

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Isaiah 40:1–5, 9–11
2 Peter 3:8–14
Mark 1:1–8

MONDAY

Luke 5:17–26

“... your sins are forgiven you.”

TUESDAY

Matthew 18:12–14

“... it is not the will of your Father ... that one of these ... should be lost.”

WEDNESDAY

Matthew 11:28–30

“Come to me, all you that are weary ...”

THURSDAY*

Luke 1:26–38

“The Lord is with you.”

FRIDAY

Matthew 11:16–19

“... wisdom is vindicated ...”

SATURDAY

Matthew 17:9A, 10–13

“... I tell you that Elijah has already come ...”

Advent Hope and Responsibility

Today's word of God abounds with a message of hope. The focus of that hope, of course, is the promise of God's action to save his people.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to people who have lived in exile in Babylon, people who have endured the hardship of separation from their homeland and familiar surroundings. To dispirited exiles, Isaiah proclaims a message of hope that God's power will work for their restoration.

To people anxious for the glorious second coming of the Lord Jesus and the full arrival of the Kingdom of God, the second letter of Peter speaks a word of hope. On the day of the Lord by God's power, fire will dissolve the old world and make way for new heavens and a new earth.

Finally, John the Baptist stirs the hope of people in his time, a hope centered on the coming of the Messiah-Savior. God's promises, John says, will find fulfillment in the one who will baptize not only in water but who will pour out his Holy Spirit.

The steady beat of hope that marks the words of Isaiah, Peter, and John the Baptist is accompanied by another rhythm. These readings speak not only of hope, they also call people to responsibility. Isaiah says that the people to whom hope has been proclaimed must also “prepare a way” for the Lord's coming. John the Baptist echoes this imperative. The letter of Peter summons people to repentance and a purification of mind and heart that will leave them without spot or blemish, so they can fully embrace God's promise. Are you ready?



The Faith of the Church

The Church identifies two kinds of sins against hope. The first is despair, which gives up on the mercy of God. The second is presumption, that is, assuming that we can bring about our own fulfillment of hope or assuming that God will “just do it” for us apart from our conversion of heart. Real hope trusts God and takes responsibility to respond to God's promise. (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2091).



Questions of the Week

Real hope, in contrast to wishful thinking, means taking God's word of promise seriously. It also means that we do whatever we need to do to respond and to cooperate with that word of promise.

Adults

Throughout my life, how have I really tried to be attuned to God's hope and listen to his promise?

Children

How do I know that I can trust what God promises me?

*The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Responding to God's Word . . .

God's hope comes to us as a gift. This Advent season is a very appropriate time to review and renew our hope, to re-claim this great gift.

Genuine hope is not something of our own making. When we make up our own idea of hope, we are simply indulging in wishful thinking. And wishful thinking can only lead us to become disillusioned and disappointed, because it is our construct of how we want life to be, how we think it should unfold.

There are certain things we can do to ensure that we do not delude ourselves with false hopes. The first thing is to listen carefully to God's

promise, especially as it is proclaimed in his word. If we are attentive more to what God says than to what we spin out in our own imaginations, we will be more likely to hear God's promise, not just our own thoughts.

The second thing we can do is to purify our desires. In other words, we learn to want more and more of what God wants for us and less of what we think we should have. Our hearts gravitate to short-term and passing things. Purification means setting our hearts on the things of God that last forever. In this way, we approach true hope.

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. Include a short prayer at mealtime for a renewal of the gift of hope. Ask God to help your family live according to his promise.

In the workplace or in school. Encourage co-workers or fellow students to take a look at hopeless situations in today's world. Invite them to consider ways to bring hope to others.

In the community. Look for ways to encourage others in difficult circumstances, for example, those in hospitals, nursing homes, or jail.



Meditation Moment

Charlie Rumbaugh grew up in reform schools, jails, and mental hospitals. At the age of 17, he escaped from a manic-depressive ward, found a gun, and killed someone in a scuffle during a robbery attempt. A Texas jury sentenced him to death. Awaiting execution, he asked a friend to pray that God would give him the grace to forgive the people he had grown to hate. Seconds before his execution, he said to the people present, "You may not forgive me for what I did, but I forgive everyone who has ever done anything against me."

For reflection . . .

How fully do I forgive—or pay to be able to forgive—those who have hurt me in some way?

WE ARE LIKE BEASTS WHEN WE KILL. WE ARE LIKE HUMAN BEINGS WHEN WE JUDGE. WE ARE LIKE GOD WHEN WE FORGIVE.

ANONYMOUS

FROM MISSION BY MARK LINK, SJ

As Days Darken, Hope Unfolds

God, most merciful and kind,
in this Advent time,
the shadows of night fall early,
and the days darken quickly.
Help us to keep vigil
for the coming of your Son.
In our waiting, let hope unfold,
as we receive sustenance
from your word.
Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a guide for your faith journey this week.

For God alone my soul
waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.

Psalm 62:5

Profile in Faith

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin (died 1996) was the archbishop of Chicago. In his last years, he faced two significant crises—a false accusation of misconduct and pancreatic cancer. He exemplified Christian hope in facing these crises, and he helped others by sharing his experience in his book *The Gift of Peace*.

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† Most Reverend Kevin J. Farrell, DD, Bishop of Dallas
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