

Finding Joy

ADVENT MATERIALS FOR USE IN YOUR PARISH

WHY

The aim of this material is to provide opportunities for priests and parishioners to make connections between the Sunday gospel and how they live as Christians among the "pots and pans" of daily life. The material can be used as a strategy for "*Whole Parish Catechesis*" the ultimate aim of which is to help nurture communities where faith is shared through lived experience.

For Advent 2009 we reflect on the theme "Seeing things differently" with the intention of providing opportunities for parishioners to let the Christmas message "Emmanuel; God is with you" influence how they see themselves both in relationship with God and also as Christians in their parish communities,

WHEN?

During Sunday mass the priest introduces the theme for the week, elaborating on the theme in the homily and encouraging parishioners to take home the THINK-DO-PRAY ideas provided. (Printed in bulletin or in separate booklet). Suggestions for prayers of the faithful are provided. Themes can also be picked up at other appropriate times in the liturgy - before opening prayer, lighting advent wreath, after communion, in the music.

The "take home" booklet or bulletin material encourages parishioners to reflect on the ideas at home. All or part of each week's suggestions can be used as part of the meeting and activity of parish groups. Booklets can also be taken into parish schools for the use of both pupils and staff.

WHAT?

For each week, material provided includes: key message(s) to use as basis for homily together with THINK-DO-PRAY ideas for inclusion in bulletin or distribution in the form of a small booklet and also a few prayers of the faithful. The themes for each week are:

Advent 1 A Happy Life ... *The kind of life that you are meant to lead; the life that God wants* Thessalonians 3

Advent 2 A Better Person *All flesh shall see the salvation of God* (Luke 3) *The one who began his good work in you will see it finished.* (Phil 1)

Advent 3 A Fuller Life *Rejoice, exult with all your heart. The Lord your God is in your midst.* Zephaniah 3

Advent 4 God in You *Give us life and we will call upon your name* Psalms 80

Christmas Joy in God's Presence *They shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us* Matt 1

Advent 1 God in You

"When I was growing up I always wanted to be someone.
Now I realize I should have been more specific." Lily Tomlin

In God's eye's every human being is unique and uniquely loved; not just a somebody; not just a nameless face among the 'everybodies.' God's desire for relationship with us, his presence within us as an invitation to that relationship, confers upon our humanity a great dignity. We have been created in an extravagant gesture of unbelievable love; we have been created for love.

Members of the Body of Christ, we are called us into a new and radical way of understanding and of living that love. Like Mary, we are asked to bring the Christ within us to others. It is a very new and different kind of life because we are challenged to believe that the Risen Christ, though his Holy Spirit shared with us at baptism, is working in us and loving through us. And we are challenged to live, like Jesus, lives of compassion, of generosity and faithfulness.

We are challenged also to embrace lives of joy, joyful in the knowledge that our life is made new because it is imbued with God's meaning, God's purpose, awash with God's love. Christ is within you, offering you new life in relationship with him; working through you to bring God's life - *God's love - to others. Blessed are you*

Suggestions for prayers of the Faithful

(First prayer is taken from Sunday **THINK-DO-PRAY** suggestions)

Loving God Help us to recognise and to enjoy the simple pleasures in life, especially the good people we meet and the good times we have together.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God Spending time is often a better way of finding joy than spending money. Help us to see how we might spend our time this week in ways that bring joy to others and to ourselves.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God We pray for those of us who are struggling with financial worries. Grant us the wisdom and strength to survive these difficult times. Help us as parish community to know how we can support each other.
Lord Hear Us

Advent 2 A Better Person

Parents, psychologists and management strategists have realised for some time that people function best in an environment of encouragement and support. Both adults and children blossom when who they are and what they do is affirmed and appreciated. If our fumbling humanity has stumbled upon the benefits of seeing the good in people, you can be assured that our all-knowing, all-powerful God has been possessed of this wisdom, and for quite some time.

We can trust, therefore, that God sees and concentrates on the good in us and he *knows* of that there is goodness within us because he is responsible for it being there. His presence within each one of us is an invitation to share in his life and love and to become the "very goodness of God".

In our becoming, in our growing into this goodness, God will stay faithful to us, even in the midst of all our stumbling and bumbling. God began his good work in us and he will see his work finished.

We focus so readily on our faults and failings and our reasons for doing so are well intentioned: we want to be better people. Can you shift your focus this week and recognise your own goodness, however limited it may seem to you. Can you find joy in the realisation that God is alive and at work in you?

Suggestions for Prayers of the Faithful

(First prayer is taken from Sunday **THINK-DO-PRAY** suggestions for the week)

Loving God Each one of us has been given our own special blend of skills and personal qualities. Help us to recognise our own gifts and to see them as your gifts, helping to make us better people, able to contribute to your dreams for our world.

Lord Hear Us

Loving God Help us to appreciate the talent of others and to focus on their good points this week rather than on their weaknesses. Let us spend the week watching out for your good work in the words and actions of those we meet.

