



ADVENT: WEEK 3

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15 – SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

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.

Evangelization: We bring the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel.

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“Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

Evangelization is not simply a project: it has to be a way of life. By its very essence, the Church has to be engaged in missionary efforts. Christ came to gather the sheep and we are now called to continue that labor of love. Cardinal Francis George, the Archbishop of Chicago, has insightfully noted on more than one occasion that it is more appropriate to speak of “the mission having a Church” than “the Church having a mission.”

“Evangelization” at its core means facilitating an encounter with the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. To “evangelize” is to spread the Gospel, to give people an encounter with Jesus. Population figures for our region reveal that we have a golden opportunity for missionary efforts. Government statistics tell us that in most of our diocese more than 50% of the population is unaffiliated with any religion. Moreover, while much of the decline we have experienced in our Catholic population can be attributed to relocation of young people in search of work and educational opportunities, we also know from our own experience that the number of Catholics who remain in our diocese but no longer practice the faith is considerable.

Those who participated in the listening sessions spoke primarily about the latter reality – the number of Catholics who for a whole host of reasons have either gradually drifted from the Church or chosen to leave. They shared that our pews would be full if we could re-energize our Catholic population. The problem is not limited to the Diocese of Gaylord but we acutely feel the pain of being weakened by their absence, particularly when those who have left are our family members, neighbors, colleagues and friends.

The most common question concerns how we are to go about the work of evangelization. Blessed John Paul II (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979), and Pope Benedict XVI (*Homily opening the Synod of the New Evangelization*, 2012), both spoke about our age’s need for a “new evangelization,” a way of evangelizing that involves “new vigor, new methods, and a new expression.” Consideration of ways in which we might make our parishes more welcoming of current parishioners as well as those who are not Catholic or who have fallen away from the regular practice of the faith also needs to take place.



Daily Reflections:

Sunday, December 15, 2013 – 3rd Sunday of Advent

- **Scripture:** When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. (Matthew 11:2-5)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “Evangelization: We bring the Good News of Jesus into every human situation... ‘Evangelization’ at its core means facilitating an encounter with the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.”
- **For Reflection:** What exactly is the Good News of Christ? Am I able to articulate the Good News in a simple way? How might I better equip myself to do this? Am I willing to make the effort?

Monday, December 16, 2013 – Monday of the 3rd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** When Jesus had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority? (Matthew 21:23)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “By its very essence, the Church has to be engaged in missionary efforts. Christ came to gather the sheep and we are now called to continue that labor of love.”
- **For Reflection:** Pope Paul VI taught that the very reason the Church exists is to evangelize, which is to share the Good News of Jesus Christ (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). Through baptism, we are given a share in that mission. Our first pope, St. Peter, wrote this to Christians: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks the reason for your hope.” (1 Peter 3:15) Who or what is it that sends us out to share the Good News? Why should I feel motivated to do this? How does love of neighbor factor in?

Tuesday, December 17, 2013 – Tuesday of the 3rd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of...Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. (Matthew 1:2-16)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “... in most of our diocese more than 50% of the population is unaffiliated with any religion ... we also know from our own experience that the number of Catholics who remain in our diocese but no longer practice the faith is considerable.”
- **For Reflection:** The gospel reading today lists the many generations who kept the faith alive until the coming of Christ. We are entrusted with keeping the Christ light burning until He comes again in glory. Whether I have children or not, how am I passing on this great treasure to the next generation?

Wednesday, December 18, 2013 – Wednesday of the 3rd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever. (Psalm 72:7)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “Evangelization ... has to be a way of life.”
- **For Reflection:** The psalm today says that justice and peace are a sign of God’s presence in our world. Do we promote justice and peace as “a way of life?” How would these values, if lived in a visible way, help people to believe that Christ matters today?

Thursday, December 19, 2013 – Thursday of the 3rd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel said to him in reply, “I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news.” (Luke 1:18-19)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “Those who participated in the listening sessions spoke primarily about the latter reality – the number of Catholics who for a whole host of reasons have either gradually drifted from the Church or chosen to leave. They shared that our pews would be full if we could re-energize our Catholic population.”
- **For Reflection:** Angels are messengers of God. While we cannot do what angels do, we do have great means at our disposal to announce the Good News. Do I promote and support Catholic radio? Do I listen to it myself? If I am on Facebook or Twitter, do I use it to lead people to the new life of Christ?

Friday, December 20, 2013 – Friday of the 3rd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? (Psalm 24:3)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “Consideration of the ways in which we might make our parishes more welcoming of current parishioners as well as those who are not Catholic or have fallen away from the regular practice of the faith also needs to take place.”
- **For Reflection:** Our “holy place” is the parish church, where Christ is present in the Eucharist and where we, His body, gather to praise Him and support one another. Are we reaching out and welcoming others to this holy place? How can our parish be more welcoming, both physically and spiritually?

Saturday, December 21, 2013 – Saturday of the 3rd Week of Advent

- **Scripture:** Exult, you just, in the Lord! Sing to him a new song. (Psalm 33)
- **From a Mutually Shared Vision:** “Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI both spoke about our age’s need for a “new evangelization,” a way of evangelizing that involves “new vigor, new methods, and a new expression.”
- **For Reflection:** The Church calls us to sing a “new song” to meet the situation of our day. Being a disciple of the Lord often calls us beyond our comfort zone, beyond what is familiar, in order to express the Good News in ways that reach the hearts of every generation. Am I willing to reach beyond my comfort zone in order to help others encounter Christ? What are some new ways in which we can reach out to others with the Gospel message?