

# Father Caruso's Advent Reflections 2020

*As we leave 2020 behind and look to 2021 we thought you might like to take a moment to look back on the Advent Reflections that Father shared this season...*

Dear Friends,

Today we begin our observance of Advent, one of the most beautiful seasons of the year. For me, much of its beauty comes from the fact that it approaches the next few weeks in such a different way than the world around us does. The world "out there" is already decorated for Christmas; in fact, much of the world is already celebrating Christmas. We, however, as disciples of Jesus have just begun to prepare. While the secular world is being overwhelmed with the commercialism of the "shopping season", we are called to prayerfully prepare for the coming of Christ.

I think that we need to celebrate Advent more than ever. With the changes and disruptions to our lives this year due to the pandemic, we need to focus on the spiritual richness of our Faith. Too many of us have placed our hope and trust in this Material World and we were betrayed by this world and left empty. I think the emptiness we felt this year is a reflection of the emptiness that we often feel after Christmas Day has passed. It has the same cause – focusing on the material world and not on the spiritual. Our Hope is centered not on the coming of Santa Claus, presents, festive lights or even a special family meal; it is centered on the coming of Christ, both as an infant in Bethlehem 2000 years ago and His coming in Glory at the end of time. As so much is going to be different this December, and many of our family traditions may not be possible this year, I hope and pray that we can immerse ourselves in the Spirit of Advent to prepare for the two-fold Coming of Christ. The Gift of Salvation that He brings is far more precious than anything we will ever find under the Christmas tree.

It is my plan to post (with the help of Colleen Rosenthal) a short reflection each day during Advent to help us to truly prepare for the Coming of the Lord Jesus. I know that many of us have already decorated for Christmas (I've started) and may even be listening to Christmas music (true confession - I listen to Christmas music year round!), but I hope we each take some time each day to prepare to welcome Christ.

As we begin our Advent journey, I assure you of my continued prayers for all of you; please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ's Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Monday of the First Week of Advent; it is also the Feast of St. Andrew, Apostle. In the Gospel reading for today (Matthew 4: 18-22) we hear Jesus call the first disciples, beginning with Andrew and his brother Simon (Peter). St. Matthew tells us that they were fishermen and that Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” It is a reminder that from the very beginning the call to discipleship wasn’t just about individuals following Jesus, but that discipleship, by necessity, requires the sharing of the Good News and a desire to bring others to the Lord. As it was for the first disciples, so it must be for us!

There are so many ways that we can be “fishers of men”. All of them involve us giving witness to our Faith. We are living in a culture that is becoming ever more indifferent to the Faith. When we live out our Faith, and let others see it, the Lord can use that witness to draw others to Him. (Some may see it as a reason to avoid us, but that is their choice; we can’t allow that to stop us from being disciples<sup>1</sup>)

In the context of our Advent journey, I think that if we were to publicly use this season to truly prepare to welcome Christ (to celebrate Advent now, Christmas later) it would be an incredible witness to the world around us. By showing that the most important way to prepare for Christ’s coming isn’t shopping, baking, and decorating, but instead, repentance, humility and joyful anticipation, the Lord can truly use us to help draw others to Him; to be, as Andrew and Peter were called to be, “fishers of men.”

Know that you are in my prayers; please pray for me.

In Christ,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Tuesday of the First Week of Advent. In our first reading at Mass today (Isaiah 11: 1-10) we are given a vision of the Peaceable Kingdom. Isaiah tells us that when the Lord comes, “the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra’s den, and the child lay his hand on the adder’s lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea.” What an incredible image, especially in this year marked by illness, death, strife, and animosity.

In the seminary I happened across a book of Peanut comic strips that were religiously themed. One of them dealt with this particular passage. It was a Father’s Day comic strip in which Snoopy was remembering his father. He recalled how a preacher had come one day and was talking about the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, etc., when his dad called out, “but what about the beagles and the bunnies?”

