

Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for one of these least brothers of mine,

You did for me

- Matthew 25:40

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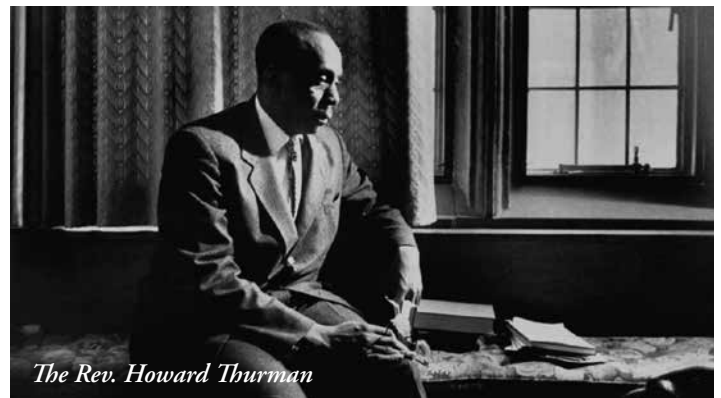
from the National Shrine of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos, C.Ss.R.

Dear Devotees of Blessed Seelos,

The Advent and Christmas seasons are my favorite time of year. It is a time of “looking forward”—a time of waiting, not waiting idly but waiting for the Savior of the world with great expectation. The birth of Christ—the Incarnation—is a hallmark of Redemptorist spirituality. The founder of the Redemptorists, St. Alphonsus Liguori, marveled at how God could love us so much that God would send Jesus into the world as a baby. St. Alphonsus wanted his spiritual sons, including Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos, to meditate often on the birth of Jesus, that it became a custom of celebrating “little Christmas” in our Redemptorist communities every 25th day of the month. Literally a statue of the baby Jesus was set out in our chapels to help us meditate on this baby who would save us from our sins.

However, the importance of the Advent and Christmas seasons would be missed if we relegate them only to a certain time of the year. Besides celebrating “little Christmas,” I find that also meditating on the poem, “The Work of Christmas” by mystic and theologian Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, helps to make the Incarnation not merely a singular event but a reality that we must all work to manifest.

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.*



The Rev. Howard Thurman

Mark Kauffman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

Together let us pray for the people in the land where Jesus was born amid the current war and violence. Pray that the Prince of Peace will bring peace to the Middle East. My friends, as you journey throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons, may you, like Blessed Seelos, come to love the Babe of Bethlehem and make a suitable dwelling place for Him in your hearts. You and your families will be remembered in my Christmas Masses. Merry Christmas!



In the redeeming love of Christ,

Father Maurice J. Nutt, C.Ss.R.

Father Maurice J. Nutt, C.Ss.R.

Director, National Shrine of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos, C.Ss.R.

About Advent

Courtesy www.loyolapress.com

Advent can come as a surprise to us sometimes, beginning right after the busy Thanksgiving holiday. It's not unlike the surprise of Mary when she received news that she was pregnant with Jesus. Like her, we take the season of Advent as a time for pause, reflection, and preparation for the gift of God's love coming to us through the baby Jesus.

HISTORY OF ADVENT

The historic origin of Advent is not certain; no evidence exists around the feast of the Nativity of the Lord before the end of the fourth century. Several homilies and synods made mention of a specific liturgical time before Christmas, but no rule existed until a note on the Mass parts appeared during the time of Pope St. Gregory VII from 1073-1085.

Much like a Lenten period of fasting and sacrifice, the early Church urged Christians to dedicate this time to readying themselves for Christ. Their practices remind us that we are also called to be attentive to the message of repentance and the end times. This may seem unexpected considering the extravagant ways we eat, shop, celebrate, and rejoice as Christmas approaches!

ADVENT TRADITIONS

The four weeks of Advent are popularly considered to symbolize the 4,000 years of darkness before the coming of Christ. We set up Nativity scenes, light Advent candles, and decorate wreaths in our homes to signify Christ's presence coming in the darkness of sin and suffering. Four candles adorn an Advent wreath, one for each week. A fifth candle is sometimes placed in the center for the beginning of the Christmas season.

