

LIVING  LITURGY™

LIVING LITURGY™

Spirituality, Celebration, and Catechesis for Sundays and Solemnities

Year C • 2025

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PREFACE

Introduction

As a premier Catholic publisher, Liturgical Press remains committed to offering liturgical, spiritual, and scriptural resources rooted in the Benedictine tradition with a desire to deepen the faith and knowledge of today's richly diverse church. While these resources have changed and developed over the years, the commitment to sound theology and best pastoral practice remain hallmarks of our mission and ministry. *Living Liturgy*TM is one of our most loved and widely used incarnations of this commitment.

*Living Liturgy*TM helps people prepare for liturgy and live a liturgical spirituality—a way of living that is rooted in liturgy. The paschal mystery is the central focus of liturgy, of the gospels, and of this volume. As Pope Francis has reminded us in his apostolic letter on liturgical formation, in the liturgy the paschal mystery is “rendered present and active by means of signs addressed to the senses (water, oil, bread, wine, gestures, words), so that the Spirit, plunging us into the paschal mystery, might transform every dimension of our life, conforming us more and more to Christ” (*Desiderio Desideravi* 21). *Living Liturgy*TM is therefore more than a title. Rather, “living liturgy” is a commitment to a relationship with Jesus Christ, embodied in our everyday actions and interactions.

We hope this edition of *Living Liturgy*TM will continue to facilitate this relationship, making liturgical spirituality a lived reality.

Authors

As always, we are extremely proud of our team of *Living Liturgy*TM authors, who help accompany all who open these pages, drawing upon a breadth of theological, liturgical, and ministerial expertise. Most of all, our writers share their own experience of “living liturgy” in a multitude of communities and contexts.

Many of the “Reflecting on the Gospel” sections for this year are taken from Barbara E. Reid's *Abiding Word: Sunday Reflections for Year C*. We are thrilled to share Sr. Barbara's excellent work in this capacity. Her exceptional biblical scholarship and seasoned pastoral proficiency are unmatched. Additional “Reflecting on the Gospel” sections have been contributed by George J. Doyle, who offers fresh perspectives on a number of solemnities, feast days, and other liturgical celebrations throughout the year.

Likewise, this edition features the wisdom of the following practitioners, each of whom supports the interplay of spirituality, celebration, and catechesis that is a hallmark of *Living Liturgy*TM: Jessica Mannen Kimmet (“Preparing to Proclaim,” “Making Connections,” “Psalmist Preparation,” and “Prompts for Faith Sharing”); Katharine E. Harmon and Matthew Sherman (“Homily Points,” “Model Penitential Act,” and “Model Universal Prayer”); Alan Hommerding, Janet Sullivan Whitaker, and Steven C. Warner (“Liturgy and Music”); and Dennis A. Strach II (“Living Liturgy”). With a variety of sections and writing styles, we know that you will find these contributions to be prayerful, practical, and relevant to our church and world today.

Finally, we again included more “Prompts for Faith Sharing” in an appendix at the back of this edition. We hope these additional questions written by Dennis Strach will serve as rich fodder for discussion and reflection.

Artwork

This edition features a stunning new series of original artwork from Ruberval Monteiro da Silva, OSB. Fr. Ruberval, a native of Brazil, resides in the Benedictine community of Sant'Anselmo in Rome. His colorful mosaics grace the walls of churches around the world, and we are excited to once again include his work in *Living Liturgy*TM.



SEASON OF ADVENT



SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Ps 85:8

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Show us, Lord, your love;
and grant us your salvation.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36; L3C

Jesus said to his disciples:

“There will be signs in the
sun, the moon, and the
stars,
and on earth nations will be
in dismay,
perplexed by the roaring of
the sea and the waves.
People will die of fright
in anticipation of what is
coming upon the world,
for the powers of the heav-
ens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man
coming in a cloud with power and
great glory.

