recognized that parents are to be the primary educators of their children in the faith, the Church takes seriously its responsibility to support parents in that role. In our day, that requires that the Church not only offer cat-

echetical formation for parents and other adults but also provide opportunities for children and young adults to learn the tenets of our faith.

In the course of the listening sessions, the need for comprehensive faith formation, meeting the needs of all age groups, emerged as a principal priority for the diocese. An appreciation for present and past programming was expressed, but it was clear that the faithful of the diocese desired more, noting that the circumstances of our day presented a greater need than ever for instruction on Church teaching, in part because of the magnitude of the societal pressures challenging our beliefs and in part because of a perceived deficiency in the catechesis many of today’s parents and grandparents received in the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s as paradigms for religious instruction shifted. They questioned whether today’s children and teenagers were receiving the tools they would need to be Catholic adults.

A further area of concern centered on the affordability and viability of our Catholic schools. The excellence and effectiveness of those schools has long been recognized locally, and in recent years that excellence is gaining even national attention. At a time when dioceses with far greater resources are closing Catholic schools, remarkably there has not been even a single school closure in the Diocese of Gaylord in the past decade, even though the general school-age population in our region continues to decline. With the collaboration of excellent parish leadership, insightful diocesan superintendents, cooperative teachers and courageous parents, our schools have been skillfully retailored to meet the present needs.

We need to find ways of making faith formation a priority for parents and young people who face so many other pressures on their time. At the same time, we need to make sure that we are presenting for all age groups high quality instruction by qualified teachers, taking advantage of parish and diocesan resources and best practices. We also need to learn to utilize the many and varied gifts that exist within our communities while forming the faithful with a genuine spiritual sense of stewardship as we seek to fulfill our mission to bring all of our children to Jesus and help them to reach their human potential.



Daily Reflections:

Sunday, December 8, 2013 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

- **Scripture:** Brothers and sisters: Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope ... that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15: 4, 6)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “We go forth and teach all nations by deepening our knowledge of Christ and His teachings so as to share them faithfully as passed on by and through the Church since the time of the Apostles.”
- **For Reflection:** Scripture tells us, what was written previously offers not only instruction but hope. Scripture is not simply a *historical* word but is a *living* word that is also addressed to us. Do you find hope and strength in the scriptures to pass on that which the Church as passed on to us?

Monday, December 9, 2013 – Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- **Scripture:** In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ. (Ephesians 1:11-12)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “While it is recognized that parents are to be the primary educators of their children in the faith, the Church takes seriously its responsibility to support parents in that role.”
- **For Reflection:** In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the Domestic Church. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are “by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1656) In an ever increasing secular world, how do you engage with the parish as a support to assist you in your role as the primary educator of your children— of your grandchildren? Do you look to the parish to nurture you as a lifelong learner in the ways of faith?

Tuesday, December 10, 2013 – Tuesday of the 2nd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** Jesus said to his disciples: “What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost. (Matthew 18:12-14)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “A further area of concern centered on the affordability and viability of our Catholic schools. The excellence and effectiveness of those schools has long been recognized locally, and in recent years that excellence is gaining even national attention.”
- **For Reflection:** One of the most important things we can give our children, our grandchildren, and in a broader sense, the children and youth of our diocese is an excellent education, steeped in the Catholic values we treasure. How can we ensure our Catholic Schools remain strong and are affordable to all who wish to enroll? How can the Catholic Schools of our diocese lead as a resource for lifelong catechesis for all of us?

Wednesday, December 4, 2013 – Wednesday of the 2nd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** Do you not know or have you not heard? The Lord is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint nor grow weary, and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny. (Isaiah 40:28)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19)
- **For Reflection:** From the Church document, *To Teach as Jesus Did*. “Catholic education is an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church He founded. Through education the Church seeks to prepare its members to proclaim the Good News and to translate this proclamation into action.” By virtue of our baptism, we too are sent as disciples. Do you go with confidence or trepidation? How might you better prepare yourself for this work?

Thursday, December 12, 2013 – Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

- **Scripture:** Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word.” Then the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “... the circumstances of our day presented a greater need than ever for instruction on Church teaching, in part because of the magnitude of the societal pressures challenging our beliefs ...”
- **For Reflection:** On human life and dignity, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops write: “For the Church, there is no distinction between defending human life and promoting the dignity of the human person. As a gift from God, every human life is sacred from conception to natural death. The life and dignity of every person must be respected and protected at every stage and in every condition. The right to life is the first and most fundamental principle of human rights that leads Catholics to actively work for a world of greater respect for human life and greater commitment to justice and peace.” How do you see yourself and your role in defending the dignity of life from conception to natural death?

Friday, December 13, 2013 – Memorial of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

- **Scripture:** Thus says the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I, the Lord, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go. (Isaiah 48:17)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “We need to find ways of making faith formation a priority for parents and young people who face so many other pressures on their time. At the same time, we need to make sure that we are presenting for all age groups high quality instruction by qualified teachers, taking advantage of parish and diocesan resources and best practices.”
- **For Reflection:** Perhaps the greatest resistance to faith is a complacent self-sufficiency, the sense that we have the world by the tail. In Advent, we prepare once more for the celebration of Christmas, the in-breaking of the Savior into the history of the world and into our own individual lives. In your life, where do you rank the priority to learn of Him, His Church and His works?

Saturday, December 14, 2013 – Memorial of Saint John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church

- **Scripture:** Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved. (Psalm 80:4)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “We also need to learn to utilize the many and varied gifts that exist within our communities while forming the faithful with a genuine spiritual sense of stewardship as we seek to fulfill our mission to bring all of our children to Jesus and help them to reach their human potential.”
- **For Reflection:** God is the Creator of all things, the Artist who lavishly and lovingly splashed color on earth and in the heavens, the Composer that wrote a symphony with every voice and sound of the universe and beyond. What have you that is not His? What gift, what talent, what resource is not owed back to the Creator out of profound gratitude for His loving unending care?