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REASONS FOR HOPE



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REASONS FOR HOPE

REASONS FOR HOPE:

Using Scripture and inspirational words from saints and spiritual leaders, Bishop Robert J. Baker of the Diocese of Birmingham, Alabama guides you through the four Sundays of Advent in preparation for celebrating the birth of Christ. Discover the many reasons for hope this Advent season with this special e-series!

Mother Angelica quote:

“Hidden, growing, patient, waiting; waiting for that birth in our lives ... that birth of Jesus that makes Him radiate through us!”





REASONS FOR HOPE

First Sunday of Advent

Advent: A Season of Hope

The Church centers its attention these days on a season we call "Advent," a season of preparation and hope. We are summoned in the first week of Advent to be on guard, to be ready and prepared for the coming of the Lord.

Unfortunately, this holy season gets lost in the shuffle of preparations for Christmas, already begun in our secular society. A maze of glitter and frivolity highlights the material aspects of a feast that is long off, and misses the true spiritual meaning of that event.

So we need the Advent season to help us focus our attention on a spiritual preparation for the celebration of this greatest event of history, the birth of Christ. All too quickly Christmas day will be here. It will have much more meaning for us if we have prepared for that day spiritually.

I invite you to take out a moment each day to reflect with me on our reasons for hope this Advent season. Our spiritual guides will be the psalmist, the writers of other books of Sacred Scripture, various saints, theologians, authors, and recent popes.

Take out a little time to enter into the season with hope in your heart, awaiting this coming feast as the people of Israel did . . . as Simeon and Anna did . . . as John the Baptist did . . . as Joseph and Mary did.

You will find as they did, that God comes in a special way to the people who steadfastly hope for his coming.

Question for Reflection/Action/Commitment

How have I celebrated Advent in the past? How will I celebrate this Advent?

Light a Candle

Let us pray.

Lord, watch over your people, who come to you in confidence. Strengthen the hearts of those who hope in you. Give courage to those who falter because of their failures. In this holy season of Advent, lead them closer to you in hope, by the power of your Holy Spirit. May they one day proclaim your saving acts of kindness in your eternal kingdom. Amen.





REASONS FOR HOPE

Second Sunday of Advent

Life Eternal — A Possibility Beyond All Human Life

As we continue our meditations on hope in this season of Advent, I once again borrow an insight from Fr. Benedict Groeschel's beautiful book *After This Life*. This insightful teacher, preacher, and writer alludes to words Christ spoke to his followers at the Last Supper (John 14:1-7), beginning with the familiar assurance:

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

These heartening words from our Savior are "*simultaneously the promise of eternal joy in our heavenly father's home and the preparation for the horrible torture and life-giving death of his Son*" (p. 83). As we meditate on these words, says Fr. Groeschel:

. . . We discover ourselves immersed in horror and death, in failure and desolation — it is as if we are drowning. But we find we are soon brought with Christ out of the depths to everlasting hope and to something almost too exalted for us to imagine: life eternal for sinful man.

Life eternal: this is a thought beyond the comprehension of creatures who live in our dying world. It is a possibility beyond all human hope, and it is offered to us despite the fact that even the best of us — the great saints among us — can never be worthy of it.

St. Paul addresses the Colossians with a similar message of hope:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing — so among yourselves, from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth.

— Col 1:3-6

Question for Reflection/Action/Commitment

Why should we not "let our hearts be troubled"?

Light a Candle

Let us pray.

Lord, watch over your people, who come to you in confidence. Strengthen the hearts of those who hope in you. Give courage to those who falter because of their failures. In this holy season of Advent, lead them closer to you in hope, by the power of your Holy Spirit. May they one day proclaim your saving acts of kindness in your eternal kingdom. Amen.





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Third Sunday of Advent

Joy and Hope

We light a rose-colored candle today on the Third Sunday of Advent — a Sunday traditionally referred to as *Gaudete* Sunday. *Gaudete* is the Latin word for "rejoice!" And it is the first word of the entrance antiphon for today's Mass, which contain words from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 4 (v. 4): "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." These words highlight our joyful expectation of the Lord's birth and second coming. Rose-colored vestments are permitted for Mass on this day as well.