I think about that comic strip every year on this Tuesday. Lest you think that I am losing my mind (too late!), this comic strip reminds me that we are called to be part of that Peaceable Kingdom. That Kingdom began to break into this world with the Incarnation; it will be completed at the Second Coming. When we hear this passage from Isaiah, it is tempting to look at the disharmony among creation (between the wolf/lamb, leopard/kid etc.) and feel helpless. What can we do, after all, to bring harmony and peace between the animals? However, this Peanuts comic strip reminds us that we are called to place ourselves in this passage along with our “enemies”. We can do something to bring harmony and peace to those relationships. Think about estranged family members or friends, the co-worker with whom you had a falling out, the person who dared to vote for a different candidate/party than you, or even somebody who has a different opinion about how to deal with the pandemic. In each of those cases, we can seek to make that Kingdom present: a Kingdom of Peace, a Kingdom of Mercy, a Kingdom of Love. What a wonderful way to prepare for the Coming of the King!

In His Love,  
Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Wednesday of the First Week of Advent. Our Gospel reading today (Matthew 15: 29-37) reminds us of the magnificent generosity and compassion of our Loving God. In this passage, Jesus goes up onto the mountain and the

crowds followed Him. St. Matthew tells us that He cured many people. After three days He tells His disciples that His “heart is moved with pity for the crowd” because He is concerned that they have nothing to eat. This is the setting for the Miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Using seven loaves and a few fish Jesus fed the crowd and there were seven baskets full of leftovers.

Such is the generosity of God. To save us from sin, He sent His Son. Out of Love for us, He embraced the Cross. To feed us, nurture us, and give us strength, He gives us His Body and Blood. During Advent, we are preparing to welcome Him. We shouldn't fear Him; we should be joyfully anticipating His Coming, for He is generous and merciful. If there is something standing in the way of our joy over His coming, then we need to turn away from whatever that is.

Advent is considered one of the two great Penitential seasons of the Church Year. There are some who think that penitence is incompatible with the joyful anticipation of this season, but they are wrong. As we joyfully await His return, we are called to prepare our hearts to receive Him. If we had a guest coming to our home, and our house was dirty, we would clean it. Why would we not want to do the same to our heart, our soul, our life in order to welcome Christ. If you are reading this in the Diocese of Syracuse, tonight is the first of four evenings (one each week of Advent) that our Bishop has asked all priests to be in Church to hear Confessions. We will be taking abundant cautions to minimize any exposure to the virus. I hope and pray that all of us will celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Advent; it is the perfect way to celebrate the compassion and generosity of the One we await: as He fed and healed the multitude, He will heal us of our sin and brokenness.

You all are in my prayers; please keep me in yours.

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Thursday of the First week of Advent. In our Gospel reading for today (Matthew 7: 21, 24-27) Jesus offers us a powerful image to show the difference between those who listen to His words and act on them and those who listen to His words and don't act on them. The first group, He tells us, are like the wise person "who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock." The latter group, He tells us, are like "a fool who builds his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined."

We are called to be the wise ones who listen to Jesus' words and act on them. Then our lives will be built on the solid rock of faith. Unfortunately, many of us have chosen not to act on what Jesus has called us to, and so our lives have been built on sand. If we don't believe this, we need to take a step back and look at our lives over the last nine months. The truths of this world changed; so much of what this world promised us was taken away; but the Truth of Jesus Christ remained the same. If we had built our lives on the rock of Faith, the storm of the pandemic would have touched us, but our lives would not have come crashing down around us, like it did for so many of us. This is not to minimize the Corona Virus, the social isolation or the economic challenges that confronted us. These are parts of the rains, floods and winds that Jesus talks about. They are going to come our way; how they affect us depends on if we listen to what Jesus says and try to act on it. We need to be invested in Him, not in this world.

My hope and prayer is that our trials this year may help us to realize where we have gone astray, where we haven't listened to Jesus. During this holy season of Advent, may we turn away from our past mistakes and turn back to Jesus; may we truly listen to Him and act upon His Word; may we seek to firmly built our lives on the rock of Faith and not the ever-shifting sands of this world.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Friday of the First Week of Advent. In our Gospel reading for today (Matthew 9: 27-31) we have the account of Jesus healing two blind men. At the beginning of this story, the blind men are a positive example for us as we seek to follow Jesus. St. Matthew tells us that the men cry out to Jesus, "Son of David, have pity on us!" Jesus asks them if they believe that He can do this and they respond "Yes Lord." Jesus then heals them as He says, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." We are called to also humbly approach Jesus and trust in Him. Too often we approach Him almost as His equal, demeaning Him to do what we want, when we want and if He doesn't follow our plan, we often express a lack of faith. We need to be more like these blind men in our prayer and in our journey of Faith.

