
ADVENT 2020



Preparing our Faith

A Xaverian Journey Through Advent



XAVERIAN BROTHERS
IN HARMONY SMALL THINGS GROW

INTRODUCTION

In the 'Fundamental Principles of the Xaverian Brothers' we are advised to "make God's word our home. To do this we must be willing to spend time each day in solitude and prayer, opening ourselves to His living word." I am pleased to provide these readings and reflections for your use as a vehicle for prayer during the Advent season. During Advent, we wait with patience and with hope for God to break through our world. The theologian and mystic Meister Eckhart advised:

"Be prepared at all times for the gifts of God and be ready always for new ones. For God is a thousand times more ready to give than we are to receive."

Advent is a gift in which God touches us and whispers words of hope. May your Advent journey connect you with what's really important in your life and the treasure God gives you in the small actions of your ordinary days.

Wishing you a Happy and Blessed Advent.

Brother Daniel

Brother Daniel Skala, C.F.X.
General Superior

4409 Frederick Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21229
P: 410.644.0034
F: 410.644.2762
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XAVERIAN BROTHERS
IN HARMONY SMALL THINGS GROW

Week 1

Nov. 29 - Dec. 5



Foundation Window: 1848

The Mission to England Brothers in procession
honoring Our Lady of Sorrows

November 29

First Sunday of Advent

"... may he not come suddenly and find you sleeping" - Mark 13:36

Most of us have experienced a situation similar to this one:

Arriving home one afternoon, taped to the door was a note: "I was in the area and thought I would surprise you with an unexpected visit. Sorry that you weren't home. I would have loved to spend some time with you."

As Advent begins, I have begun to think about how I will spend the next four weeks preparing for the celebration of Emmanuel - "God with Us." Today's readings remind me to "Watch ... you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming." If I hope to stand ready for the appearance of the Lord in the house of my life, I will need to be at home when He arrives. The Advent "call" to be at home certainly means a great deal more than staying quarantined within the four walls of my house. It provides an opportunity to recognize the home, which encompasses my entire life, as the home that will entertain the unexpected guest: as Holy Ground, as the unique situation where I have been "put in place" by a loving God "to manifest love to the peoples of the world in these times." I have begun to wonder if my home is spacious and welcoming enough to receive an unexpected guest.

As I reflect on the ordinary days of my life, I find that I am often physically at home, but not with the attentiveness and openness that offer hospitality to an unexpected visitor. Sometimes I find myself "sleepwalking" through my life, occupying each moment with no more mindfulness than that I would give to brushing my teeth or tying my shoes. Helpful as these routines might be, at the end of a full day I am left with the question, "When and how did you respond to what was asked of you today?" There are other days when my attention is given over to the accomplishment of all the tasks and responsibilities that fill my "Day Planner" page. I begin and end the day pre-occupied, having left little time to listen and even less willingness to change my plans should an unexpected guest arrive.

I find myself much like Martha “worried and anxious about many things” and somewhat jealous of Mary who peacefully listens to the house guest. At the end of such a day I wonder “to what ‘call’ was my life an answer today?”

Isaiah prayed, “Would that we were mindful of you in our ways!” Nothing is lacking to us in the “common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life.” What is left to us is the willingness to “stand ready to answer when asked if you are available for God to become more present in your life and through you to the world” as the Xaverian Brothers 'Fundamental Principles' state. Much of how we take up our everyday life depends on how we encounter the people, events, and the world that we inhabit. Is each day simply “more of the same old – same old” or is it “Holy Ground” prepared to manifest and nurture the abiding love of God? There is an interesting Koan which highlights the difference made by how we experience life:

To those who do not understand, things are just as they appear:

To those who understand, things are just as they appear.

As we enter this first week of Advent, may we find ways to be truly at home in our lives, attentive and watchful, ready to respond to the presence and call of the unexpected guest; whether that comes in the form of a reassuring sense of love and communion or a challenge to acknowledge and surrender our sinfulness and isolation to make room in our homes for the presence of Emmanuel. What attitudes would help me to stay at home, truly in “my place” and keep me attentive and available to respond to God’s call, wherever and whenever it “appears” in my ordinary life? What practice might help me to develop a habit of readiness for response?

**Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.
Amen.**

Brother Joseph Pawlika

November 30

The Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle

“He said to them, ‘Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him” – Matthew 4:19-20

I think about the times I have responded in the affirmative and didn't necessarily have any good defensible or logical reason to do so: the times when I answered yes and followed a path just as St. Andrew said yes and followed Jesus. Accepting that first job offer, signing that first lease, agreeing to do a favor for a friend before I even heard what the favor would be, saying that of course I had time to listen and of course I wouldn't laugh or get mad or think it was stupid; stating yes I will marry you and build a whole new world with you and raise children with you and grow old with you.

Perhaps not logical, but definitely worth it. For all the risk, I answered yes because my heart (and maybe my gut, too) knew that it was a chance to build a career or create a home or support a friend or raise a child or marry the love of my life. It is not just hindsight that I made the right choices. It's that I want to be a person who is brave, a person who takes chances, a person whose faith in herself reflects her faith in a God who never abandons. I make all those ordinary, unspectacular choices because they lead to the extra-ordinary, spectacular gift of my life.

**Dear Lord, grant me the faith of St. Andrew, to always say yes to the opportunities in my life to serve you and your people.
Amen.**

Peg Weidner

December 1

*"Then he turned to his disciples and said privately,
"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see" — Luke 10:23*

On a recent drive to work, I was taken aback at the beauty of the sunrise over Lake Quannapowitt in Wakefield, MA. It was truly a "blessing to see." I was thinking of that beautiful sunrise later that same day when I mused to my polite but probably bored students that I bet I had seen dozens of sunrises that rivaled it but had not really "seen" them. That same day, we were discussing the infancy narratives in class, and I wondered, how many people saw the star in the sky over Bethlehem, but why had only the "lowly" shepherds really seen enough to run towards it? Why were they capable of seeing something that others missed?