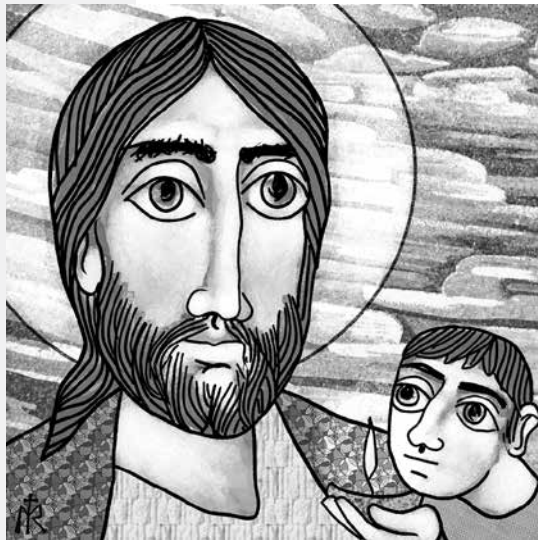
But when these signs begin to happen,
stand erect and raise your heads
because your redemption is at hand.

“Beware that your hearts do not be-
come drowsy
from carousing and drunkenness
and the anxieties of daily life,
and that day catch you by surprise
like a trap.

For that day will assault everyone
who lives on the face of the earth.
Be vigilant at all times
and pray that you have the strength
to escape the tribulations that are
imminent
and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

How do people who fall in love sustain their hopeful expectation of one another throughout their lives? Some relationships begin to crumble after the infatuation wears off, the delight in mutual commitment fades, and routine life settles in. Some relationships don't make it through a lifetime. Others weather the passage of time with moments of renewed celebration of promises made and kept, and of crises faced together, strengthening the lifelong bond. Such experiences in human relationships reveal something of how God interacts with us.



As Advent begins, people in the northern hemisphere may be inclined to snuggle into the shortened dark days of approaching winter to calmly contemplate the coming of Christ. But the readings put us in a crisis mode that is anything but restful. Jeremiah addresses the exiles who are undergoing great distress. He had earlier prophesied that the Davidic dynasty would be restored soon after the fall of Jerusalem. Instead, the weary exiles have experienced disaster after disaster, and they are grasping for some sign of hope. “The days are coming” is an expression that, in the Bible, ordinarily introduces a pronouncement of judgment, instilling fear in

the hearers. Instead, Jeremiah uses the phrase to startle the careworn exiles with an assurance that God will fulfill the promises made to Israel and Judah.

While Jeremiah's hearers were waiting for fulfillment of God's promises in an existing crisis, Luke's and Paul's hearers are waiting for an apocalyptic end time that seems long in coming. Luke's warning is not to let one's heart grow drowsy during the long wait. Like lovers whose passion fades and whose lives are lulled into routine, the people's ardor may dim, and they may be found unprepared for the coming crisis. Luke advises not letting our hearts go after things that satisfy only for a time and not becoming weighed down with anxiety. Be always watchful, he says, so as not to be taken by surprise. Pray for strength, and do not be afraid. Stand tall, he says, raise your heads, and be ready for the embrace of the One who is Love Incarnate.

Paul tells the Thessalonians to strengthen their hearts. He prays, “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all,” reminding us that it is God who initiates and sustains us in love and that it is a love meant to be shared with all. Daily prayer and practices of loving outreach prepare us well for the crisis times, when disaster strikes, when jobs are lost, when illness or death turns our world awry, when violence rips at the fabric of our world. With hearts already strengthened by God's love, we are able to withstand any assault.

The expectation of the birth of a child can often reignite the ardor of a flagging love relationship. So too in Advent, if our hearts are weary or drowsy, our preparation for the celebration of the Christ, who has already been born as one of us, can spark our love once again, not only toward the One who came as a child in our midst but also to all God's beloved children.

Preparing to Proclaim

Key words and phrases: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars.”

To the point: Many of us think of Advent as a peacefully prayerful time. The idea of “keeping vigil” is appealing and cozy: shortened days draw us inside, where lights dim and candles flicker while we renew our devotion to prayer. But the first Sunday of Advent always has an edge to it. Jesus’s reminders to stay vigilant are not gentle ones. He warns that his return to earth will assault everyone who lives here. People are going to die of fright at the cosmic signs of the eschaton. Jesus’s return will be a source of great joy, but it is also going to change the world as we know it. No matter how well we purify our desires, all of us will suffer some loss in the process. This is the vigilance Jesus calls us to: detachment from the things of this world so that we will be ready to leave them behind when the time comes.

