
ADVENT 2023

Making the Word our Home

A Xaverian Journey Through Advent



XAVERIAN BROTHERS

IN HARMONY SMALL THINGS GROW

INTRODUCTION

Advent is about waiting and preparing patiently for Christmas, the coming of Christ. However, we know that the One we seek is already with us in the “common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life” (Fundamental Principles of the Xaverian Brothers). I am once again pleased to share these personal and heartfelt reflections on the Advent Scripture by the Xaverian Brothers, our Associates, and our Partners in Mission.

Listening to the voice that speaks to us through Advent Scripture and these reflections is a good way to journey together as we become more alert to the many ways God comes into our lives in the here and now. During this season of hope we contemplate our blessings as we more deeply encounter the God who waits for us.

When we let go of our need to control every aspect of our journey and turn to God we “will experience the ongoing revelation of Jesus” (Fundamental Principles). May you be strengthened by your reflections and the blessings of the Advent season. In this way, you will have all that you need to encounter the Prince of Peace.

Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus.

Brother Daniel

Brother Daniel Skala, C.F.X.

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XAVERIAN BROTHERS
IN HARMONY SMALL THINGS GROW

Week 1

Dec. 3 - 9



“Winter Marsh at Dusk”
by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

December 3

Feast of St. Francis Xavier

“No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for Him”

- Isaiah 64:3

On the Feast of St. Francis Xavier, I reflect on three things Jesus taught me through St. Francis Xavier.

As a young man in college, St. Francis Xavier experienced an incredible conversion with the help of the Holy Spirit and his friend, St. Ignatius Loyola (the founder of the Jesuit order). Through the gift of St. Francis Xavier’s intercession, we can receive the grace of an equally powerful conversion in our own lives. As believers, including religious, we sometimes forget our need to be converted. We become comfortable, thinking, “I pray daily,” or “I go to confession regularly,” and so our relationship with God becomes stagnant. We forget to grow.

St. Francis Xavier had the gift of being open to mission and baptizing over 100,000 people. He was asked at the very last minute to go to China, India, or Japan. Despite the change of plans, St. Francis was open to the will of God and abandoned his life to the Jesuit mission. Through his intercession, the Holy Spirit can move us to have the same missionary abandonment. Sometimes, we think of evangelization as being a vocation for only a few people. Mission is for all believers.

It’s been said that St. Francis Xavier performed countless miracles of healing while he was on his mission. This healing became a clear witness to the power of God, which helped in his mission of conversion and spreading the Gospel message. Sometimes, healing is only thought to happen in the book of Acts. Sometimes, healing doesn’t always look like what we want it to. Maybe we have a physical wound or chronic illness but what God really wants to heal is something in our hearts, like a grudge or a wound from an old situation.

Father, we pray for the courage to be missionaries, reaching out and leading others to Jesus. Like St. Francis, may we help those in need, live lives rooted in prayer, and may we bring Christ to all we meet. This we ask through Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Brother Stephen Obara, C.F.X.

December 4

“He shall judge between nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares. And their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again” – Isaiah 2:1-5

I have watched the ebb and flow of war and peace in my lifetime. There have been times of great progress with the end of the Cold War, and a slowing of the nuclear arms race. Domestically, we saw progress during the Civil Rights Movement, the introduction of Medicare, the Voting Rights Act, etc. This past decade, however, has marked a decline in global stability. Even among our own citizens, the divide seems to be widening. The road to peace and progress has been obstructed by fascism, nationalism, and tribalism.

During this first week of Advent, the words of Isaiah speak to our troubled times, and provide hope that the innate goodness of the human spirit will rise up and heed the divine message of peace.

**Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.**

Donald Macrino

December 5

“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” – Luke 10:21

As a child I had the privilege of being surrounded and raised by adults who didn't own much but happily shared their cultural wealth. There were nuns, teachers, an older brother, grandma, cousins, and neighbors who filled my days –including many dark nights without electricity– with hours of storytelling, readings, songs, and what I call “live history trips” –our school was right across the street from the Ciudad Colonial in Santo Domingo, steps away from the eventual site of the first cathedral, hospital, and university in the Americas. Also, where the Dominican monk, Brother Antonio Montesino launched his fight for the rights of the native tainos, marking the start of efforts for the recognition of fundamental rights of humankind. In this magical and vibrant setting, I fell in love with learning and developed a spirit of inquiry. My favorite book was “el porqué de las cosas” because it thoroughly explained the causes of many things and events that were of importance to me.

