

Advent Pilgrimage Daily Reflections

1 December - First Sunday of Advent

*I rejoiced because they said to me: "We will go up to the house of the LORD."
And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem. (Ps. 122:1-2)*

Our hearts are also joyful because we're on our physical and spiritual pilgrimage to the Original Shrine. There, the Blessed Mother and the Christ-child are waiting to welcome us with open arms, pouring out their gifts of grace and love.

In my life: What joys have I experienced this year? Today, I will make a physical or spiritual pilgrimage to the shrine where I'll give thanks for all the good things God prepared for me this year. What special joyful gift can I offer our MTA this Advent?

2 December - Monday of the First Week of Advent

For over all, the LORD's glory will be shelter and protection: shade from the parching heat of day, refuge and cover from storm and rain. (Is 4:6)

In the storms of our lives we find a home in the shrine. It is our safe house and our resting place. As we go on our pilgrimage to the Original Shrine, we take also with us the things that trouble us, the things that bring us sadness or anxiety. We take these with us, trusting that God will give us the strength to overcome all adversity, the same strength that He gave to our Blessed Mother as she waited for the birth of the Saviour.

In my life: Which struggles have I not been able to overcome this year? Do I trust that God's grace will help me to face the fiercest storm? Let me take some time today to speak to the Lord about the things that trouble me and go with Him in faith to see the way that He has prepared for me.

3 December - Tuesday of the First Week of Advent

I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. (Lk 10:21)

As we look at the MTA picture in the shrine, we see the absolute trust of the Child Jesus as he lies in his mother's arms. Fr. Kentenich often spoke about childlike trust and through his life, gave us wonderful testimonies of what it means to trust in God's Divine Providence, even in situations that to human eyes seemed hopelessly desperate.

In my life: My own life often seems a mystery and I find it so difficult to discern which way God wants me to go. Very often I try to do things my own way because it seems easier than to trust. Which impossible situation can I take with me on pilgrimage this Advent and throughout this Jubilee Year? Let my attitude today and everyday be one of childlike trust that God's hand rests in every moment of my life.

4 December - Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. (Mt 15:36)

During this year of Jubilee, we want to bring many contributions to the Capital of Grace, in thanksgiving for 100 years of Schoenstatt. During Advent, these gifts of love -- no matter how small -- take on a special meaning, where each love offering softens the manger in which the Christ Child will lie.

In my life: Sometimes my efforts seem as futile as the seven loaves and few small fish to feed a large crowd. But no contribution to the Capital of Grace is too small or too insignificant because together all our gifts "swell the stream of heavenly grace (*Heavenwards*). What gifts can I bring to the Blessed Mother and the Christ Child today?

5 December - Thursday of the First Week of Advent

Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. (Mt 7:24-25)

The shrine is our house built upon the rock. When life's troubles beset us, we know that in the shrine we are sheltered by our Mother's mantle and she stands with us in prayer to ensure that we are not swept away. This Advent, Mary is gently calling us back to the Father's heart by encouraging us to listen to Jesus' words and make them practical in our lives.

In my life: Where have I built my house? On the rock of faith and trust in Divine Providence? Or do I put my faith on my material possessions or my position, things that can disappear overnight? What graces do I want to ask for during this Jubilee year that will help me to strengthen the rock of my faith?

6 December - Friday of the First Week of Advent

The blind men approached him and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I can do this?" "Yes, Lord," they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. (Mt 9:28-29)

Sometimes we are so consumed by our worries and the daily rush, that we become blind to the signs of God's love in our lives. A year of Jubilee is a time of grace, during which we are invited to experience God's presence in our life with new eyes. The season of Advent, in particular, invites us to experience the wonder of life from the eyes of a child, the Child who came to take away all darkness.

In my life: What are the things that blind me? Is my faith strong enough to believe that Jesus can work miracles in the broken and dark places of my life? Today I ask the Christ Child for the grace to look at my loved ones with new eyes, recognizing the fullness they bring to my life. And I give thanks to God for His many gifts of love.

7 December - Saturday of the First Week of Advent

The harvest is abundant but the labourers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out labourers for his harvest. (Mt 9:37-38)

The Schoenstatt Sisters regularly pray: "Send, O Lord, labourers into Your vineyard and spare Your people." They often pray this as an intention for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. But each one of us has a special vocation, that unique mission for our lives to

which God has called us. As we draw closer to Jesus' heart this Advent, we try to listen more closely to God's plan for us.