Psalmist Preparation

This psalm is a very important preparation for the frightful images we will hear in this Sunday’s gospel. In that gospel, Jesus tells us to prepare for a terrifying end to the world as we know it; the day of his return “will assault” all who live on earth. Preparing for this sounds like a tall order. But God does not want anxiety for us, and we are not to rely on our own efforts in preparing. God is our teacher and guide; God promises to show the right path even to sinners. Preparing for Christ’s return is less about doubling down on our own efforts and more about finding the stillness we need to listen for God. As you prepare to proclaim this psalm, try to carve out a moment of stillness where you can listen and rest in God’s love.

Making Connections

Between the readings: In the second reading, Paul reminds the Thessalonians to stay ready for Jesus’s return. He also tells them *how* to do so: by increasing in love. It is love for others that will grow their holiness and strengthen their hearts for Jesus’s coming. This love will humble them before others, but to choose it is a radically courageous act. It comes from trust in God’s providence and care.

To experience: In the gospel, Jesus names the anxieties of daily life as one of the things that can make our hearts too drowsy to be ready for him. This might be surprising—he places these anxieties alongside carousing and drunkenness, which take a more active choice to partake in and are therefore easier to avoid. Anxiety is tricky. It can make us *feel* like it’s helping us prepare. It keeps us vigilant. But it is distracting and unproductive, miring us down instead of setting us free. Jesus calls us to vigilance, yes, but not at the expense of the peace he promises.

Homily Points

- Nations will be in dismay. The powers of the heavens will be shaken. People will die of fright. Doesn’t sound very much like a merry Christmas, does it? The gospel today, which begins our Advent season, certainly does not conjure commercial images of festive gift-giving and sweet-sounding silver bells. This is because Advent is not about preparing for a merry Christmas. Advent prepares our hearts to receive the one great gift—Jesus Christ—who comes to us in the incarnation and who will come to us again at the end of time.
- Advent refers to the “coming”—but the coming of Christ sounds far more fierce than any Christmas carol might have us believe. We focus on the beauty and peace of the baby Jesus, and this is right and good. But Advent is also to remind us that Jesus not only comes to us—we are to come to *him*. When the world comes to an end, will we be prepared with strengthened hearts to walk, holy and blameless, in his sight? Advent is here to remind us to be ready *for*, and to make ready our way *to*, the Lord.
- Jesus warns us today to be ready for his Second Coming. But we are not only to rid ourselves of the vices of carousing and drunkenness. Jesus tells us not to let the anxieties of daily life make us drowsy, forgetful, neglectful of preparing our hearts for him. We might not readily think of our busy days as drawing us away from Christ. But do we remember to pray? Do we remember to show compassion to others? Do we remember to be present to those who need and depend upon us? Let us be ready. Let us remember.



Model Penitential Act

Presider: The gospel today calls us to be vigilant, not afraid. Preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ, we call to mind our need for his mercy . . . [pause]

Lord Jesus, you come to bring justice and righteousness to the earth: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you show sinners the way: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you strengthen our hearts and increase our love: Lord, have mercy.

Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Presider: Turning to the Lord who unceasingly shows us his love, we offer our prayers and petitions for all the world.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

For Pope N.: may his words of teaching and exhortation invite us and all the world to greater lives of faith, hope, and charity, we pray . . .

For leaders of nations, especially where bloodshed is taking place: may they work for justice and protection for their people, we pray . . .

For all who struggle with fear and anxiety: may this Advent season invite them to new hope and peace, we pray . . .

For us as we gather here in prayer today: may our friendship increase as a parish community as we choose to know one another more deeply, we pray . . .