Over the past several months I have spent countless hours in emergency rooms, nursing homes, and doctor's offices accompanying my mother who received a kidney transplant last December. One night while praying on a train back from Boston I came to the realization that I am still that child wanting to know ¿por que?/why? While praying, I asked God, why is she going through so much pain and suffering, and Father please, for how long? God answered immediately and revealed that she is God's child and I am called to remain by her side, as long as it takes, accepting each day as it comes with a trusting and praising heart. I felt immense peace in understanding that God doesn't rescue us, instead he fully joins us and remains by our side in our suffering.

Loving and present God, give us the ability to embrace the journey You have called us to embark on, help us during this advent season to remain as 'childlike' so we can be filled with a spirit of joy and gratitude for all that is hidden in our journey. Teach us to be patient and faithful but most importantly to trust that You will reveal, at the perfect time, the things that will delight You and prepare us for a Christ-centered celebration.

Raisa Carrasco-Velez

December 6

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” – Psalm 23:1

The three Scripture passages that the Church provides for us today all have a reference to God’s people being fed. “The Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast ...” (Isaiah 25, 6) “You spread a table before me...my cup overflows” (Psalm 23, 5) “He (Jesus) took the seven loaves and the fish..., gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied.” (Matthew 15, 37).

This God whom we meet in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures consistently reveals God’s self as a Lover whose “heart is moved with pity” for people (Matthew 15, 32). Just before New Year’s 2023, I learned that I had had a heart attack. I had detected a couple of traditional symptoms, but they seemed very slight. I spent ten days in our local hospital, having several heart-related tests and being equipped with a heart monitor. January weather and Covid issues prevented more than one or two visitors. I did some reading but spent more time thinking and praying. Although I recognized the seriousness of my condition, I never felt particularly worried or upset. A line in the Fundamental Principles of the Xaverian Brothers is a favorite of mine: “Above all else, remember that your God is forever faithful” (pg 3). This verse took on special meaning and became a bit of a companion for me while waiting for surgery. I had triple bypass surgery the second week of January and received wonderful nursing and rehab care. The God of all is revealed as Someone whom we can trust. You and I can depend on God to care for us with love, even when we don’t immediately recognize that love.

Faithful God, help me to trust Your personal love for me and to assist others to grow in their trust.

Amen.

Brother Robert Green, C.F.X.

December 7

Memorial of St. Ambrose

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ happened. Mary, His mother, having been betrothed to Joseph, found herself with child, by the virtue of the Holy Spirit, before they had lived together. Joseph, her husband, who was a good man and who did not want to defame her, decided to break up with her secretly” – Matthew 1:18–19

To speak of Advent in the Catholic Church is to think of preparing, through the hope of this promise, the coming of the Son of God, who will bring us the salvation and redemption announced to us in the Old Testament. But the question is, “Why do we still wait for this salvation?” We wait for this salvation because we live in a world of hatred, war, ethnic and tribal conflicts, misery and famine, disease and murder. This is why our hope must be great, so that the birth of this Christ for whom we are waiting can bring us consolation and salvation in our moments of suffering. Therefore, our mission as Xaverian Brothers, and lay collaborators, is to show the presence of Christ to all those who are experiencing dark moments in their lives: Children in difficulty, especially those who are unable to learn and who have intellectual difficulties wherever we work as missionaries and disciples of Christ. the light who will be born while following our charismatic principles of our congregation.

Eternal and Almighty God, may this time of Advent be favorable for us to recognize the mystery of Your love and our salvation forever. You who live and reign for ever and ever.

Amen.

Brother Hubert Mulenga, C.F.X.