I feel like I am given invitations by God "to see" something significant many times a day, and I "see" perhaps one out of ten. I feel like I see them more when I allow God's grace in - unfortunately for me, often in times of struggle. For example, I remember that the area around Mass General Hospital never looked more beautiful than when I was sprung for a short walk by my doctor seven years ago during a long hospital stay. Again, I remember the beautiful morning walks in my neighborhood this Spring during quarantine. In both of those walks, I could clearly see God's presence in my life. How can I utilize the grace of this Advent season to open myself up to "see" more regularly, and not just in the difficult times of my life? What is God calling us to see during this Advent?

Lord, help us to see what you see and from your perspective. Give us your eyes we pray.

Amen.

Steve Ruemenapp

December 2

“My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry” — Matthew 15:32

These words manifest a practical way Jesus showed compassion throughout his public life and moves me to reflect on how many people in our world go to bed hungry every night. About 690 million people globally are undernourished even though there is enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet. An estimated 14 million children under five suffer from malnutrition. Half the world lives on less than \$2.50 a day. These are staggering statistics.

Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us that everyone is our neighbor. Xavierian Brother Bill Griffin, now ministering in Haiti, recently said that the folks associated with the school he is serving were suffering from severe hunger. This presented an opportunity to care for our neighbors in Haiti. The Brothers at Ryken House in Louisville, and Louisville Xavierian Associates responded to this food crisis by donating \$3,000.00 to Brother Bill, helping provide rice, pasta, dried beans, cooking oil, cans of salmon, bar soap, and COVID-19 masks to at least 100 families. Since the people in Haiti are communitarian and not individualistic, Bill believes that even more people were recipients of the food. Sister Simone Campbell, Director of NETWORK, encourages us to pray and act:

“Let your heart be broken open by the anguish of our time. Come together in community and listen for the still small voice that can give you direction. Trust those with whom you travel to share your commitment. Finally, act on what you hear. You do not have to do it all; you only have to do your part. Break out of the individualism of our time.”

Gracious God, move me to find a way to move compassion to action as I prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Brother Cornelius Hubbuch

December 3

Memorial of St. Francis Xavier

“Go then, to all people everywhere, and make them my disciples’.... It is through your life of gospel witness that God desires to manifest His care and compassionate love to those who are separated and estranged, not only from their neighbors, but from their own uniqueness; to those who suffer from want, neglect, and injustice: the poor, the weak, and the oppressed of this world” – Fundamental Principles of the Xaverian Brothers

More than 180 years ago, Theodore James Ryken was inspired by God to form The Brothers of Saint Francis Xavier, known as the Xaverian Brothers, in Bruges, Belgium. On this feast day of St. Francis Xavier, we honor our spiritual patrimony, the gifts of Francis Xavier’s missionary zeal and Ryken’s complete trust in God’s Providence. We also remember all who have embraced Ryken’s vision and upon whose shoulders we stand. Moreover, we celebrate the lives of all who are part of the Xaverian Brothers’ mission today. The Xaverian unique missionary expression of service is manifested in the international character of the congregation and its ministries throughout Europe, Kenya, Haiti, Congo, and the U.S. Though we honor our history, we draw inspiration from St. Francis Xavier and Brother Theodore Ryken for today’s mission. Both Xavier and Ryken placed their trust in God throughout their lives, even in dark and difficult times. They were drawn by God’s grace into a journey which broke down barriers. In their lives, we are reminded that God calls each one of us to embrace service in its many dimensions. On this day, we remember that our mission, “to go and make disciples” is a work we all share.

During this time of COVID-19 and the struggle for economic and racial justice, may we “let the developments and changes of our times be a source of both confidence and challenge.” When we are led to see the face of God in all, and when we extend the boundaries of ourselves, we find that God will sustain us.

Father, as St. Augustine wrote, you are closer to us than we are to ourselves. Help us experience your presence during these challenging times and may we embody the mission of the Xaverian Brothers.

Amen.

Brother Daniel Skala

December 4

“...Do you believe that I can do this?” – Matthew 9:28

Today’s Gospel reading tells of Christ’s miraculous healing of two blind men. While far from his first miracle, Christ approaches the pleading blind men and humbly asks, “Do you believe that I can do this?” On one hand, Christ seems to be testing the faith of these men. On the other, however, he appears vulnerable and openly doubting his abilities to help these men. Through their faith and trust in Jesus, the blind men are healed “according to their faith.”

I have often found myself doubting my talents and abilities. As a first-year administrator at a Catholic High School, I remember my first presentation to the school’s board. It was awful. As the youngest person on the leadership team, I projected my own insecurities about my experience onto the strangers in the room. I stumbled over my words and let my self-doubt take over. After my train-wreck of a presentation, the board chair pulled me aside and said, “I fully trust you and we need your help. We are glad you are here.” My internal demons immediately vanished through this act of kindness.

I believe today’s Gospel is as much about the trust of the blind men as it is about Christ’s own self-doubt in a perceived moment of weakness. Trust is built through vulnerability. During those moments when I do not trust myself as much as I should, I am reassured by the shared vulnerability of the blindmen and Christ. By trusting others, we recognize the divinity that they may not be able to see in themselves.

All-knowing God, allow me to believe in myself and others this day, as you believe in me.

Amen.

Benjamin Horgan

December 5

“While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears: ‘This is the way; walk in it’”— Isaiah 30:21

The renowned author Maya Angelou tells the story in her autobiography 'I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings' of being slapped by her grandmother for using the expression, “by the way.” For Maya’s grandmother, there is only one Way, it is the Way of the Lord, and to use the expression in reference to any other way is akin to taking the Lord’s name in vain. When I taught that novel to high school students it was understandably difficult for them to catch the significance of the lesson Angelou learned from her grandmother.

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26 and Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5A, 6-8 refer to the Way. Isaiah tells us the Lord, the Teacher, will be present to us, guiding us along the way when we would be apt to turn one way or the other off the path set out for us. Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel further explicates the way when he sends out the disciples to the lost sheep to tell them “the Kingdom is at hand” and “to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.” Xaverian Brothers founder Theodore Ryken was metaphorically slapped in the face when as a young man he was “put in his place” by a deep humiliation and turned toward God, fell in love with God and placed himself in God’s service. Perhaps as we come toward the end of this first week of Advent we can today think about the Way, our way.