The two men offer a mixed witness in the latter part of this story. After Jesus heals them, He tells them, "See that no one knows about this" but they go out and tell people about what had happened. They got what they wanted, and then they didn't listen to Jesus. I have seen that happen (and have done that myself) many times. He is good enough for us to go to Him and ask for something, but if He asks something of us, it's not important for us to do what He asks. Do we think we know better? Or is it just easier to do what we want? Either way, when we do that we show a lack of Faith in the One who came to save us.

Although the men in this story disobeyed what Jesus told them to do, He has not told us to keep our experience of His Love, Mercy and Forgiveness to ourselves. In fact, He calls us to share that Good News with the world around us. There is no reason for us to remain silent; in fact, our Faith compels us to share His Love, in word and action, with all those around us. I pray that each of us remembers that as we continue on our Advent journey. May all those we meet in the days ahead come to know Him in the witness that we offer.

You are in my prayers; please remember to pray for me.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Saturday of the First Week of Advent. In the Gospel reading for today Jesus sends out the Twelve with the instruction: "Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'" This proclamation of the Kingdom is at the heart of the Gospel. The proclamation of the Kingdom challenges us as it is proclaimed to us. We are living in the end times; the King is going to return. We need to seek out the values of the Kingdom and make them our values; we need to learn the attitudes of that Kingdom and make them our own; and we need to discern the will of the King and make it our will. These should be the guiding principles for us on our Advent journey as we prepare for the coming of our King!

The proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven challenges us by calling us to share in its proclamation; as the in-breaking of the Kingdom is proclaimed to us, so we must proclaim it to others. When we see Jesus call and then send forth the Twelve, we are reminded that He has called each of us and has sent us into this world to share in the proclamation of the Kingdom, in the preaching of the Gospel. We don't need to make a special effort to do that; if we are seeking to live with the values and attitudes of the Kingdom, if we are seeking to conform our will to the King's, then the life we live should indeed godly proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at Hand.

I once read that the life we live may be the only Gospel another person will ever read. If those around us were to "read" our life, would they hear of the Kingdom? Would they learn about the King? Would they find the Good News?

You are in my prayers; please pray for me.

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Advent. The Gospel reading for today (and next week) speaks to us of the figure of John the Baptist. Although John is found in the New Testament, he really is the last, and the greatest, of the Old Testament prophets. He was the one that was chosen to immediately prepare for the coming of the Christ. John really is a model for us because we have the similar responsibility in Faith to prepare ourselves and the world around us for the Second Coming of Christ.

John lived a simple life (again, a reminder to us when we set our priorities) and preached repentance. That is a message each of us needs to hear and also share with those around us. John's message and way of life made him stand out, but it was never about himself. He sought to draw people to Christ. At the end of the Gospel reading today he says, "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In the Gospel according to John, John the Baptist says Jesus "must increase; I must decrease."

Perhaps this is the lesson we can take with us as we continue on our Advent journey. The example that we set, the witness that we seek to give, the life we try to lead are always supposed to point to the Majesty, Goodness, and Love of Christ Jesus and not to ourselves. We are called to be His humble servants, preparing the world (and ourselves) to welcome Him when He returns in Glory.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Monday of the Second Week of Advent. In our Old Testament reading at Mass today (Isaiah 35: 1-10) the prophet gives a beautiful image of the transforming power of the Lord. "The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song" he tells us; also that "streams will burst forth in the desert, and rivers in the steppe. The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water". What was parched, barren and seemingly devoid of life will overflow with life giving water and become lush and filled with life.

We can see ourselves as the ones who are parched and barren and seemingly devoid of life. The answer to that barrenness isn't to be found in this world but, instead, in the coming of the Lord. The words of Isaiah are called to strengthen us in our weakness: "Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; With divine recompense he comes to save you."

That is the One we are preparing to welcome: the One who will make us whole; the One who fills us with life; the One who strengthens us! When we are weak, tired, or fearful, instead of turning to this world and its inadequate answers, let us turn in prayer to Him, who came to save us.