December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

*“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; break into song; sing praise”
- Psalm 98:3-4*

When was the last time you spontaneously broke out into song or joined a group of people shouting with joy? Did your favorite team come from behind to win at the buzzer? Were you told that your company was giving an extra vacation day during the holidays? The birth of a child? I am guessing that it does not happen too often and would have to be something extraordinary to make you or I react in such a way. Why is this? I believe that we are very wary of making ourselves open to experiencing true joy such that we seem to almost lose control. Our mode of being often reflects the safety of plain old inertia where life is just fine or worse, okay. Even if we do not consider ourselves cynical people, we seldom express ourselves so demonstrably, either because we fear ridicule from others or dread the disappointment that may come after the moment is over.

Our disappointments occur daily, but they are hard to accept because of the hurt it causes. This is especially true when our day-to-day journey of life seems uphill. The real question is, can we own the reality of our pain and the emotions that come with it, which can then leave space for us to be open to what is truly extraordinary? This is the only way we can experience the joy of the presence of God that is right in front of us to encounter. The Immaculate Conception of Mary, which we honor today, shows God's intimate connection with humanity, and love as action. That is what it is about: agape or love as action or decision. We may not understand these actions, but we certainly adore them, because this divine love is nothing short of a miracle, and that is something worth celebrating.

God, help me find my voice, my true voice, and the courage and joy to sing of the miracle that is You in our midst.

Amen.

Robert Peace

December 9

“While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears: ‘This is the way; walk in it,’ when you would turn to the right or to the left” – Isaiah 30:21

Since becoming a mother, I’ve struggled with balancing my career with professional ambitions, all while ensuring that I’m living a fully purposeful life. I’ve been blessed with professional opportunities, but at times those opportunities require me to make great sacrifices that impact my family life. I’ve found myself questioning if my career choices were in the best interest of my family and more importantly, benefited the greater good.

While I’ve always harnessed the power of prayer, about two years ago I became very intentional about starting every day with praise and worship music. Seeking God’s guidance and support as I approach the day brings ease and assurance that the decisions I make are in line with His vision for me. Finding dedicated time to speak to God continues to be the most impactful part of my day- reinforcing my trust in Him. Despite any difficulties that I face, I know with all my heart that He is informing my decisions.

It was this trust in God’s plan that brought me back to Good Counsel. I vividly remember how deeply I contemplated transitioning into the education sector, from a successful career in the humanitarian sector. However, as I prayed and reflected, God’s will was clear. “The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.”

As I enter my second year at Good Counsel, I am grateful for heeding God’s call and the blessings that I have received upon re-entering into this community. I continue to create time and space for contemplation to ensure that my work is guided by faith and what the Xaverian values call us to do. We are truly blessed that Advent provides us with the opportunity to await, welcome, and celebrate the coming of our King and all that He brings.

Our Father, You are the one who fights for us. Open our ears and hearts so that we may continue to trust and become closer to You. We welcome Your coming with all our heart.

Amen.

Limnyuy Konglim

Week 2

Dec. 10 - 16



“Hilltop Evergreens”
by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

December 10

“Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before Him, at peace” – 2 Peter 3:14

The beauty of having a relationship with God is that He is all-knowing and forgiving. In reading this passage from Peter, some of the phrases like “the heavens will be dissolved in flames” and “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief” may instill fear in some of us, but the reality of the entire scripture reading is that God wants us to be prepared and ready for His blessings. He wants us to be open to all that he has to offer so that we are always ready to receive Him no matter what circumstances we are in. We are not perfect, we are sinners, but if we keep our minds and hearts on the blessings He has in store for us each day, we will always be ready for Him. They begin this reading using the term “beloved” meaning “deeply loved” or “dear to the heart.” From the beginning of this passage, it is understood that this message is coming from the deepest place of love. This reading also notes that God is patient with us and that He is giving us time to repent for our sins. When I think about Advent and the connection to the Xaverian identity, I think about all the new students, families, faculty/staff, and alumni who begin a journey together. A journey of excitement, learning, growth, and my favorite Xaverian virtue, trust. Just as stated in the XBSS Charism statement that we are “seeking to find God and to be formed by the ‘common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life’” this reading reminds us that if we keep our hearts open to the simple daily functions of each moment, we will find God in the little things.

