Wednesday of the First Week of Advent  
December 1, 2010

Scripture: Isaiah 25:6-10; Psalm 23:1-6; Matthew 15:29-37

Reflection: As we begin this beautiful season, anticipating with great hope the coming of the Prince of Peace, let us be attentive to the words of Jesus, and of the Prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah wrote not only to comfort, but to fill with hope, a people who had long endured captivity and suffering. His message was the Messiah will come. Of course, this promise presumed that the people would be faithful to the Lord and walk in his ways. The suffering will end and there will be peace. In this series “Something Beautiful from God” we are pondering the blessings God has offered to all peoples throughout the course of time. Yet, are we not like these ancient peoples in so many ways? How many of us, on this ever-shrinking planet, yearn for peace—peace within ourselves, in the community around us, in all of creation?

The Gospel from Matthew is seen in two parts. The first is a series of miracles—the healing of individuals. There is nothing new or distinct in this account of Jesus’ working of miracles for the people. The second part, quite distinct from the first, relates that a very large group of people have been with Jesus for three days, listening to his words. Jesus is very aware of their need to have food. In his sensitivity to their need he tells the disciples that he cannot send them away hungry, lest they will faint on the way.

The disciples haven’t the slightest idea of how to address the situation. When a few fish and some loaves of bread are found, Jesus blesses them and directs the disciples to see that everyone is well fed. Jesus then sends them home. Again, all of this is from the perspective of Matthew. He gives us no indication of the peoples’ response to these miraculous actions. Neither does the evangelist tell us of the disciples’ reaction to this miracle. Are we as oblivious, as were the disciples, of this miracle that Jesus performs in us each time we receive him in the Eucharist?

Suggested Action: Pray with great hope: The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

Sister Benedicta Berendes, IHM
Scranton, Pennsylvania
Thursday of the First Week of Advent  
December 2, 2010  

Scripture: Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27; Matthew 7:21, 24-27  

Reflection:  
The reading of today tells us that the one who does the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven, and it also states that whoever listens to his word and puts it into practice is like a wise man who built his house on rock.  

What is the will of the Father, and how, like the wise man, can we build a strong house? It is clear from today’s reading that the will of the Father is love. God gave us life, wisdom, freedom, and especially love, which will become the material needed to build our house. In addition, he has confidence that we will build the reign of God in communion with other people, that we will be creative and prudent in doing so.  

Jesus seems to be telling us that we ought to live in love, that is to say we ought to do the will of the Father in communion with other people, nature, and especially that we ought to be creative and prudent in light of the changes in the modern world. We ought to build the reign of God in this real but changing world where there exist other ideologies, where already there are those who do not have time to pray, much less share love with the people around them. It is in this climate that we ought to construct the house on a firm foundation in order that the message of Jesus and the love of God do not disappear. We are to be prudent and wise so that the building will not collapse in the real world.  

Suggested Action:  
Let us take time to reflect: Where and on what have we built, or are we still constructing the house? How long will it last?  

Sister Norma Poma Arpi, IHM  
Lima, Peru
Friday of the First Week of Advent
December 3, 2010

Scripture: Isaiah 29:17-24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; Matthew 9:27-31

Reflection:
In keeping with the topics that weave through the scriptures during this liturgical season, there is an abundance of themes. Isaiah speaks of abundance in his image of Lebanon being changed into an orchard and an orchard becoming a forest. The prophet then reminds us that “on that day”—words which introduce something spectacular—the deaf will hear and the eyes of the blind will see.

The psalmist reminds us that “One thing I ask of you, Adonai, one thing I seek: that I may dwell in your house all the days of my life, to gaze on your beauty and to meditate in your Temple.”

Finally in Matthew we find Jesus opening the eyes of the blind—a miracle in response to the deep faith of the sightless ones that Jesus could heal them. When we ask to see, do we believe it possible, knowing our prayers will be answered according to our faith? Most of us reading these scriptures can see with our physical eyes, but do we ask to see with our heart, to move beyond the sense of sight to the gift of insight which we are given when we pray with deep faith?