You are in my prayers; please pray for me.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the patronal feast of the Church of Syracuse as well as the Church in the United States. As important as this day is, some people may be confused about what we celebrate today and think the Immaculate Conception refers to Mary's conceiving Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this confusion is due to the fact that this Solemnity is celebrated during Advent as we are quickly approaching Christmas. Maybe its because the Gospel reading for today's Mass (Luke 1: 26-38) is an account of the Annunciation where the Angel Gabriel tells Mary that she has been chosen by God to bear His Son into the world. But what we celebrate today happened years before the Annunciation. The Immaculate Conception refers to Mary's conception by her parents, St. Anne and St. Joachim. They conceived her through natural marital relations, but God preserved her from the stain of Original Sin because she had been chosen to bear His Son into world and God wanted the vessel that was to bear His Son to be free from the contagion of sin.

Our Solemnity today says something about the Blessed Mother and why we constantly look to her as model, mother and intercessor. She has a special place in God's plan for our salvation. He preserved her from original sin, but then in her own life, using the gift of her free will, she most perfectly conformed her will to God and avoided falling into sin. She was that pure vessel chosen to bear God's Son into the world.

This Solemnity tells us something about ourselves. We are called to imitate Mary. While Mary uniquely bore God's Son at the time of the Incarnation, we are called to "bear" Him into the world today by making Him (and His Kingdom) known through our lives. While all of us have been touched by the stain of Original Sin, that has been washed away in Baptism; we need now to exercise our free will in order to conform our will to God's.

Finally, this Solemnity tells us something about God. After the Fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, God had a plan to offer us a second chance, to offer us Salvation. That plan was revealed as God saw fit to reveal it, not according to our plan. Humans didn't always know or understand what was happening. So it is with the Immaculate Conception. St. Anne and St. Joachim didn't know what was happening, they just struggled to do what God was asking from them. Mary didn't know until the time of the Annunciation that she had been chosen for a special role; before and after her encounter with Gabriel she just sought to do what God called her to do.

So it must be with each of us. We need to seek to turn away from sin, discern God's will for us, and humbly seek follow it. We don't need to know (despite our great eagerness to) what the fullness of God's plan is or even what our role in it means; we just need to do it, trusting in God's infinite wisdom and knowing that He will lead us to the Glory of the Kingdom, if we only follow Him!

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent. Even in “normal” times many of us can feel overwhelmed by the trials, burdens, and challenges of this world. This had been made worse by the extraordinary challenges that this pandemic has presented to us. We can try to deal with these burdens on our own (and fail) or we can turn to Jesus for help.

In our Gospel reading for today (Matthew 11: 28-30), Jesus makes an invitation: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” Too often our stubborn pride gets in the way and stops us from accepting that invitation. We need to humbly accept that invitation and be drawn into the rest-filled presence of Jesus. This doesn’t mean we won’t have sorrows, cares, or burdens; on the contrary, Jesus invites us to “Take my yoke upon you.” However, we are not alone in carrying that burden, for He also tells us “learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yolk is easy and my burden light.”

As we continue our Advent journey, may our hearts be opened to that invitation of Jesus to come to Him and find rest. Let us take time each day to enter into His presence in prayer and learn from Him and be strengthened by Him, so that we will be ready to greet Him when He comes.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Thursday of the Second Week of Advent. We are just about half way through our Advent Journey. Our focus is still on preparing for the Second Coming of Christ; it will be another week until our focus shifts to prepare for His First Coming as a baby in Bethlehem. This is a good time to stop and see how we are doing this Advent.

Have the last twelve days been any different from what came before? Have we taken more time to pray? Have we sought to be reconciled with the Lord? During this time of preparation, have our preparation gone beyond shopping, wrapping, decorating and/or baking? I have seen many posts on Facebook about how wonderful the tree looks, how extravagant the lights on the house are this year, etc., but none about the spiritual preparation we are supposed to be undertaking. I realize that this is something personal, but our preparation isn't just about ourselves: we are called to help the world around us (including our family and friends) to prepare for Christ's coming. How do we do that if we aren't willing to give personal witness?

If Advent has gotten by us so far, it is not too late to make the most of the remainder of this Holy Season. Let us each take time to prepare ourselves to welcome the Lord Jesus and let us pray for each other, that we may all be ready to greet Him when He comes.