In my life: What vocation has God called me to - marriage, religious life or single life? Have I discovered the specific task He has given me to help build God's kingdom here on earth? Am I living my vocation to the best of my ability? In this Jubilee year, how can I re-dedicate myself anew to living God's plan for my life?

8 December - Second Sunday of Advent

The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord. (Is 11:2-3)

In Schoenstatt, we have many role models whose lives constantly were a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. And all of them modelled themselves on the Blessed Mother. In wisdom she "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart," even she could not understand what they meant. Even in the greatest adversity she stood firm in the knowledge that God's will was being done.

In my life: Do I allow God's spirit to rest on me? Do I, like Mary, turn to Him in all moments of my life as I grow in wisdom and understanding? Or do I try to do things my own way, looking for answers in the darkness? Today I meditate on the Blessed Mother and her attitude of complete reliance on God in all the moments of her life, especially in the difficult circumstances leading up to the birth of Jesus.

9 December - Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. (Lk 1:38)

On the feast day of Mary's Immaculate Conception we reflect on the Church's teaching that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin. Sin came to the world through Eve because she disobeyed God. But Mary, the Ave, holds the promise of a redeemed humanity. In her obedient 'yes' to God, she becomes the instrument for our salvation.

In my life: Am I more like Eve or more like Mary? Do I give my 'Yes' to God in the circumstances of my life? Or do I allow myself to be tempted by my illusions, blaming others for the hardships I face? Today I accept responsibility for my actions and hand my life to God and say 'Yes' to his plan of love for my life from this moment on.

10 December - Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent

A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! (Is 40:3)

Every age has its prophets, men and women who can read the significance of world events in the light of faith. Fr. Kentenich looked at two movements - the signs of the times and the movements of the soul. He examined how events in the world around us affect the whole human person - both our physical and spiritual aspects. During this Advent we reflect on

how our environment impacts our relationships with God and others and consider how we can return to the heart of God.

In my life: Which event of this year has had the greatest impact on me? How has it influenced me? Has it brought me closer to God or distanced me from Him? What practical action can I take to prepare the way for Jesus so that He can enter a heart that is open this Christmas? How can I use this to prepare myself to renew the Covenant of Love at the end of this Jubilee year?

11 December - Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent

For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you: Do not fear; I will help you.

Sometimes we feel so helpless when we look at situations in our lives that we have little control over. It is often very difficult to see God in these situations. And yet, He asks us to trust Him, to take hold of his hand. The problems may remain unsolved, but God promises us the strength to endure the suffering. As we go on our Jubilee journey this year, we look at Fr. Kentenich who even the most impossible situations trusted that God's plan of love would prevail.

In my life: Which situations in my life do I have no control over? Unemployment or illness? A child who makes destructive decisions? Today I entrust my impossible situation and place it in my Father's hands. And I pray with Our Blessed Mother: "I trust your might, your kindness Mother dear. I do believe that you are always near. Whatever happens, Mother mild, I blindly trust in you and in your child."

12 December - Thursday of the Second Week of Advent

For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears, let him hear. (Mt 11:13-15)

In our days, we're also called to be prophets. We are called to look at the world we live in and point out the elements of our modern culture that do not give honour to God or abide by the teachings of his Church. And as prophets, we're called to be models of a counter culture. The life of our Covenant of Love offers an alternative to the culture of death that is pervasive in our world today. Instead, we're called to live a covenant culture in solidarity with those around us.

In my life: Which element of our culture makes me uncomfortable because it goes against what I believe? Am I ready to speak out boldly, as a prophet for our times, and promote a different way of living and being? Today I will spread a covenant culture by speaking to my children honestly about life issues, or having the courage to be an example to my friends or colleagues.

13 December - Friday of the Second Week of Advent

If you would hearken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river, and your vindication like the waves of the sea; your descendants would be like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains. (Is 48:18-19)

One of the things we are celebrating in this Jubilee year is the "source of our fruitfulness and the concrete way in which live and follow Christ" (Message 2014). This source is our Covenant of Love. Our life in the Covenant of Love is very practical way of allowing Christ to be born anew in our communities, so that we can bear much fruit for the future.

In my life: What fruits of my life in the Covenant of Love can I bring today as a gift to the Christ Child? What can I do to "more widely open Schoenstatt's portals" (*Heavenwards*) in my parish, my family, my workplace, my friendships groups, in wider society?