Advent colors are worn by the priests and deacons and decorate the church. They are represented in the candles that surround the Advent wreath.



Violet: royalty, repentance, and fasting (First, Second, and Fourth Week)

Rose: abundant joy (Third Week, known as Gaudete Sunday, "joy" in Latin)

White: light and purity (Christ Candle, center candle completes the season and begins Christmas)

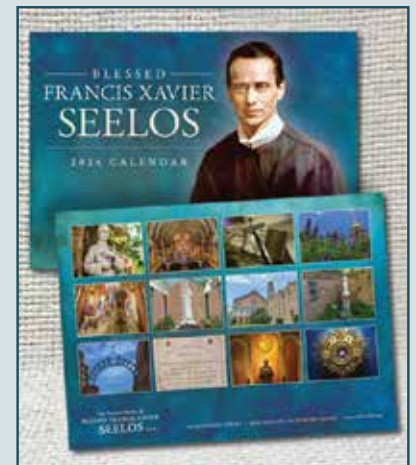
SCRIPTURE & PRAYERS FOR ADVENT

During Advent there are three themes we see as we wait for the coming of Christ. We long for the Messiah, are urged to be alert for Jesus' Second Coming, and meditate on Christ's presence in our lives. The Scripture readings for Advent and the Liturgy of the Hours revolve around the first two of these themes. They encourage proper preparation, point to the grace and humility of Mary, show us how to adore God in the Incarnation, and recognize the glory of Jesus and how he frees us from sin and ingratitude.

It is important to consider how we can grow in spiritual wholeness during such a busy commercial season. Take time for silence and reflection each day with Scripture, a devotional prayer, or with an Advent calendar. Dwell with the scene of the Nativity. What is it like to imagine the journey of Mary and Joseph and to be with them as the baby Jesus comes into the world? Consider praying with saints, with the Liturgy of the Hours, or with

the "O Antiphons" the last week before Christmas (see next page). A prayerful journey with the Holy Family and the Church throughout Advent will lead to gifts of gratitude and joy when we enter the Christmas Season.

Get Your 2024 Seelos Shrine Calendar Today!



We're excited to offer this 2024 Seelos wall calendar, made in New Orleans exclusively for the Shrine! It features 12 large photos around the Shrine, St. Mary's Assumption Church and grounds. Each month highlights memorable events in Seelos' life, saintly feast days, church celebrations and holidays.

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*Hospital visits with a Seelos Crucifix
(Only family members may request)*

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Praying the "O Antiphons"

Courtesy www.usccb.org and saintfrancischurch.org

Most commonly recognized through the song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," the "O Antiphons" act as a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas. The Roman Church has been singing the "O Antiphons" since at least the eighth century. An ancient tradition is to incorporate them before and after reciting the canticle of Mary (the Magnificat) during evening prayer on December 17-23. Their repeated use of the imperative "Come!" embodies the longing of all for the arrival of the Divine Messiah.

DECEMBER 17 —

O Wisdom of our God Most High,
guiding creation with power and love:
come to teach us the path of knowledge!

DECEMBER 18 —

O Leader of the House of Israel,
giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
come to rescue us with your mighty power!

DECEMBER 19 —

O Root of Jesse's stem,
sign of God's love for all his people:
come to save us without delay!

DECEMBER 20 —

O Key of David,
opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
come and free the prisoners of darkness!

DECEMBER 21 —

O Radiant Dawn,
splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
come and shine on those who dwell in darkness
and in the shadow of death.

DECEMBER 22 —

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church:
come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

DECEMBER 23 —

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
come to save us, Lord our God!

Prayer Partner Available By Phone

Can't make it to the Shrine? Volunteer **Geri Heigle (504) 312-1732** is available to pray with you by phone 7 days a week, any time day or night.



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