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Friday of the Second Week of Advent. In the Gospel reading for today (Matthew 11: 16-19) Jesus challenges those who hear him, those 2000 years ago and those today, to be open to what God has planned for them. He compares them/us to “children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.’” If we aren’t clear about the challenge, He continues, “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, ‘He is possessed by a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, ‘Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’” Nothing was right for the people of Jesus time; they couldn’t accept what God was doing because it didn’t fit what they were expecting, what they wanted. Even the very different ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus were rejected for opposite reasons. It’s as if they went out of their way to find a reason to reject God’s Love, God’s message to them. Because they were too focused on the things of this world.

Before we judge them too harshly, I think we must recognize that many of us also do the same thing. We look for reasons to reject God’s message (and the ones whom He uses as messengers). We go out of our way to find excuses to turn away from all that He offers us because it challenges our limit perspective. During these holy days of Advent, let us pray for the Grace to reject, not the offer of His Love, but all the excuses that prevent us from humbly accepting the Gift He brings.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Saturday of the Second Week of Advent; it is also the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This Feast day marks the apparition of the Blessed Virgin to St. Juan Diego in Mexico nearly 500 years ago. She asked for a chapel to be built on the hill where she appeared. Church authorities didn't believe Juan Diego's claim and they asked for a sign from this woman. Eventually, on this day in 1531, roses appeared on that barren hill and Juan Diego brought them to the bishop in his cloak and when he opened up his cloak to show the bishop the roses, an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was found on the inside of the cloak.

This Feast is the patronal feast of the Americas (both North and South). It is a reminder that we are united by something far greater than those things that might seem to divide us, namely, God's Love. Ultimately that message of His Love is at the heart of this apparition. When the Virgin appeared to St. Juan Diego, who was a poor peasant, she spoke to him in his native language. When Juan Diego had avoided the spot of the apparition because he didn't want to be delayed as he was trying to help a dying relative, the Blessed Mother chastised him for not bringing his problems to her, saying, "Am I not here, I who am your mother?"

Mary is always there for us to help us on our journey to the Kingdom of her Son. With a mother's love she seeks to comfort us, helping us to realize that the answers to our problems are to be found in her Divine Son. As we celebrate her feast day today as we journey through this Advent season, let us turn to her for her intercession; may we find the Grace and strength that we need in her Son.

You are in my prayers the day; please pray for me.

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.”** These words, from Philippians 4: 4-5, form the entrance antiphon at Mass today, the Third Sunday of Advent. Traditionally, this Sunday is called Gaudate Sunday (“Gaudate” is the Latin word for “rejoice” that is used in the antiphon). When we light the third candle on the Advent wreath, it is rose colored, as are the vestments worn by the priest at Mass. What does all this mean? Is the change in color just a signal that Christmas is fast approaching and we are running out of time to shop? Hopefully, it means much more than that.

The season of Advent is a time of expectation, anticipation, and preparation. We are called to turn away from sin and to prepare our hearts for the long awaited Messiah. This Sunday helps us to remember that our preparation is not for an event to be feared, but for one that is the source of our joy. All too often, we can lose sight of this and our “holiday season” is anything but joyous. This year has certainly offered us many challenges and those challenges keep coming our way. If there is any joy to be found in the world around us, it is often the fleeting joy which the things of this world bring. On this Joyful Sunday, let us all remember that the time of the Lord’s arrival is near; and, as people who are prepared to receive Him, let us rejoice and show the world what the real joy of the season is. **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near.”**

Please know that you are in my prayers during these holy days of Advent; please keep me in yours.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Monday of the Third Week of Advent. To help us focus today on our Advent Journey, I would like to reflect on the Collect (Opening Prayer) for today's Mass. This prayer says: "Incline a merciful ear to our cry, we pray, O Lord, and, casting light on the darkness of our hearts, visit us with the grace of your Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever."

The Collect begins by recognizing the mercy of God - "incline a merciful ear". It is easy to become distracted by the problems of this world, to allow ourselves to be weighed down by our problems to the point we lose sight of God's mercy. I have met too many people who even look at God as vengeful, not merciful. But at the heart of the Good News is the revelation of the fullness of God's mercy in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Recognizing God's mercy, we humbly turn to Him for help; we pray that he incline His merciful ear to "our cry". You cry out for help when you recognize you can't do what needs to be done, when you humbly recognize your powerlessness and you turn to the All-Powerful One for assistance. We can't do that with our hearts filled with pride.