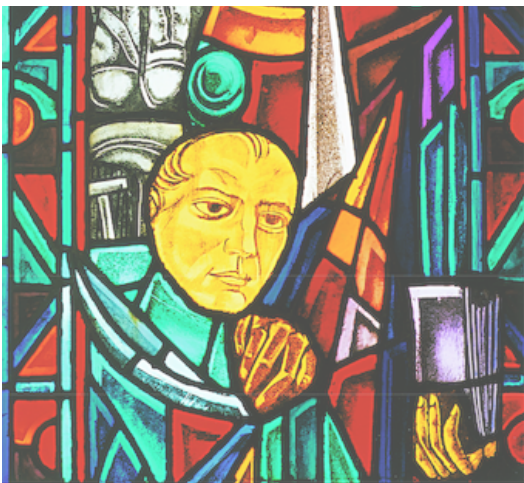
What way is the voice behind us calling us to take this Advent? To whom does Jesus send us out to announce the coming of the Kingdom? As Maya Angelou had her grandmother to remind her of the only Way, perhaps we too have the experience of others who have reminded us of the way or been a model for us of the way we are called to walk in the “common, ordinary, unspectacular flow” of our everyday life.

Lord, in recalling those who have guided us along our way, may we remember “without cost you have received: without cost you are to give.” Amen.

Brother Lawrence Harvey

Week 2

Dec. 6 - 12



Foundation Window: 1825-26
The Founder teaching catechism to orphan
children

December 6

The Second Sunday of Advent

"A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make His paths straight" – Luke 3:4

How do we prepare for the coming of the birth of Jesus in these most unusual and challenging times? We wrestle with many issues today: how to welcome and be hospitable to immigrants; how to respond to the climate crisis; how to counteract racial injustice; and how to stay safe in the midst of the pandemic.

At times I feel like I am in the wilderness and do not know how to respond to these challenges. I often feel overwhelmed with so much turmoil, and I question what God is asking of me. Since I am 84 years old, I need to be careful in my social interactions outside of Ryken House, our Brothers' retirement home in Louisville. Giving of myself through volunteering or even socializing with family and friends is not possible.

In attempting to answer the question on how to prepare, I am drawn to a quote from our Xaverian Brothers 'Fundamental Principles':

"If you allow yourself to be formed by God through the common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life, you will gradually experience a liberation and a freedom never before imagined."

How then does that translate into practice? I am informing myself through reading and also spending more time reflecting and praying. Books I have recently enjoyed such as Bryan Massingale's 'Racial Injustice' have helped me see how I have been the recipient of white privilege. In my personal contacts with the eleven Brothers I live with and through phone calls and email correspondence, I can practice compassion by listening and encouraging others, especially those who may be living alone. Attentive listening is a real gift we can give to others. I can dialogue with others concerning the major challenges Pope Francis is advocating.

The Pope is calling us to encounter our neighbor by sincerely listening to others, especially those with whom we disagree. I can do this, but it takes practice. I can also share with others that Pope Francis is calling us to become one world, and that is only possible if we begin to treat everyone as our neighbor, and that means everyone.

Perhaps this Advent can be a special time for all of us as we attempt to follow the wisdom of our founder, Theodore James Ryken. As our 'Fundamental Principles' remind us: "Yet, like Ryken, foster an attitude of openness to the needs of the Church and our world and a willingness to follow Christ wherever He leads. We are called to a life of constant searching."

What ways are you preparing for the birth of Jesus? Do you see what we are now experiencing as an opportunity to reflect on and act on your priorities so that something new can come to fruition out of struggle? If so, reflect on what those priorities might be.

**Gracious and loving God, I pray for patience during these challenging times. Like John the Baptist, give me the courage to proclaim by the way I am living and loving the message of peace, justice, and love.
Amen.**

Brother Cornelius Hubbuch

December 7

Memorial of St. Ambrose

“What are you thinking in your hearts?” — Luke 5:22

As part of my pre-Canna retreat in preparation for our marriage, my wife and I took the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment to help us understand our personality preferences in our relationship. According to this psychometric test I have a preference trusting my intuition when making decisions. In other words, I often lead with my gut. While trusting my gut has mostly worked out positively, it can be frustrating to others as not all the facts are shared. My gut feeling is personal and cannot be understood by others in the moment. It is an important consideration that I trust, nonetheless.

Jesus had a contentious encounter with Pharisees after his miraculous healing of a paralyzed man who was lowered from a rooftop. At the heart of this conflict is what is “right.” The Pharisees, on the other hand, abide by the rich tradition of their faith and its stated law to guide their view. Christ, on the other hand, is self-aware and confident in his identity as the Son of God. The faith of the Pharisees is seeking the promise Christ fulfills, but their perceptions blind them from seeing that in the man in front of them. By asking what are you thinking in your hearts, Christ is challenging the Pharisees to move past the self-imposed limitations and consider the movements of their soul in that moment.

Our gut reactions are not always correct. They do, however, teach us to be still, listen, and be open to holy possibilities previously unseen.

As we prepare in joyful hope for the coming of our Lord this advent, let us be open to trust in our instincts and listen to how the spirit may be working through us in this way. Amen.

Benjamin Horgan

December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds” — Psalm 98:1

Who knows what great things God has prepared for us?

Today's Marian feast day is a lesson for us that our God often works in secret. Did Mary know that she was destined for great things? Was she ever aware that she had been formed in her mother's womb in a most unique and immaculate way? Yet, when the time came for God to make those plans known through the message of an angel, Mary was open to God's plan. She said “yes.” She cooperated with God's strategy to redeem the world.

Who knows what strategy God has for us to help bring about the Kingdom of justice and peace. Pope Francis in his recent encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti' writes that one way we help in bringing about God's Kingdom is by being imitators of Mary, by being “a Church that serves, that leaves home and goes forth from its places of worship, in order to accompany life, to sustain hope, to be the sign of unity ... to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation.”