14 December - Saturday of the Second Week of Advent

Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted, the son of man whom you yourself made strong. (Ps 80:14-15)

As we celebrate 100 years of Schoenstatt's history, we give thanks for the fruitfulness of this vine. We thank God for always having protected the Schoenstatt Family through two world wars, Fr. Kentenich's exile while the Church authorities determined whether this young movement was the work of the Holy Spirit, and in our modern days when family life has come under attack. We ask for God's continued protection over our entire International Schoenstatt Family.

In my life: Today I thank God for those who brought me to Schoenstatt and life in the covenant of love. I pray for many Schoenstatt vocations from all walks of life. I pray especially for the Schoenstatt Fathers and the Sisters of Mary who have dedicated their entire lives to spreading the message of Schoenstatt to all corners of the earth.

15 December - Third Sunday of Advent

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord... Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:7-8)

We often become impatient when we pray but feel that our prayers are not being answered as quickly as we would like. At the time of Jesus' birth, the Jewish people had been waiting for the promised Messiah for many generations. And when he did come, they did not recognize him. We are often the same: we have become so impatient that we become blind to God's action in our lives.

In my life: Where in my life am I waiting for God to act? Have I waited with patience and a steadfast heart? Or have I acted impatiently and taken matters into my hands, perhaps missing the solution that God has prepared for me? During this third week of Advent, I want to practice patience so that Christ can truly be born again in my heart this Christmas and each day throughout this Jubilee year.

16 December - Monday of the Third Week of Advent

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 saviour. (Ps 25:4-5)

Today, on the Day of Reconciliation, we think of the many barriers we have overcome in our country. But we reflect also on the many relationships that still need to be reconciled. Reconciliation is the ability to recognise the full humanity of each person in this country. We

cannot speak about true reconciliation until we have overcome the barriers of poverty, prejudice and distrust.

In my life: As I walk through my days, do I treat those I meet with respect and recognise that God lives in them too? Who do I exclude? Today, I will reach out to someone I would normally ignore and allow God's truth to reveal their humanity despite the trappings of their brokenness and weakness.

17 December - Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent

Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ fourteen generations. (Mt 1:17)

Today's Gospel focuses on Jesus' genealogy and shows how God's plan of love is revealed through the history of God's people. In the 100 years of our Schoenstatt history, we can also see God's plan of love, even when it seemed that no stone would be left standing -- the senseless death of the first socialists on the battlefields of World War I, the certain death that awaited Fr. Kentenich in Dachau, the time that our founder was cut off from his life's work by the Church authorities. And yet, God's work prevailed.

In my life: Do I see God's plan of love in my life? Do I believe that He has a unique mission for me? Today I reflect on God's hand in the various moments of my life and ask the Holy Spirit to help me to see my personal history with the eyes of faith to discern where God's plan for my future.

18 December - Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent

The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Mt 1:20-21)

When God calls, we're often afraid. We're afraid that we're not up to the task. Or else we're afraid of the changes we need to make in our lives to heed God's call. But yet, God's way is always life. As we continue on our Jubilee pilgrimage we entrust our fears and doubts to our Blessed Mother and allow her to transform us into disciples who are ready to cooperate in God's plan of salvation.

In my life: What fears prevent me from saying yes to God's call? Am I like Joseph who initially decided to take the easy way out to avoid a scandal? Or am I courageous enough to say: 'Yes, Lord, I will do it your way and trust that this is part your plan of salvation.' As I renew my Covenant of Love today and pray the consecration prayer, I reflect especially on these words: "I consecrate to you this day...my entire self **without reserve**."

19 December - Thursday of the Third Week of Advent

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. (Lk 1:15-16)

John the Baptist was able to recognize Jesus even as an unborn child in his mother's womb. He grew up knowing Christ intimately. And it was this intimacy that allowed him speak with such conviction that many listened to his call and turned back to God.

In my life: How can I describe my relationship with Jesus? Do I know Him intimately or is my connection to Him merely one borne out of habit, passed down through family tradition? Like John the Baptist, I also want to recognize the unborn Christ in my life and prepare a way for Him in the wilderness of a world that has forgotten him in the preparations for a commercial Christmas.