Lord, please empower us to find You not only in times of need, but in times of joy and thankfulness and to keep us open to Your blessings. We beg You, Lord, to continue to be our protector and our savior as we go about our daily lives. In Jesus' precious name we pray, Amen.

Anif McDonald

December 11

“But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus” – Luke 5:17-26

After living most of his life a contented bachelor, my Dad at age 48 was lovestruck by a beautiful Protestant woman. He quickly realized he wanted to marry her but gave her the condition that she must first convert to Catholicism. My mom quickly complied and became the wife of a proud Irish Catholic man! Two children quickly followed, and we were blessed to be educated in Catholic schools. While my dad had the Catholic education, ritual, tradition and faith, my mother it turns out more profoundly influenced my faith. Throughout her life, by word, action and practice, she carried my sister and me “up on the roof and... into the middle in front of Jesus.”

The above excerpt from Luke describes friends bringing a paralyzed man to Jesus in search of a miracle. Because of the people crowding Jesus, the man's companions go to great lengths to get the man “in front of” Jesus. They climb a roof and are forced to lower him through ceiling tiles to be seen by Jesus. Jesus praises the men for their faith and cures the paralytic.

Who are the people in your life who, because of their faith, have carried you up a roof and put you in front of Jesus? Who has gone to great personal effort and sacrifice to help you see Jesus? Perhaps it was a beloved Xaverian Brother, a teacher or a coach. Perhaps this Advent season is a good time to thank them for carrying you on the journey. It also may be an opportune time to reflect upon who we can inspire with zeal and lift during this holy season. Could it be a family member, student or fellow Board member who needs to be shown the love and joy of this season? The Xaverian value of compassion calls us to “... look at life through the eyes of Christ, to accompany them...,” just like the friends of the paralyzed man.

Loving Jesus, during this hopeful Advent season, help us to carry others front and center to You. May we be evangelists whose words and deeds draw others to our faith. May we also be mindful and thankful of those on our journey who have personally sacrificed to lift us before You.

Amen.

Ellen Ciampi

December 12

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Blessed are you, holy Virgin Mary, deserving of all praise; from you rose the sun of justice, Christ our God.

Several years ago, I visited St Mary's College, Moraga, CA. It was the end of the school year and many Brothers were busy organizing various events associated with graduation. My friend, Brother Michael, was the chaplain for the Latino students. He invited me to a special celebration for these students which took place in the college chapel. When I arrived, the chapel was filled with parents, grandparents, friends and children. The graduates gathered in the back, each holding a long stem red rose, a symbol of the renowned miracle of La Virgen de Guadalupe. Eventually, they formed a processional line behind a beautiful banner of the miraculous image of La Virgen. The procession moved quietly until the students reached the sanctuary. Then they sang a Spanish hymn in honor of La Virgen. Afterward, students took turns at the microphone to thank loved ones for their support and generosity. The gratitude expressed was so warm, heartfelt, and beautiful that my eyes kept tearing. Their sincerity, appreciation, and happiness was remarkable.

For these students and their families, their devotion and dedication to La Virgen is a daily inspiration of hope and compassion because they know that the Blessed Mother and her Beloved Son are always on the side of those most in need, the forgotten and the oppressed. On this Feast Day of our Lady of Guadalupe, may each of us be inspired to join our prayers and participation on behalf of those most in need of our support, kindness and love. Que viva La Virgen de Guadalupe!

Loving Mother, shelter us under the mantle of your protection, keep us in the embrace of your arms, help us always to know the love of your Son Jesus. Amen.

Brother Richard Mazza, C.F.X.

December 13

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me” - Matthew 11:29

The verse is a simple yet life changing invitation from our God. Lord, I long for You. In my weakness, in my despair, in my sorrow - I long for You. In my triumphs, in my moments of joy and my countless blessings - I long for You. Truly, as St. Augustine wrote: “our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” God invites us.