Are we ready to cooperate with that plan? It seems to me that in a myriad of ways God invites us to fulfill the role created for us in our mother's womb. St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is also a reminder for us that, “In Christ we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One.” (Ep 1:11-12). In the words of the Brothers' 'Fundamental Principles,' may these days of Advent be a time for us “to make ourselves available for God to become present in our life, and through us to the world.”

Father, help yourself to our lives. We long for and seek your presence this Advent. May we live into the fullness of who we are destined to be in you. Amen.

Brother Lawrence Harvey

December 9

“Jesus said to the crowds: ‘Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest’”

– Matthew 11:28

I learned a long time ago that there is a difference between giving up and giving over. I have too much pride to give up – too many people would be disappointed in me if I did; probably myself most of all. I was raised with the rule that you take a deep breath and put one foot in front of the other, and don’t ever let them see you sweat. I also have too much faith to give up. I know that while God did not promise that I would never struggle or feel pain, He did promise that I would never be alone in struggles or pain. He is with me in the faces of those who love me, in the presence of those who share my life, in the arms of those who hold me, in the prayers of those who comfort me.

I find myself resting and restful in the certain knowledge that I can deal with whatever life sends my way because I never carry my burdens alone. God always answers my prayers – with the love that listens to what I think I want and responds with what will help me. I give over to God not because I will get what I want but because I know that He will help me find what I need. Sometimes I find what I need in the silence of His loving presence and sometimes it is in the words and deeds of other people. But He never fails me if I never fail to seek my rest in Him and remember that I am exactly where He wants me to be.

Dear Lord, may I always respond to Your invitation to come into Your presence for rest from my labors and burdens.

Amen.

Peg Weidner

December 10

“I, the Lord, grasp your right hand; ‘Fear not, I will help you’” – Isaiah 41:13

Have you ever reached out to a busy friend with the offer – “Hey, let me give you a hand with that” only to receive the reply, “No thanks, I can handle it myself”? While it could be true that our friend may not really need our help, it is also possible that the friend lacks the humility to admit human limitation and dependence on others. Jesus is the Lord’s outstretched hand. Jean Vanier writes, “By ourselves we cannot bridge the gap that separates the finite from the infinite. God reaches out to us and we become holy as we welcome God who comes to us.” What will be our response to our Lord’s offer to give us a hand? Will we have the humility to set aside our arrogance, the illusion that we can achieve satisfaction, control, success, permanence, and independence, without reaching out to grasp the hand that is offered to us in love? Communion and community depend upon our willingness to reach out, to receive the Lord’s help in the gifted uniqueness of others but also to offer to others that which is our share in the richness of God’s love. “As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are called to ... minister God’s healing touch of love ... to all whom you meet in your journey of life.” We may have become so accustomed to a lifestyle oriented toward accomplishments and independence that we fail to recognize the little invitations that arise in our ordinary, unspectacular lives to reach out to receive, respond, and participate in the Kingdom of Heaven that is already abiding and growing within and among us.

In Harmony, Small Things Grow.

What attitude will help you to be attentive today to the moments in which a hand is extended – either to offer you help or to request help from you?

**The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger, and of great kindness.
Come Lord Jesus!
Amen.**

Brother Joseph Pawlika

December 11

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” — John 8:12

The Lord calls us to love and establish his law, to meditate on it day and night and do all it commands, even calling this the entire duty of man. Why has the Lord called us to observe and follow his law when he so freely gives us mercy and grace? God desires to have intimacy with mankind and created us to have intimacy with him. Before intimacy can be established, however, mankind must be able to discern and understand the characteristics and nature of God. The law is the manifestation of our Lord, and all that is in the law directs our paths to his love.

The law, therefore, is God's manifested love for us. As a tree grows strong when planted by a river, so do we grow strong when we delight in the law of the Lord. The law of the Lord is a light unto our paths, providing life, revealing truth, and is the way to delight in the Lord. Whoever delights in God will find the blessings he has for them. Scripture tells us that if we seek God first, he will give us the desires of our heart, straighten our paths, and uphold us with his righteous right hand.

By delighting in God's perfect law, we delight in the perfect nature of God. We face troubles every day where we need to rely on God to show up and fight on our behalf. Keeping our minds on the Lord, trouble shall never prevail over God's will for our lives. Let us always turn to God in a time of need and declare the truth of God's law into our lives. In God's law, we will find wisdom, perseverance, faith, and strength to fight the battles that lie ahead.

Lord, may we follow you wholeheartedly and delight ourselves in who you are this Advent.

Amen.

Joshua Kinney

December 12

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

“Mary said, ‘Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word’”

– Luke 1:38

When I was living and working in Chicago in the 1990s, one of my closest friends was a Catholic nun who was a teacher and Assistant Principal at St. Pius School in the Pilsen neighborhood. In the 1990s, Pilsen was a primarily Mexican neighborhood, and my friend Sr. Jane told me that every year, St. Pius would cancel regular classes on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe – the feast we celebrate today. Students would come in for breakfast, engage in Mass or a prayer and then go home. It always sounded like a great community celebration. Our Lady of Guadalupe was an extremely important day for the community of St. Pius. Evidently, even though the Pilsen area has gentrified over the years, graffiti art of Our Lady of Guadalupe still peppers the neighborhood.

Quite honestly, a profound devotion to the Blessed Mother has not been central to my faith life. Frankly, I think my lack thereof says more about my prayer life than it does about Mary! While I am far from an expert on apparitions of the Blessed Mother, my impression is that Mary generally appeared to folks like Juan Diego – young and poor, with an extremely sincere faith life. They obviously were able to see things that I don’t. So, on this Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, as we remember Juan Diego, the people of Mexico, and our Blessed Mother, I pray that I may learn from their faith. May I have the faith to see roses in December, to believe in things that may seem impossible, and work for their completion.

Blessed Juan Diego, pray for us.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

Amen.