These Advent readings find expression in the Morning Prayer from Weston Priory:
“When God opens the eyes of our eyes,
and the ears of our ears are unsealed,
then we will be a people fully awake,
a people who may listen deeply.”

Suggested Action:
Sit looking at the abundant gifts that you see in your surroundings. Then ask for the gift of seeing with the eyes of your eyes—the heart—that you may gaze on Adonai’s beauty and loveliness and experience seeing as Adonai sees.

Sister Grace Campbell, IHM
New Bern, North Carolina
First Sunday of Advent  
November 28, 2010

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122:1-9; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

Reflection:  
Isaiah’s vision is one of fulfillment. It recalls the promise to Abraham, “and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing—all this because you obeyed my command, to walk before God and be blameless.”

Liberated from slavery, Israel became a social betterment society. Anyone reduced to poverty was restored to economic stability by the elders. The Jews of Jesus’ time, although living in their homeland, psychologically still felt as if they were in exile while under Roman oppression.

America also is still battling oppression. Jesus fulfills Jeremiah’s prophecy, “I am sowing something new....” Filled and energized with the Spirit of Jesus, we need a new agenda, one that works for the common good of all, one that sows peace and economic stability in our midst and globally.

Suggested Action:  
Who is crying out to me today for support and liberation? How can I answer the call?

Sister Jacquelyn Donohue, IHM  
Bethesda, Maryland
Monday of the First Week of Advent
November 29, 2010

Scripture: Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 8-9; Matthew 8:5-11

Reflection:
On a recent plane trip I overheard a conversation taking place in the seats behind me. A mother was describing to her very young son their destination—Grandpa’s house. “Grandpa will meet us at the airport and then he will drive us out to his farm,” the mother said, “where there are huge trees, lots of grassy fields, cows, and even a horse.” “Is the farm as big as our backyard?” the son asked. “It’s much, much bigger,” the mother answered. “Is it bigger than the playground at school?” “It’s even bigger than that.” “How big is it?” No answers, however, seemed to help this inquisitive boy’s mind move beyond the realities with which he was familiar. He was not able to image the beauty and vastness of Grandpa’s yet-to-be-seen farm.

I recalled that conversation as I read the passage from Isaiah. Here too I found the author trying to describe an existence so magnificent that his hearers probably struggled hard to imagine it—a world that was beautiful and glorious, clean and fruitful, lavish in providing shelter and refuge. Isaiah, recognizing the key role of a compelling vision, shared the image as an impetus to work for the realization of a new world order.

I wonder how a modern-day prophet might rewrite this passage for these times. What vision could motivate us to embark on a process of transformation? What images could inspire us to be utterly tireless in our efforts to bring about a new world?

Suggested Action:
Rewrite the passage from Isaiah with your own compelling vision for what a truly beautiful and glorious world would look like today. Commit yourself to one action that could help bring about that vision.

Sister Annmarie Sanders, IHM
Washington, DC
Feast of Saint Andrew, Apostle  
November 30, 2010

Scripture: Romans 10:9-18; Psalm 19:2-5; Matthew 4:18-22

Reflection:
Paul instructs the Romans: Listen, believe, proclaim. 
The psalmist declares: Without speech or words the message goes out. Jesus through Matthew calls: Follow me. Something beautiful from God is offered to us this Advent:

- the grace to listen
- the grace to believe
- the grace to proclaim without speech or words

God offers us the grace to continue to follow Jesus wherever we are in our life’s journey, going deeper into the mystery of the incarnation in ways we never thought were possible.

Once again I am amazed that each liturgical year, each Advent calls me to follow Jesus in ways I never realized before, as if the words were new to my hearing.

Suggested Action:
What does “listen, believe, proclaim, follow me” mean in your life today? God is offering you something new and beautiful this Advent. Pray for the grace to know and embrace new ways to listen, believe, proclaim, and follow Jesus. You may be as shocked as were Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

Sister Denise Lyon, IHM  
Notre Dame, Indiana