Presider: Lord God, guide us always in your truth and teach us. Hear our prayers as we begin this season of preparation for the coming of your Son, and draw us ever closer to you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Liturgy and Music

I can remember a time when all my news came to me from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a publication that is still delivered daily to my doorstep. Most mornings, this newspaper is filled with news that, thanks to online newsfeeds and streaming content, I have already heard. From hate crimes to political unrest to climate instability, one thing is certain: ours is an age of troubling upheaval.

In today’s gospel, Jesus describes the end of days. It’s as if he were looking forward into our present-day newsfeed. Knowing human nature, Jesus warns us against being caught by surprise—a danger as real today as then. Troubles rise, yet we grow desensitized with every increase. There is so much work to be done. Where do we begin? How are we to be bearers of Christ’s light in the face of such darkness?

The season of Advent is short, deep, and complex. The gospel for this first Sunday forms a kind of aerial view of the eschaton: terror, anxiety, misery, death, and earthly calamity. Nonetheless, we are reminded that redemption awaits those who take courage, live lives of faith, and trust in the mercy of God. And, because Advent moves so swiftly, the message quickly gives way to the radiant glory that lies beyond the darkness. These four weeks form a road map for our very lives. Persevere in faith, stand tall, and move through the pain of living. Look to the brightness of eternal life in God’s presence.

COLLECT

Let us pray.

Pause for silent prayer

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,

the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ

with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Jer 33:14-16

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land.

In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: “The LORD our justice.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

R. (1b) To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

 Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
 teach me your paths,
 guide me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are God my savior,
 and for you I wait all the day.

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

 Good and upright is the LORD;
 thus he shows sinners the way.
 He guides the humble to justice,
 and teaches the humble his way.

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

 All the paths of the LORD are kindness and
 constancy
 toward those who keep his covenant
 and his decrees.

 The friendship of the LORD is with those
 who fear him,
 and his covenant, for their instruction.

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

SECOND READING

1 Thess 3:12–4:2

Brothers and sisters:

 May the Lord make you increase and
 abound in love
 for one another and for all,
 just as we have for you,
 so as to strengthen your hearts,
 to be blameless in holiness before our
 God and Father
 at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all
 his holy ones. Amen.

 Finally, brothers and sisters,
 we earnestly ask and exhort you in the
 Lord Jesus that,
 as you received from us
 how you should conduct yourselves to
 please God
 —and as you are conducting
 yourselves—
 you do so even more.

 For you know what instructions we gave
 you through the Lord Jesus.

Living Liturgy

The Future You Envision Is the Present You Will Live: When we plug an address into a navigation app on our cell phone, the app quickly determines our current location and suggests the most efficient route to our destination. As the app tracks our vehicle's progress, it is sometimes helpful to zoom out from our location on the map in order to get a better sense of where we're at, where we've come from, and where we're going. Our destination determines our route.

The season of Advent invites us to “zoom out” and consider how our path is being informed by our ultimate destination. As we light the first candle of the Advent wreath, we find comfort and hope in the direction offered to us in the words of Scripture and in the witness of the life of Christ, the Light of the World. As the church begins this new liturgical year, we seek the time and space to pause, to listen, and to learn to walk in the pathways of God (Ps 25).

In our readings, we proclaim that our Lord is faithful, just, and a shelter for all (Jer 33); the Lord is a teacher and friend who is humble, upright, kind, and reliable (Ps 25); he is our redeemer (Luke 21). If the future we envision is an eternity in the presence of this loving God, how does this destination inform the daily path we are forging in this present life? We look forward with hope to God's vision for us in order to make sense of and embody *now* in our flesh the realities we were created to live in eternity.

The moments of liturgical stillness and quiet that we offer during this season will allow us to reflect on how God is directing our steps in new ways. In the midst of our gloomy darkness, the light of the Advent candles calls to mind our destination, illuminating the way for us to prepare and revealing the joy that inspires our preparation. The promise of Christ proclaimed in word and in sacrament gives us the grace to stand confidently before the Father; his grace is making us ready to enter the banquet of heaven.

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

- What might you need to detach from in order to be better prepared for Jesus's coming? How can you make more space for him in your heart?
- How can you balance the vigilance God asks from us with trust in God's goodness, love, and desire to save all of us?
- How could you “lift your soul” to God this week? How might you carve out a little space of stillness so that you can listen to God's loving voice?





SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 3:4, 6

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 3:1-6; L6C

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert. John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:
*A voice of one crying out in the desert:
“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*

Reflecting on the Gospel

In some cultures, a woman who has been widowed or who loses a child wears black for a year or more, signaling her mourning. Her face, too, wears the marks of grief. The sparkle in her eyes gives way to ready tears and her gait becomes heavy from sorrow. Such is the image of the city of Jerusalem in today’s first reading.



Baruch characterizes the devastated city as a woman in mourning for her exiled children who have been forcibly taken away from her. The prophet declares that it is now time for Jerusalem to exchange her robe of mourning and misery for a brilliant new mantle. Her new cloak is spun from justice and glory from God. The humiliation of their forced march into exile on foot will be undone by their being carried back aloft, as if they were royalty. It is not that the suffering is forgotten, but now the divine gift of joy settles over the grieving mother as rebuilding life out of the ruins begins.

Divine mercy embodies God’s motherly care, as she grieves with all who mourn and acts with compassion to bring relief for all who suffer. Divine justice is the setting aright of all relationships: with God,

self, others, and the whole of the cosmos. With these two companions come healing, restoration, and the chance for a new beginning.

In the gospel, there is a similar invitation to a new beginning announced by John the Baptist. The narrative starts on an ominous note, as John’s ministry is set against the backdrop of the Roman imperial rulers. Luke is not simply displaying an interest in history by naming Tiberius Caesar, the emperor; Pontius Pilate, the governor; Herod, Philip, and Lysanias, the tetrarchs; and finally, Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests who colluded with the Roman authorities. He is reminding his hearers of the omnipresent imperial power that kept the inhabitants of Palestine in fear and grief at many levels. He foreshadows the terror of John’s execution and of Jesus’s crucifixion by introducing Herod and Pilate before these two prophets have even spoken their opening words.

Luke’s hearers already know the end of the story. It is in this context that we hear John’s invitation not only to turn away from personal choices that impede God’s coming but also to collective repentance and a turn toward divine mercy. Any desire for revenge, any attempts to try to retaliate with violence, must give way to forgiveness on the part of the victims. This forgiveness invites repentance on the part of the offenders. Using Isaiah’s words, John first speaks in imperatives: prepare and make straight the way. But then the verbs shift to the passive voice, implying that it will be the Coming One himself who will do the filling in of the valleys and leveling of the mountains, straightening out winding roads, and smoothing the rough ways.

For them and for us, his coming does not eliminate these challenges along life’s path but fills us with saving joy, justice, forgiveness, and mercy as we open ourselves to the great things God has done and continues to do for us.

Preparing to Proclaim

Key words and phrases: “[T]he word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert.”

To the point: The first paragraph of this gospel might seem superfluous—all those names and places are nearly meaningless to us in our time and place. But they serve a purpose: they are locating John the Baptist (and soon Jesus) in a specific time and place. Jesus’s humanity is not half-baked. He enters into human history with all its political turmoil. He is born in a real place with real leaders and their ongoing, feeble attempts at peace. He lives amid all these goings-on as we do, and yet he will transcend them. Even as we wait for his final coming, he already is the true King whose power is in weakness and who leads by humble service. It is in Jesus that we will find at last the peace for which humanity has always yearned.

Psalmist Preparation

This psalm, sung by the Israelites in response to their restoration from the Babylonian captivity, proclaims the restorative work of God. Our God is one who wants freedom and joy for us. As you prepare to proclaim the psalm this week, name some “great things” that God has done for you. What heartbreaks has God healed? What gifts inspire gratitude in you? Bring thanks for these things into your proclamation of this psalm. If you are in a season of grief or heartache, it might be hard to name these things. If that is the case, hear this psalm as a promise from the God who always wants your good.