Steve Ruemenapp

Week 3

Dec. 13 - 19



Foundation Window: 1840

The Bishop of Bruges with the Founder and his
Jesuit spiritual advisor

December 13

Third Sunday of Advent

“A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him” – John 1:6-7

John the Baptist is single-minded in his mission. His only purpose is to testify to his faith in the coming Messiah, the light of the world. His testimony is like a light to others so that they might have faith in the coming Savior. He is to give witness to his faith so others “believe through him.” God has a purpose for him and he knows exactly what it is.

Anyone old enough to be familiar with the Baltimore Catechism remembers being taught that “God made me to know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this life, and be happy with Him in the next.” Someone younger might have learned, “Desire for God is written on the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to Himself” (Catechism of the Catholic Church). I learned the first set of words when I was confirmed. The second set I have repeated often to my students and my own children. Either wording works for me – I come from God, I live out a life of love and service because of God, and then I will return to God.

John had to decide how to give testimony to the coming of Jesus Christ, as do we all. His way meant baptizing in water, traveling and preaching, and eventually being martyred. Those who come before us teach us the way – perhaps not in the letter, but certainly in the spirit. I need to live my life with a hopeful, even joyous waiting for my faith and the faith of others to create God’s kingdom in the here and now. I also need to know that how I live my life will determine my place in the kingdom to come. Hopeful and joyous waiting seems to be exactly what Advent is meant to be for those of faith. However, being hopeful and joyous also means being certain and secure. Perhaps, that is where John and I differ sometimes.

I find myself wondering at times if I give testimony well enough, often enough, enough.

My witness is through the circumstances of my life. I am a wife and mother, building a family is the most creative thing I have ever done. My husband and sons and all my relatives know that I love them, no question or qualification. We love well – we don't always agree, we get irritated, we forget to be grateful sometimes, but we love well.

I am a teacher, for 36 years I have worked with students on content, skills and faith development. Once in a while they tell me that my class and I have made a difference. When I don't feel as if I do enough, I remind myself that I am living the life that God wants for me for He “put me in my place”– He loves me, and I am always “enough” to Him.

My family, teaching, and life in general, only works because of my faith in a good, loving God. To me, faith can't be separated from family and relationships and the daily rhythms of my life. God in me and through me creates and sustains all that I am, even as I await the coming of my Savior. The Xaverian Brothers say it well – ‘everything with God, nothing without God.’ How do you give testimony of your faith through the circumstances of your life? What do you do to sustain a “hopeful and joyous waiting” during the Advent season?

Dear Lord, grant us the knowledge of your grace so that we may love and serve you to the best of our abilities.

Amen.

Peg Weidner

December 14

Memorial — St. John of the Cross

“I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near” – Numbers 24:17

At Christmas, we participate and rejoice in the mystery of what has already occurred – Emmanuel has come – God is already with us. During Advent we participate in the confusing mystery of waiting for something/someone that has already arrived. St. John of the Cross gives some insight into this mysterious paradox. In his poetry, 'The Romances' St. John “listens in” to the conversations that take place within the Trinity as the time of the Incarnation draws near. The Father speaks to the Son – “In perfect love this law holds: that the lover become like the one he loves.” What has already occurred in history is God’s fidelity to His perfect love – humbly becoming human to share fully in the life of those he loves. What still remains undone is our response to that love – our taking up in the ordinary activities and events of life, dispositions and actions that mirror the love in which we share. We are called, over the course of a lifetime, to become like the one we love. In old age, grandparents seem to look like one another more and more. Dog owners often resemble their beloved pets. Twins who live in close geographical proximity continue to resemble one another. If people can physically grow to resemble those they love, what changes of heart and transformations of spirit are possible when in humility we respond to the Love in which we abide? In silence, solitude and stillness we may actually begin to “see him, though not now; behold him, though not near ...”

The Xaverian 'Fundamental Principles' encourage us: “Stand ready to answer God when He asks you if you are available for him to become more present in your life and through you to the world.”

What “beloved” has so grasped you that your life is being directed and transformed by your love for that “beloved?” Be attentive today for a moment that calls you to love as God loves.

Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Brother Joseph Pawlika

December 15

“Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him” — Matthew 28:32

In an interview for a barista position in my college coffee shop, I was asked, “What would your theme song be?” Without hesitation, my answer was Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons’ “Walk Like a Man.” This song was always a staple in my family, with rousing renditions sung into wooden spoons while making dinner. Despite the catchiness of the tune, it is one that challenges me every time I hear it and causes me to question my authenticity.

Throughout my life I have gotten in trouble for knowing just enough to get in trouble. While I project confidence outwardly through my words, I have a tendency to internally question myself. I have often lost myself in attempts to meet the expectations of others, using words to mask my true self out of fear of rejection. When lost, I have found myself in the small humbling acts of caring for another.

The message of my theme song and Christ’s parable in today’s Gospel reading are the same: you must “walk” your “talk.” When we are disingenuous with ourselves, we distance ourselves from the way that God sees us and alienate ourselves from others. Christ does not require perfection as a precondition to his benevolent love. He simply asks to try our best to have our actions and words be authentic. When we find our authentic selves, we often find God close by.

Forgiving Lord, help me to see myself as you see me, in all my sinful and graced humanity.

Amen.

Benjamin Horgan

December 16

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard” — Luke 7:22

John the Baptist knew his mission and lived it well. He had devoted his life to pointing people to the Messiah. Perhaps he could sense that his own time and his mission was winding down and, understandably, he needed to know if Jesus was the one and if he had done his job.

Jesus then gives John’s disciples the answer, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” The proof was in Jesus’ actions, and John either was missing it, or just couldn’t believe it. Maybe it was just too good to be true.

I’m conscious that I have missed God’s presence many times in my life while I was in angst about my next job or next duty on my mission. I could be out on a rare date with my wife and I will begin to think about when we have to pick up the kids. I could be enjoying a visit from my daughter and I begin to get blue because she will be leaving in a couple of days. God was there in each of those occasions – the precious time with my wife and my daughter. Like John, I was so focused on my mission that I missed it. It was too good to be true.