That leads us to the next supplication in the Collect: "casting light on the darkness of our hearts". I am convinced that many of us think that we are perfect, that we have no need for God's forgiveness, for God's mercy, or even, at times, for God Himself. In this part of the prayer we ask God to cast His light into our hearts that we may see our pride, our weakness, our sins. This really should be part of our daily prayer as we seek to draw closer to Him.

Finally, after asking for help in seeing the failings of our life, we recognize that the answer to all that is wrong is not found in ourselves or in the world around us, but in God Himself: "visit us with the grace of your Son." That is at the heart of our Advent Journey as we prepare to welcome Christ and it is (or at least should be) at the heart of our life-long journey of Faith. We are, indeed, imperfect sinners and yet God loves us more than we can ever imagine and seeks to give us all we need to be with Him forever. Let us take that to heart as we deal with the on-going challenges of our world today.

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent. In the Gospel reading for today's Mass (Matthew 21: 28-32) Jesus challenges the religious leaders of His day (and us today) by posing this question: "A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' The son said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" The leaders answered as we would today, "the first." Jesus takes this opportunity to challenge them on their failure to believe John the Baptist while tax collectors and prostitutes (those who like the first son said "no", but eventually did the father's will) did. Therefore, He tells them, those tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before the religious leaders.

I have always been tempted to breathe a sigh of relief that Jesus wasn't talking to me in a passage like this, but the reality is that He is talking to me and to each and everyone of us. We have become those "insiders" who pay lip-service to God's call to us, but then do what we want. There are others, perhaps "public sinners" that seemingly reject God but are ultimately seeking to do His will. I think the pandemic has given us ample opportunities to see if we are actually willing to "go work in the vineyard today." The Gospel calls us to service, sacrifice and mercy. If we aren't willing to live that way, then others will enter the Kingdom of God before us.

Let us pray for one another, that we will respond with heart, voice, and action to the Lord's call.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent. It is the last day of Advent where our focus is on the future and the Second Coming of Christ; tomorrow we begin to prepare for the celebration of the First Coming of Christ at His Nativity in Bethlehem. In the Gospel reading for today (Luke 7: 18b-23) John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him if He is the One that was to come. Jesus told them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." Jesus saw what He was saying and doing as evidence of who He was and the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God.

As He did for those who were with Him 2,000 years ago, He does for us today. He will heal us of our defects, make us whole, and comfort us with the Good News. As we continue our Advent Journey, let us recognize where we need healing and turn to the only one who can make us well!

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is December 17th, Thursday of the Third Week of Advent. It is an ancient tradition in the Church to begin on this day the use of the "Great O Antiphons" as part of her prayer. Most of us would know the "O Antiphons" from the Advent hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The antiphon "O Emmanuel" is actually the seventh, and last of the antiphons and is used on December 23rd. For the last week of Advent each of my daily reflections will be on that particular day's "O Antiphon." Each of the antiphons takes an Old Testament title given to the long awaited Messiah and expresses an ever greater longing for His coming.

The antiphon for today is O Wisdom (O Sapientia): "O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet gentle care. Come and show your people the way to salvation." We are reminded of the Eternal Wisdom, that Word of God in whom and for whom all was created. Isaiah also prophesied about Wisdom: "The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:

a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, But he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide fairly for the land's afflicted." (Isaiah 11: 2-4)

Please join your sisters and brothers throughout the world today to pray for Wisdom to come to us. We pray for Wisdom to come to us, to help us through the difficulties of this life; we pray for Wisdom to come to us to help us, in the midst of this passing world, to focus on the things of Eternity; we pray for Wisdom to come to us, to show us the way to Salvation.

Let us keep each other in prayer.

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is December 18th, the Friday of the Third Week of Advent. There is only one week until Christmas Day. The O antiphon for today is O Lord (O Adonai): "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." In this antiphon we pray for the Lord who gave the law to Moses. On our Advent Journey, we pray for Him to come to us, the Lord who gave the Law, the Lord who came to fulfill the Law, the Lord who taught us the Law of Love. We pray for Him to come and set us free.

In order to authentically pray for Him to come to set us free, we must first recognize that we are not free. We are held bound by fear, by indifference, by doubt, by sin. Let us pray for the Grace to recognize all that prevents us from being free and then join our brothers and sisters throughout the world to Pray for the Lord to come and set us free. What a wonderful preparation for Christmas!