Making Connections

Between the readings: The first reading echoes the passage quoted in the gospel—heights are to be lowered and depths are to be filled. For those of us who love mountains, this is hard to hear; flattening their wild magnificence into plains doesn’t seem to match the promises of beautiful botanic abundance that Baruch also foresees. Mountains are also privileged places of encounter with God in the biblical imagination; it doesn’t quite make sense that God would get rid of them. But mountains are separators; in North America, the Rockies mark a sharp dividing point between many species of wildlife. The point here is not that mountains are bad; it is that God’s final coming will be accessible to all. The privileged mountaintop encounters of Moses and Elijah will be the way of the entire world.

To experience: The baptism John proclaims is all about repentance. Its participants turn from sin and turn back toward right relationship with God. Our baptisms today still have this cleansing character, but they are also much more than that. John’s baptism anticipates the fullness of what Jesus will offer, because when Jesus participates in John’s baptism, he elevates it. It is still about the washing away of sin, but it is also a moment of adoption, when God enfolds us into God’s family and names us as God’s beloved children.

Homily Points

- What confidence Paul has in our second reading today! Are we confident that God will continue to perfect us? Are we confident that God even began *any* good work in us? Yet our Scripture gives us this great affirmation: Yes, we are good, and we can do good work with our lives. Yes, we are incomplete—we still make mistakes and are lacking. But if we feel as if we are failures, this is simply because Christ is not finished with us yet. We can grow. We can change. Christ has confidence in us, too.
- In our gospel today, Luke punctiliously places Jesus’s birth on the historical map. Make no mistake: Jesus came in time and place and space. He is no legend, no fictional, symbolic figure. He is the Word made flesh, foretold by the prophets from Isaiah to John the Baptist. Jesus comes into the world so that all flesh might see the salvation of God. Luke acts as witness, so that we who know Christ in faith and sacrament might continue to make his presence known in time and place and space.
- For some of us, it may have been a long time since we’ve had a mouth filled with laughter. How can we find delight in the Lord when our hearts are hurting? If we have faith, we might trust that the Lord God is present with us even in our distress. If we have hope, we might believe in his mercy and that his mercy might be ours as well. If we have love, we might cling to God, even though all the world would have us believe that God is silent. Let us encourage one another not to give up but to look to God, who alone brings us joy.



Model Penitential Act

Presider: Our psalm today reminds us of the great things that God has done for us and invites us to be filled with joy. Preparing ourselves for the joy God promises, let us call to mind the times we have failed to love our God and our neighbor . . . *[pause]*

Lord Jesus, you alone bring mercy and justice: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you turn our mourning into rejoicing: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you call us to be pure and blameless in your sight: Lord, have mercy.

Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)

Presider: Coming before the Lord with our prayers and petitions, we offer our hopes for ourselves and for all the world.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

That the church's call to care for all creation resounds among the faithful, inviting us to care for the earth and to be good stewards of our environment, we pray . . .

That leaders of nations might recognize patterns and systems of injustice that divide their peoples, we pray . . .

That all who suffer from lack of food, water, or access to health care might rapidly find resources to alleviate their needs, we pray . . .

That we gathered here today might hear the word of God in a new way, drawing us closer to Christ, we pray . . .

Presider: O God, you hear us in our joys and in our sadness. Accept the prayers we offer for ourselves and all the world, and help us always to grow in confidence in your everlasting mercy. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Liturgy and Music

All of us have been inspired by someone who, in faith, shouldered great suffering with grace and courage. We only hope that, when it is our time, we can keep our eyes fixed on God's mercy and prevail as they did. True communion means that we are meant to align ourselves with the suffering of others and to be companions to those who struggle under sorrow's load.

As pastoral musicians, a profound part of our ministry is to assist in funeral liturgy preparation. In doing so, we can be uniquely present to those who mourn the death of a loved one. Many pastoral musicians say that funeral music ministry is the most rewarding and faith-enriching aspect of their work. Compassionate care for the sorrowing means following the pattern of Christ Jesus, who wept at the tomb of Lazarus. Often, despite their grief and pain, those we serve witness to faith in new and surprising ways. Consolation ministry then becomes a powerful means of evangelization.