The birth of our savior will be celebrated in nine days. Let’s not miss one moment of this Advent as we wait and prepare.

Loving God, we pray for the grace to soak in your loving presence in the common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life.

Amen.

Steve Ruemenapp

December 17

“Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob, listen to Israel, your father” – Genesis 49:2

“There is no worse form of alienation,” Pope Francis writes in 'Fratelli Tutti,' “than to feel uprooted, belonging to no one.” Today’s scripture readings remind us that we belong. The gospel from Matthew provides us with the genealogy of Jesus. To forget that we have a history leads not just to a sense of alienation, but also to a sense of individualism. Reflecting on the pandemic of 2020, Pope Francis writes, “the recent pandemic enabled us to recognize and appreciate once more all those around us who, in the midst of fear, responded by putting their lives on the line. We began to realize that our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, ... men and women working to provide essential services and public safety ... They understood that no one is saved alone.”

To be followers of Jesus, especially in a time of pandemic, means to be aware that we belong and are connected to each other; we have a shared history. Not only are we not in this alone, but we have a responsibility to save each other and work for the common good. This Advent, I’m grateful for the “ordinary people” who have helped to sustain me in a time of crisis. I am also cognizant of my responsibility to reach out and care for others, even those who may not share my spiritual or cultural heritage, but who are members of a “single human family, ... children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bring the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, ... brothers and sisters all.” (Pope Francis, 'Fratelli Tutti')

Holy Lord, help us to reach out and care for each other, recognizing that we are all part of the human family.

Amen.

Brother Lawrence Harvey

December 18

“When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home”

— Matthew 1:18–25

The Gospel today focuses on Joseph and his gracious response to what God wants of him. He accepts his role in the Holy Family. This triggers an important two-fold focus question: How do we know what God wants of us? How does God communicate with us? Many spiritual writers believe this is manifested deep within, where the Spirit dwells. According to Thomas Hart, a spiritual writer and director, “God’s purpose for us is found deep within ourselves, in the place where we find our own life-orientation or destiny. What God wants for us, and what we are, are consistent with each other.” Therefore, the challenge is to discover at a deep level who we are and what our priorities are.

My own personal experience mirrors the above belief and gives me an example of God’s will being followed. Years ago, my mother lived with Alzheimer’s for over ten years. Her main caretaker was my dad. His devotion to my mom gave a clear example of a person following what God had in mind for him. He was a leader in church and civic activities, serving on numerous boards, and a firm believer that God wants us to love and respond to the needs of others. Faced with his wife’s condition, he prayed, especially the Rosary, every day. He refocused his priorities and retired from outside activities. His priority was seeing that his wife received the best possible care. When it was decided that her needs would best be met in a nursing home, he made the decision to accompany her. Fortunately, he was able to get a two-room suite in the nursing home. Mom had the bedroom, and he slept on a sofa bed in the living room. We five children will never forget the example he set by giving of himself in this way. It continues to inspire us to be for others. As my dad would say, “It is all about love, service, and commitment.”

Loving God, give me the grace to make my decisions in life by always discerning what is the most loving thing to do which is discovered deep within myself. Amen.

Brother Cornelius Hubbuch

December 19

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, 'Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.'"

- Luke 1:26-38

When the angel Gabriel greeted Mary, the scripture tells us that she was “greatly troubled.” Gabriel replied, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

I often think how astounding it is that God appeared not to a royal queen in a palace, but a poor, young woman whose heart was in the right place to receive him. Although afraid and confused at first, Mary accepted her mission and obeyed the Lord. She fully trusted God, despite how upside-down and bizarre the revelation must have been to her. I'm sure Mary too, at times, wondered why the God of the universe would choose her to carry forth his redemption of the world. As I get to know God, I realize more and more that his ways are not our ways. He often uses the weak to shame the strong, the faithful and obedient to baffle those who think they're wise. God manifests his extraordinary character in the seemingly ordinary, and shows up in unexpected places. Mary knew this full well, and perhaps it was her soft heart and childlike faith that brought forth God's favor and choosing.

I want to have that kind of faith. I want to be able to believe God even when circumstances seem confusing, fearful, or too hard to grasp. I want to be able to obediently trust my Lord with my life with the same acceptance that Mary had. As believers, we too are carrying the Lord with us in our hearts and into the world. May we accept our mission to shine God's light and love, manifesting his presence and character in our own lives. This is how God turns the ordinary into the extraordinary.

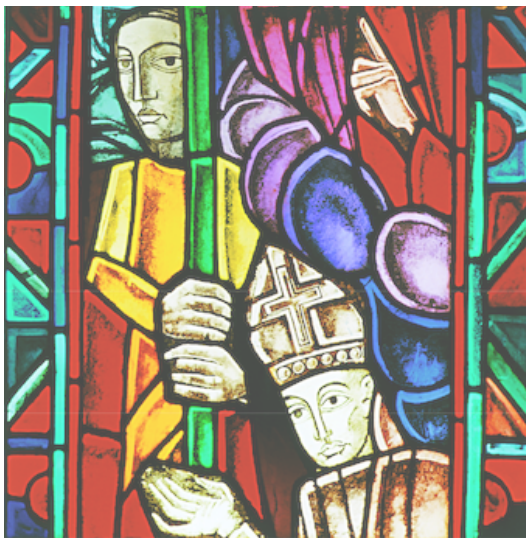
Dear Lord, may we have the courage, obedience, and trust that Mary had when Gabriel appeared to her. May we accept our mission to carry your presence into the world.

Amen.

Joshua Kinney

Week 4

Dec. 20 - 25



Foundation Window: 1854

The Mission to America
The Bishop of Louisville
blessing the pioneer Brothers in America

December 20

Fourth Sunday of Advent

“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” – Luke 1:38

I am a long-time teacher of Religious Studies. After almost 30 years in the classroom, I have taught, not always well, just about everything a high school Religious Studies curriculum offers. However, I am far from a scripture scholar. Nonetheless, my understanding is that Mary was approximately 14 years old when the angel appeared to her and told her God’s plan. What 14-year-old kid could ever be ready for that? Mary is confused for a moment, but then, utters the famous words of the Angelus, “may it be done to me according to your word.” Somehow, she was ready enough.

