

Reflection

VIRTUAL ADVENT PRAYER SERVICE

Western Lieutenancy of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem
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Just last week we all were in “Thanksgiving” mode. For many of us Thanksgiving is a time to give thanks to God for all the gifts God has bestowed upon us. Even the most negative person can find *something* for which to be thankful. It is good to have an *attitude of gratitude* as much as possible, especially these days.

But, I’d like to ask a different kind of “Thanksgiving” question as we continue our Advent journey. Instead of reflecting on what it is that we give thanks to God for, how about this: **What can God give thanks to US for?** What is it that I have said or done that would cause God to look at me and say, “Thanks, Jim!” Or, to put it biblically, what have I said or done that would cause God to say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (MT25:21)?

On this coming Second Sunday of Advent, whose sacred scriptures we just heard, the prophets Isaiah and John the Baptist challenge us to “prepare the way of the Lord.” Let’s pause for a moment and sincerely ask ourselves: Is God thankful to us for the ways we have “prepared the way of the Lord” this past year? Believe me, the following challenging questions I need to hear, first and foremost, myself.

- Is God thankful for my positive and cooperative attitude during this time of pandemic, or have I contributed to a negative atmosphere of doubt and questioning and refusing to follow safety protocols set before us for the good of all?
- Is God thankful for my understanding and acceptance of the limitations placed on us in church for the sincere safety, health and wellbeing of others, or do I continually complain when things change and cause me inconvenience?
- Is God thankful for the way I have kept holy the Lord's day when the obligation to attend Mass has been lifted, or has it become another day to get caught up on things?
- Is God thankful for the way I have been a peacemaker and reconciler during the most recent turbulent political season, or have I contributed or still contribute to the unfortunate negativity that has caused so much division and even shattered relationships between family and friends?
- Is God thankful for the way I have accepted and respected those who think or live differently from me, or have I chosen the un-Christian course of demonizing those on the "other" side?
- Is God thankful for my positive and life-giving presence on the internet, or do I continue to bully others by posting or re-posting negative things

about those I find difficult to love or those with whom I disagree?

- Is God thankful for the way I promote the dignity of every human person created in the image and likeness of God, or do I reject those whom certain sectors of society, or perhaps even myself, have declared repulsive and unworthy of human respect and care?
- Is God thankful for the way I consistently affirm and respect the whole of life from the moment of conception through the final breath, or am I only concerned about a portion of each life God has created without the same concern for the rest of the cycle of life?

You see, we all want God to be thankful for all of us at all times, but sometimes we're just not worthy of that. But even when we're not worthy of God's gratitude, it doesn't stop God's unconditional love for us. So, let's make this Advent a new time to finally get rid of those negative detours that lead us away from the clear and direct path of being faithful disciples who desire to grow in personal sanctification. Therefore, if we want to "prepare the way of the Lord" or "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (cf. IS 40:3) in our own hearts which is our own "Holy Land", we have to commit ourselves to ***live unconditional love*** for everyone, like Jesus did, without exception, without condition.

So let us give God good reasons to thank us as we accept the challenge of Isaiah who encourages us to "give comfort" and to "speak tenderly" (cf. IS

40:1-2), and as we let John the Baptist's call to repentance help us get rid of the detours of uncharity along the way, those detours that keep us from letting God's love live unconditionally through all we say and do.

May we all have a Happy Advent, with lots of Thanksgiving! Amen.