20 December - Friday of the Third Week of Advent

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. (Lk 1:38)

So often we see Mary as someone very different from us. Someone who saw an angel and received an incredible message, said yes and gave birth to Jesus. All these things happened, yes, but when we read this favourite Advent story we often forget what Mary must have experienced in her soul at the Annunciation. Her Fiat was not an unthinking 'yes', but rather a decision to go God's way, knowing that her life, as she knew it, would be changed forever.

In my life: I remember those moments in my life when I distinctly heard God calling me to something greater than myself. What was my response? What were the consequences of my answer to God's call? Today I draw strength from the Blessed Virgin and give my 'yes' to God's call to be a Christ-bearer in all the spaces of my life.

21 December - Saturday of the Third Week of Advent

Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Lk 1:42-43)

As Mary approached, Elizabeth sensed that something was different about her cousin. And she is awed that this simple girl, become the bearer of Salvation, would have come to visit her. We also experience this wonder when we visit the Shrine. In this place of grace, Mary comes to visit us in the innermost depths of our souls and shares the Christ-child with us, transforming the coldness in our hearts so that the child in us also leaps for joy at this encounter.

In my life: Today I make time to be in the Shrine, my home shrine or my heart shrine and simply enjoy the visit of Mother Mary and the Christ Child to my innermost being. I will allow their joy and their love to permeate the parts of me that have grown cold. I draw strength from Jesus and Mary to continue on my journey of faith during this Jubilee Year.

22 December - Fourth Sunday of Advent

Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel. (Is 7:14)

A very human part of our journey of faith is that we ask for signs that prove God's existence and His love for us. But like Ahaz the king, we often feel that we'll incur God's wrath if we ask for a sign. God's doesn't see our need for signs as a lack of faith, but rather as an expression of our search for Him. He gives us signs to draw us closer to Him. The greatest of these signs was the birth of the Child who would save God's people for all eternity.

In my life: Have I seen signs of God's love in my life? Am I able to recognize him in those small moments of my life: a beautiful sunset, the smile of a child, a hand reached out in friendship? Today, Lord, I give thanks for your many signs of love and ask for an open heart so that the wonder of the Christ Child can be born again in my life.

23 December - Monday of the Fourth Week of Advent

All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be? For surely the hand of the Lord was with him." (Lk 1:66)

These words were spoken about John the Baptist because of the miracles that God worked in the life of his parents. As we journey through our Jubilee Year, we can ask the same question: How has Schoenstatt, this "favourite idea" born in Fr. Kentenich's heart at the calling of the Blessed Mother, grown in the last 100 years? And as we prepare to renew our Covenant of Love for the next 100 years, we reflect on how much more we can become if we walk with God.

In my life: What is that one idea, that one passion that rules my life? Have I given life to that favourite idea, to that child that God has placed within my heart? Or have the cares of life distanced me from the true mission to which God calls me? In these last days of Advent, as I prepare myself for Jesus to be born in my heart, I pray also for the ability to discern what God calls me to each day.

24 December - Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Advent

He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hand of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life. (Lk 1:72-75)

Today's readings remind us of the "miracle of the Holy Night." Shortly before Christmas 1941, one of the Schoenstatt Sisters wrote a letter to the Christ Child asking for Fr. Kentenich to be released from prison, where he'd been incarcerated by the Nazis. This letter made its way into Fr. Kentenich's hands and he answered as if it were the Christ Child writing it: "the miracle of the Holy Night is placed in your hands and the hands of Schoenstatt children." God heard this prayer and the fervent striving of the Schoenstatt Family and Fr. Kentenich was able to return from Dachau.

In my life: On this Christmas Eve what miracle would I like the Christ Child to work in my life? What strivings can I offer in return to show that I also have remembered my part in my covenant of love with the Blessed Mother and, through her, with God? Today, I write my letter to the Christ Child, baring open my soul to the Saviour who is about to be born.

25 December - Christmas Day

And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." (Lk 2:14)

We join the angels as we give praise to God for all his mighty deeds in our lives, in our world. But we also remember those who do not enjoy peace: victims of war, those who perpetuate fear and violence, those who have lost hope and are anxious, those who have never experienced God's love and for whom the wonder of Christmas has been overshadowed by the fleeting pleasures of false gods.

In my life: This Christmas Day is another step on my journey of faith through this Jubilee Year. I give thanks for all the goodness that God has given to me, and ask for His peace to come over all those areas of my life that make me anxious. I also join in solidarity with all God's people, perhaps spending time with someone who would be alone on this Christmas day or praying for peace in the many places that are ravaged by war and crime.