It was the morning of July 23, 2019, and it was raining like crazy as I was driving my son to a basketball clinic. We had to get to a school in Boston amid heavy traffic. We were late and I was stressed. My older brother called, I picked up and told him the situation and asked if I could call him back in a few minutes. After I dropped my son off, I called my brother who informed me our mom had died earlier that morning. My mom’s health had not been great for years, but this was still unexpected. She was the strongest person I had ever known, and she had been taking care of my 89-year-old dad who suffered from dementia. I was crushed, and I wasn’t ready to say goodbye – at least I didn’t think I was.

I hopped on a plane, wrote an obituary for my mom, worked with my siblings to plan a funeral, stayed with my other brother and took care of my dad. I worked with my brothers and sister to get dad moved into a memory care facility, and then, a couple weeks later, I headed back home. I’ll never forget those two weeks after my mom’s death. They were painful, awful, and still wonderful. With the support of my siblings, my wife, my kids, and my friends, somehow, I was ready enough for all of it.

As we look at our world today, it is perfectly understandable to want to say that it is all too much.

We are in the grip of a pandemic, we witness almost daily effects from the injustices of systemic racism, and the tragedies of climate change, and here in the U.S., it seems like oftentimes people can't even talk to each other about these pressing issues. What can we do to create a more just world?

Yet, I believe we are ready. We have the Gospel. We have the insights and legacies of Xaverian Brothers who have been working for justice for years and years. We have a community of believers who will support and edify us if we just keep moving. We need to do the work during this Advent season and beyond of staying close to a God who reaches out to a 14-year-old girl to bring our Savior into the world. Our hope lies in that kind of power. God continues to tell us that we are more ready than we think we are. We who have been given the Gospel, and the power of a Xaverian community do not have luxury to give up.

When in your life have you been more ready than you thought? Where is God calling you to follow the example of Mary and “have it done to me, according to God’s word?”

**Loving God, Please bless us with the faith and the courage to know of Your constant love for us. Secure in that love, grant us the insight and strength to know that we are ready to work to build Your kingdom.
Amen.**

Steve Ruemenapp

December 21

“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?” — Luke 1:42-48

The Gospel today focuses on Mary and her gracious visit to Elizabeth. This reminds me of the importance of Mary, the Blessed Mother, in my life. My grandmother, mother and dad all had a special devotion to Mary. Subsequently, when I entered religious life 66 years ago, I took the name of Brother de Montfort, the author of “True Devotion to the Blessed Mother.”

Through the years, my sisters, nieces, and wives of my nephews have all inspired me in so many ways. And in my active years of ministry, women colleagues and secretaries became dear friends. When I was on the faculty at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley and again while I was on the staff at Southdown in Canada, I served as Co-Director of programs with women. These relationships were personally transformative for me. In both experiences we developed a relationship of mutuality and equality. This model of leadership became an example of genuine collaboration between a man and a woman. One participant in the Berkeley program remarked, “Many are writing about this model of leadership, but the two of you are actually doing it.”

As we approach the birth of Jesus, let us reflect on Mary and Joseph as they together overcame great obstacles to bring Jesus into the world.

**Gracious God, be with us as we reflect on our personal devotion to the Blessed Mother, and may that devotion influence us as we continue to create equal and mutual ministerial relationships between men and women.
Amen.**

Brother Cornelius Hubbuch

December 22

"I prayed for this child, and the Lord granted my request" — 1 Samuel 1:27

As a sophomore at St. John's High School in Shrewsbury, MA, I attended a service trip to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Moved by my encounter with the Lakota people on this service trip, I lived and worked at a Catholic school on the reservation after college. Despite the injustices that plague reservations, it was so clear to me when meeting the Lakota people that God was close.

Children in Lakota culture are seen as holy. The Lakota word for children is wakanyeja, or "sacred little ones." Lakota people believe all children are close to the Creator as they are pure and innocent, not yet corrupted by the sins of man. As an educator on the reservation, my Lakota colleagues often reminded me that we have much more to learn from children than they have to learn from us.

Like Lakota spirituality, our Catholic faith reveres the holiness of children. In today's readings, both Hannah and Mary recognize the holiness in their children and turn to God to assist with their sacred responsibility as parents. As a new parent myself, I often find myself overcome by the grace my daughter brings to our family and my dependence on God to guide me in the challenges of this new identity.

Our preparation and patient waiting during Advent ends with the infectious joy of new life with the arrival of the Christ child and our renewal of self. By humbling ourselves to place our faith in the birth of a child, we strengthen our faith and dependence on God.

Loving God, allow me to be moved by the infectious joy of new life this Advent.

Amen.

Benjamin Horgan

December 23

“Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming?”

— Malachai 3:5

It was truly unprecedented. The fullness of the universe was humbled and made vulnerable, coming near in the most ordinary and unexpected way. Divinity curled up inside a lowly manger; cradling the son of God. A small and meek gift from above, this child was not the earthly ruler that was expected, but rather the unexpected heavenly king. The script had been flipped as God’s infinite grandeur, power, might, and majesty was manifested in a vulnerable baby, born to poor parents in the tiny village of Bethlehem.

In the words of our Founder, Theodore James Ryken, the Holy Spirit is an admirable artist, not bound either by rules or models, working where and how God wills. Like the birth of our Lord Jesus, we can expect the fullness of almighty God to show up in the unexpected; in places of humility and simplicity, and the common, ordinary, and unspectacular flow of everyday life.

This year could also be described as unprecedented. While none of us could anticipate such tumultuous trials, God has used the challenges to reveal Himself in ways we would not have otherwise known or been able to see. As we prepare for Christ’s coming, may we make room for God to come as and how He wills, keeping the unexpected in mind. It is in unforeseen times that God may be prompting us to go further, to search deeper, to take another step forward in the darkness believing that he will indeed provide.