Lord Hear Us

Loving God We cannot do everything; some things we do better than others; some things we cannot do at all. Help us to accept our natural limitations and to know that together, as a community, we have been given by you everything we need to do your good work.

Lord Hear Us

Advent 3 A Fuller Life

One of the strongest anaesthetics available without prescription is the TV. We all know the benefits of an hour's 'switch off' time with a favourite TV programme. Yet how many of us spend evenings watching actors live their TV lives while our own lives remain un-lived? Life with all its real and raw pain and pleasure is for living. How much time do we spend living it?

Real life presents us with a bewildering range of ups and downs and invites us to be . . . real: to be fully alive to what bothers us . . .and fully aware of what makes us laugh. The alternative? An experience akin to a dentist's injection: our pain is numbed - by another drink, a new handbag, a new relationship - but our capacity to enjoy, to *taste* life, is also affected.

Our invitation today is to join with Zephaniah's "*Rejoice with all your heart, God is in your midst*". We are asked to taste life with all its sadness and laughter and to bring our real-life experience to the God who gives the gift of life and who is with us, accepting, loving and supporting us in good times and in bad. No need for anaesthetic, just honesty.

Suggestions for Prayers of the Faithful

(First prayer is taken from Sunday **THINK-DO-PRAY** suggestions for the week)

Loving God Christmas is a time of year when we can feel obliged to be happy. As we pray today we take a moment to become aware of how we are really feeling - good or bad. . . . pause . . . Help us to use the opportunities in this Mass and in the week ahead to tell you how we are feeling. Help us to appreciate that you are listening, that you care.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God May we be sensitive to those who are having difficulties or experiencing pain this week. Help us in our listening and in our words and actions to be signs for them of your supportive and accepting presence with them.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God We pray for an ability to enjoy life with all its ups and downs. Help us to trust in your strength and support in both the dark times and in times of happiness. Let us be signs of your presence to each other in our joys and in our sorrows.
Lord Hear Us

Advent 4 God is With You

"When I was growing up I always wanted to be someone. Now I realize I should have been more specific." Lily Tomlin

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We are challenged also to embrace lives of joy, joyful in the knowledge that our life is made new because it is imbued with God's meaning, God's purpose, awash with God's love. Christ is within you, offering you new life in relationship with him; working through you to bring God's life - God's love - to others. Blessed are you

Suggestions for Prayers of the Faithful

(First prayer is taken from Sunday **THINK-DO-PRAY** suggestions for the week)

Loving God You live in us and love in us. This is a tremendous gift to our humanity. Help us to grow in appreciation your amazing presence within us.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God Help us to treat others with a recognition that you live within them. Let us treat everyone we meet this week, especially the members of our own families, with the dignity and the respect that they deserve.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God Help us to go out of our way, as Mary did with Elizabeth, to quietly offer our company or assistance to someone this week. We think now of one specific way in which we can be of service pause and ask for your help to follow through on our good intentions
Lord Hear Us

Christmas Day Joy in God's Presence

When the angels described Christ's birth as a joy to be shared among all people, they were not making a one-day-a-year offer, to be folded up and put away with the Christmas lights. They promised lasting joy. Such joy may be hard to spot and our Christmas lights often shine light on people suffering from injustices, from poverty and violence.

We could become depressed. If God is with us - Emmanuel - how did we get ourselves into such a state?

Apart from the obvious reason that we often don't pay much attention to God's invitation to living a different way of life and decide to go our own way with disastrous consequences, it is also the case that we have forgotten where to look for signs of God's presence in our world. God's joy is to be found,, even in the worst of places and at the worst of times - if we know where to look.

See some of the signs in the coming weeks by viewing the bad news with new eyes. Recognise those in your own neighbourhood who work tirelessly to make life healthier, safer, more fulfilling. Look further afield to relief workers acting with quiet courage in war-torn countries, to the activists who will not stop until their people are treated with dignity and respect. Find them: find the good people in the midst of the bad news and see in them the face of the God who was born for us, the God who is with us. Take joy in the resilience of our humanity, in our fight for justice and peace, in the ordinary people who rise above the ordinary to do acts of tremendous and extraordinary good.

Life is better because of them. Life is better because of you. Life is good. God is good. God is with us. With you. In us. In you. Rejoice.

Suggestions for Prayers of the Faithful

(First prayer is taken from Sunday **THINK-DO-PRAY** suggestions for the week)

Loving God Thank you for the joy which comes from knowing that you have been born among us and are with us always. Help us to see your presence in our daily lives, especially in the good people who cross our paths.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God We pray for those people who work at a local or at a national / international level to make this world a safer, healthier and better place to live. May we recognise in them signs of your presence in the darkest places in our world and support them through our own prayers and actions.
Lord Hear Us

Loving God Help us to continue to experience joy by relishing life's simple pleasures and by recognise the presence of your goodness in ourselves and in others. May we also take joy in this great gift of life you have given to us and be of support to each other as we try to live joyful and healthy lives.
Lord Hear Us