In His Love,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is December 19th, the Saturday of the Third Week of Advent. The O antiphon for today is O Root of Jesse (O Radix Jesse): “O Root of Jesse’s stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.” Isaiah had prophesied: “But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom” (Isaiah 11:1), and “On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.” (Isaiah 11:10). Through the Incarnation Jesus is of the lineage of Jesse (the father of King David).

We are reminded in this prayer today that God entered human history in a remarkable way at a very specific point in time; it was the fulfillment of a plan that stretched across generations of human life. But it came to pass as God planned, when God planned. Throughout those generations, God’s people were restless; they longed for Him to come. By praying this antiphon we join with them, pleading for Him to come to be with us, to help us on journey through the challenges of this life, to “come to our aid.”

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is December 21st, the Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent. The O antiphons for today is O Radiant Dawn (O Oriens): "O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death." The prophet Isaiah wrote: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shown." (Isaiah 9:1). We have certainly been living in darkness lately. The false lights of this world have proven inadequate to cut through the darkness; those of us who have sought the comfort of the lights of this world have been left in the dark.

Today we pray for the coming of the light of Jesus Christ, the Radiant Dawn, to dispel the darkness from this world, to cast the darkness out of our lives, that we may live in His light: a light that brings comfort, a light that brings warmth, a light that brings hope. Let us join our sister and brothers throughout the world to pray for the Radiant Dawn to come to all living in darkness.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is December 22nd, the Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent. The O antiphon for today is O King of the Nations (O Rex Gentium): "O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O Keystone of the mighty arch of man, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust." We are reminded of the prophesy of Isaiah: "For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:5), and "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." (Isaiah 2:4)

In the midst of all the problems this world faces, there are rising tensions among people: within our homes, within our communities, among the nations of the world. Today we are invited to join our sisters and brothers throughout the world in praying for the coming of the King of the Nations, that He will bring us peace and save us from ourselves.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is December 23rd, the Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent. The last of the seven O antiphons is used today. It is O Emmanuel: "O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God." Isaiah had prophesied: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel." (Isaiah 7: 14)

Today we pray for the coming of Emmanuel, "God with Us". We are reminded that in this world that can often be cold, dark and lonely, we are not alone. God has not abandoned us. He has come to dwell with us. He is our Savior, come to set us free. If we, like so many others, struggle today with a sense of loss, of sadness, of loneliness, let us join our sisters and brothers throughout the world in praying for Emmanuel to come to us.

In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is December 23rd, the Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Advent. The last of the seven O antiphons is used today. It is O Emmanuel: "O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Savior of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God." Isaiah had prophesied: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel." (Isaiah 7: 14)

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In His Peace,

Fr. Caruso

Dear Friends,

Today is Christmas Day. For many of us our celebrations this day will be very different from what we are used to. This terrible pandemic continues to alter our lives and can easily make us grow weary; however, one thing that hasn't changed is the message of Hope and Love at the heart of Christmas.

This year, perhaps more than ever before, I keep thinking about the shepherds on that First Christmas. They were alone and isolated on a good, dark night; it was to them that the angels first brought the wonderful news of Christ's birth: "Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'" (Luke 2: 8-14)

Perhaps the shepherds were chosen because in the loneliness and darkness that they were experiencing, they could most clearly hear and see the tremendous news that was being shared. St. Luke tells us that they were afraid, but they angels assure them that they were there to proclaim "good news of great joy." Moved by this message, the shepherds hastened to Bethlehem where they encountered Mary, Joseph and the Baby Jesus. After their encounter, they began to share the message with others and "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." (Luke 2: 20)

I think the shepherds are wonderful examples for us, especially this year. In the darkness of this world may we see the bright light of Christ's coming; in the silence around us may we hear the "good news of great joy" proclaimed once again. In our hearts, may we hasten to Bethlehem to encounter the Christ Child, God's great gift to us, a gift of a Loving Savior. Like the shepherds may we bring this message with those around us who shared the darkness with us; and. Like the shepherds of old, may we, with our lives, glorify and praise God for all He has done.

You are all in my prayers; please pray for me.

Merry Christmas!

In the Peace of the New-born King,

Fr. Caruso