Heavenly Father, as we prepare for your coming, may our faith be stretched so we too may endure. Help us to faithfully step up and step out in uncertainty, trusting in you.

Amen.

Joshua Kinney

December 24

“In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace” – Luke 1:78-79

I have always loved this Canticle of Zechariah and thought it was so fitting for Christmas Eve. The light and hope and joy – the “dawn from on high” that will “shine on those who dwell in darkness” – that settles in our hearts the day before our gift at Christmas. This year I find myself noting specifically that the light and hope and joy come from the “tender compassion of God” and will “guide our feet into the way of peace.” Perhaps these words resonate particularly because I just desperately wish that compassion and peace were the way of our world.

While I sometimes find myself unable to find light and hope and joy in our times, I know that it is because it is so much easier to find fault in others than in myself. I cannot control the thoughts and words and deeds of others, but I can control my own. I choose to believe that compassion and peace are both inherent in this world and able to take hold and grow in all of us. I choose to believe that Christ, as the light of the world, shines for all of us. I choose to believe that all the anticipation of the Christ child during the Advent season comes to life when childlike wonder at the goodness of the world and others takes hold of all of us. Simply, I choose to believe that God loves all of us, every last single one of us belongs to Him.

Dear Lord, may we come to cherish all of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Amen.

Peg Weidner

December 25

The Nativity of the Lord

"Sing to the Lord a new song" - Psalm 96:1

Advent is certainly a time of song. The aching longing of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” – the boundless joy of Handel’s “For unto us a Child is born...” – the evocative invitation of “O, Come All Ye Faithful” – all ready the ground of our hearts to receive the Word of God and to make it fruitful in our ordinary lives and in the life of our world. Many of us have become accustomed to singing these songs either with bittersweet nostalgia as we think of days gone by or as not really significant in light of the challenges that face us in our broken and shattered world. Can they be sung as a “new” song?

Today’s Gospel might be looked upon as the “new” song that John wrote to describe his experience of the coming, the maturing, and the fruition of the Word in his life and in his world. “The Word was made flesh.” – “The Word made His dwelling among us.” – “We saw his glory ... full of grace and truth.” We may be inclined to see John’s experience as that of an extraordinary disciple, far beyond what might be possible for any ordinary person. Still, John challenges us – “from His fullness we have all received.” Do I live in the awareness of my participation in the Word – the call given to me “to be a unique expression of God’s love ... to manifest that love to the peoples of the world in these times”?

Today we’re invited to “Sing to the Lord a new song.” Not many of us have the gift of composing or voices that enthrall, yet every one of us is able to make of our lives a song that gives glory to the Word of God in our little corner of the world. Where and to whom are we being asked to sing the love of God? Is it to the panhandler at the stop light? A student? A child? A spouse? An elderly parent or neighbor? In the silence? In the city? Watch for opportunities to let the Word of God take flesh in your life and speak God’s love to another.

Dear Lord – let your Word become flesh in me this day so that “All the ends of the earth may see the saving power of God.” Amen.

Brother Joseph Pawlika

About the Authors

Brother Lawrence Harvey, C.F.X.

Currently serves as a member of the General Council and on staff at the Generalate. He had served previously as General Superior and a member of the leadership council, as well as Director of Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools.

Benjamin Horgan, Formation Director

Initially formed by the Xaverian Brothers while at St. John's High School in Shrewsbury, MA, Ben returned to the network to serve as the Formation Director for the XBSS in 2018. He currently lives in Baltimore, MD, with his wife Hillary and daughter Finley.

Brother Cornelius Hubbuch, C.F.X.

Brother Cornie entered the Xaverian Brothers 66 years ago and has spent his career serving, ministering, volunteering and teaching; serving as principal, provincial, vicar general, and formation director.

Joshua Kinney, Director of Communications

Josh is a storyteller, writer, photographer, and world traveler who has spent his career working in mission-driven, faith-based organizations. He is a Philadelphia expat living in Baltimore.

Brother Joseph Pawlika, C.F.X.

Is a recently retired High School counselor at Xaverian Brothers High School. He participates in the Xaverian Brothers Associate Program and is involved in offering Adult Formative Spiritual Direction.

Steve Ruemenapp, Director of Community Formation & Religious Studies Teacher, St. John's Prep

Steve previously served as Director of Campus Ministry at Malden Catholic, blessing him with over 20 years in Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools. He lives in Medford MA., with his wife Heather of 27 years and our four fantastic children, Sarah, Benjamin, Joey and Bereket.

Brother Daniel Skala, C.F.X., General Superior

Elected to serve as General Superior in 2019, Brother Dan had served as teacher, administrator and headmaster for over 40 years. Since 2007, he had served on the leadership council of the Congregation.

Stephanie Stricker, Associate Director of Mission Advancement

Beginning her employment with the Xaverian Brothers in 2003, Stephanie has held various positions in the Advancement office. She especially enjoys interacting with benefactors and friends of the Brothers in her current role.

Peg Weidner, Religion Chairperson at Our Lady of Good Counsel High School, Xaverian Brothers Associate

Peg has taught at Our Lady of Good Counsel High School in Olney, MD, for 31 years. She and her husband David have been married 34 years and have two sons, Nicholas and Daniel.

About the Xaverian Brothers



The Xaverian Brothers are a community of consecrated laymen who as religious Brothers participate in the Roman Catholic Church's mission of evangelization. Founded in Belgium by Theodore James Ryken in 1839 to be missionaries, the Brothers have been educators in the U.S. since 1854. The ministry in the U.S. includes 13 Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools, as well as many activities of the Brothers in direct service to refugees, prisoners, adult education, and the homeless. Xaverian Brothers have expanded their ministry work among the poor in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Haiti, while continuing their historic connection with schools in Belgium and the U.K. The Xaverian mission touches the lives of the most vulnerable wherever the Brothers serve.



May your Advent
journey connect you
with what's really
important in your life
and the treasure God
gives you in the small
actions of your
ordinary days.



XAVIERIAN BROTHERS

4409 Frederick Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21229

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