John the Baptist cries out, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" The people he addressed were looking for hope and an end to their ongoing oppression. We prepare our hearts inwardly, and repentance is an important part of our own spiritual discipline. In reaching outward, beyond ourselves, we prepare the way by doing the work of loving, rejoicing, and consoling: work that does not wait and is every bit as necessary as rehearsing beautiful music and preparing our ministers for the celebration of the Lord's nativity.

COLLECT

Let us pray.

Pause for silent prayer

Almighty and merciful God,
may no earthly undertaking hinder those
who set out in haste to meet your Son,
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom
gain us admittance to his company.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Bar 5:1-9

Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning
and misery;
put on the splendor of glory from God
forever:
wrapped in the cloak of justice from God,
bear on your head the mitre
that displays the glory of the eternal
name.
For God will show all the earth your
splendor:
you will be named by God forever
the peace of justice, the glory of God's
worship.

Up, Jerusalem! stand upon the heights;
look to the east and see your children
gathered from the east and the west
at the word of the Holy One,
rejoicing that they are remembered by
God.

Led away on foot by their enemies they
left you:
but God will bring them back to you
borne aloft in glory as on royal thrones.

For God has commanded
that every lofty mountain be made low,
and that the age-old depths and gorges
be filled to level ground,
that Israel may advance secure in the
glory of God.

The forests and every fragrant kind of
tree
have overshadowed Israel at God's
command;
for God is leading Israel in joy
by the light of his glory,
with his mercy and justice for company.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

R. (3) The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like men dreaming.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.

Then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad indeed.

R. The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the torrents in the southern desert.
Those who sow in tears
shall reap rejoicing.

R. The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.

Although they go forth weeping,
carrying the seed to be sown,
they shall come back rejoicing,
carrying their sheaves.

R. The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.

SECOND READING

Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Brothers and sisters:

I pray always with joy in my every prayer
for all of you,
because of your partnership for the
gospel
from the first day until now.

I am confident of this,
that the one who began a good work
in you
will continue to complete it
until the day of Christ Jesus.

God is my witness,
how I long for all of you with the
affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer:
that your love may increase ever more
and more
in knowledge and every kind of
perception,
to discern what is of value,
so that you may be pure and blameless
for the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness
that comes through Jesus Christ
for the glory and praise of God.

Living Liturgy

All Flesh Shall See the Salvation of God: John the Baptist preaches repentance and conversion, inviting us to commit our lives to a new path, the way of the coming Messiah. This way of life, described by the prophet Isaiah, is one of equity and justice. In other words, God’s vision is something of a divine leveling that will allow *all people* to experience his glory.

At the heart of any true conversion is the acknowledgment of sin together with some concrete action to uproot it. On a personal level, this will mean examining our hearts in order to identify areas that harbor bias, bigotry, hypocrisy, defensiveness, or fear. On a communal level, too, we must name laws, systems, and attitudes that form crooked ways in the midst of our civic and faith communities. Finally, it will require action, making amends and doing the work of “leveling” so that we can experience in our flesh the hope that God desires for a people who are broken, weary, and starving for the truth of their worth. This work isn’t simply a way for us to be more welcoming or inclusive; this is a prophetic *command* rooted in Sacred Scripture and an integral way that we embody our Christian belief that all people are imbued by God with an inviolable dignity.

These days, it seems one is better off being rich and guilty than being poor and innocent. The work of conversion—examination and action—is the work of God’s divine construction to *make straight his paths*. Our change of direction will no doubt make some people uncomfortable, especially those who enjoy positions of power or privilege. But for those still walking in the valleys, who are still oppressed and persecuted, there is collective work to be done. Saint John the Baptist intercedes for us as we make room in our hearts for the Lord and cooperate in the prophetic vision God has for the entire human family.

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

- The gospel names specific people and places to locate John the Baptist in real human history. What is the context for God’s work in your life? What are the people and places that would describe your spot in history? How does God enter into your specific time and place?
- What “mountains” are keeping you from God right now? What do you need leveled in order to run more freely to God?
- What does your baptism mean to you in this season of life? If you don’t know the date, try to find out and add it to your calendar for the coming year. How could you remember or honor that date in a special way?