Joy and hope are sister virtues. Hope spawns joy. The psalmist got it right when he prayed, in Psalm 13:5-6:

But I have trusted in your merciful love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

"I have trusted in your merciful love . . . my heart shall rejoice in your salvation." It's time for us to pull out the stops and do a little rejoicing today. "Rejoice in the Lord always," St. Paul says. "Again I will say, Rejoice."

I lifted another verse from St. Paul, connecting hope and joy, for the motto of my episcopal coat of arms. It is from Romans 12:12. There St. Paul tells the Romans, "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

"Rejoicing in hope" has become my motto, and sharing that message has been part of my time as a bishop. I am now forty years a priest and eleven years a bishop. I have seen much transpire in the Church and in the world these past years. My role as priest and bishop has been one of preaching hope to my people — reasons for hope and, consequently, reasons for joy.

Hope and joy come from the expectation of good things now and good things to come. And those good things come from the good news we preach. With St. Paul, I have come to see all good centered in God. All our hope is in him. When we put our hope in passing values and fads, it quickly diminishes. It dies out. When God enters the picture, there is hope; there is joy. He is our reason for hope. He is our reason for joy. *Gaudete!* Rejoice! The Lord is near! The Lord is here!

Question for Reflection/Action/Commitment

Do I inspire hope and joy in others? How can I do that better?

Light a Candle

Let us pray.

Lord, watch over your people, who come to you in confidence. Strengthen the hearts of those who hope in you. Give courage to those who falter because of their failures. In this holy season of Advent, lead them closer to you in hope, by the power of your Holy Spirit. May they one day proclaim your saving acts of kindness in your eternal kingdom. Amen.





REASONS FOR HOPE

Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Saints: Models of Hope

The saints are special models for the life of Christ. In their lifetimes, they were people of great hope. Against great odds and in the face of many obstacles, they carried on and never gave up, knowing Christ was with them every step of the way.

The saints are there for us today, encouraging us, supporting us, and walking with us in faith, hope, and love. Pope Benedict XVI says:

In the life of each one of us there are very dear persons, to whom we feel particularly close; some are already in God's arms, others still share with us the journey of life: they are our parents, relatives, educators. They are persons to whom we have done good or from whom we have received good. They are persons we know we can count on.

It is . . . important to have travel companions on the journey of our Christian life. . . . A spiritual director, a confessor, persons with whom we can share the experience of faith.

The pope also considers as our "companions" the Virgin Mary and the saints:

Each one should have a saint that is familiar to him, to whom he feels close with prayer and intercession, but also to imitate him or her.

Our Holy Father invites us to know the saints better, "beginning with the one whose name" we bear, "by reading his life" and his writings. We "can be certain that they will become good guides to love the Lord ever more and valid aids for our "human and Christian growth."

The pope has a special devotion to the saints whose name he bears, Joseph (from his baptismal name) and Benedict (the name he chose as pope). He also has a great devotion to St. Augustine.

What is your saint's name? Do you have special devotion to various saints? When I was in the Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina, our diocesan patron was St. John the Baptist. Here in Birmingham, our diocesan patrons are St. Paul and St. John Vianney. My personal patron is St. Robert Bellarmine. Let us look to the saints of past and present as models for life, models of hope. They want to help us hope always in the Lord and serve for us as great examples of the virtue of hope.

Question for Reflection/Action/Commitment

What saint helps me to hope? What about my own patron saint?

Light a Candle

Let us pray.

Lord, watch over your people, who come to you in confidence. Strengthen the hearts of those who hope in you. Give courage to those who falter because of their failures. In this holy season of Advent, lead them closer to you in hope, by the power of your Holy Spirit. May they one day proclaim your saving acts of kindness in your eternal kingdom. Amen.