Yes, Matthew’s Gospel tells us this. Do we, likewise, invite God? As the Xaverian Brothers’ Fundamental Principles remind us: it is “God, who knows you, understands you, and loves you.” Yes, even better than we ourselves do! The Fundamental Principles challenge us to empty ourselves to Christ. In so doing, we invite Christ into our hearts just as He invites us into His.

His love embraces us. His love secures us. His love offers us true peace. Christ reminds us in His invitation that we are never alone. He walks with us through our sufferings; in our temptations; during the turbulent moments in our lives. And He reminds us to learn from Him.

This reminder is ever present in the Xaverian charism. I know that it has allowed me to find peace during the various obstacles in my own life. For some it may seem like a burden to take on Christ. He Himself admits it is a yoke. But once we take it - Him - on, we will find out how light it really is. For it is Christ who carries it - and us - along the way.

**Christ, may we welcome You and surrender ourselves to You. May we accept Your invitation to come to You by making space for You in our lives. May we always be thankful for Your unfailing compassion.
Amen.**

Salvatore Tinervia

December 14

“Amen, I say to you, among those born of woman, none has risen greater than John the Baptist; and yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he” – Matthew 11:11

God's plan is the salvation of all humankind. Our life on earth is a pilgrimage at the end of which we must return to give an account to God. It is the sin we commit that keeps us from living according to His plan. As a good Father, faced with the “chaos and catastrophe of sin” God does not abandon us. In His divine mercy, He sends us His son born of a woman to save us. Jesus comes to us, especially in the darkest moments of our lives (suffering, illness, death, rejection, incomprehension, isolation, slander, etc.). These moments are favorable times to open ourselves more to Him following the example of St. John of the Cross whom we celebrate today. Misunderstood, he was kidnapped and imprisoned in the convent of Toledo, where he was kept in solitary confinement, in the dark, for nine months. It was during this period when he was mistreated and humiliated that he composed some of his most beautiful mystical poems.

Likewise for our founder Theodore James Ryken, when he learned in 1871 from his doctor, Doctor François Van den Abeele, that the wound in his right leg would lead him to death, “he received the last sacraments with lucidity.” Following the example of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, when difficulties overwhelm my life, I like to choose solitude and understand God's will in what happens to me. This is not an easy thing, only grace helps me achieve it.

**May God in His goodness grant us the grace to remain in communion with Him despite all the situations we go through in our lives.
Amen.**

Brother Joseph Kibambe Ngoie, C.F.X.

December 15

Your descendants would be like the sand, and those born of your stock like its grains, their name never cut off or blotted out from My presence” – Isaiah 48:19

In the gentle embrace of Advent’s anticipation, we find hope in the words of Isaiah: “Their name never cut off or blotted out from my presence” (Is 48:19). As we prepare to welcome the Savior’s birth, we are constantly reminded of memories of our loved ones and the enduring legacy of love.

This Holy Season echoes memories of family gatherings through the decades past. While we may have lost some loved ones, we also experience the joy of expanding our family tree. Each year, we light candles around the advent wreath, and the light serves as a reminder of the past and the future.

The Advent candles flicker like memories handed down through time. The legacy of love I witnessed as a child and now see in my children parallels the assurance of God’s embrace, both unbroken by passing years.

As we gather this Advent, we embrace the promise that our names, like our ancestors, are forever etched in God’s heart. Our presence, love, and faith endure, weaving a timeless connection that binds generations.

Let this season of anticipation remind us that just as Advent’s light kindles hope anew, so does God’s promise illuminate our souls.

Jesus, as we anticipate the celebration of Your birth, we are reminded of the joyous time with our loved ones. May Your blessings be upon all those we encounter and love on this journey together.

Amen.

John Berger

December 16

“Lord, make us turn to You; let us see Your face and we shall be saved” – Psalm 80

When invited to write a reflection for this booklet, I was quite honored and excited to be presented with the wonderful opportunity. Familiar with the process of writing talks, reflections, lessons, and homilies, I was hoping for, and anticipating a Sunday reading, a reading that encompassed one of the familiar stories found in Advent, or beyond all dreams, the Gospel reading for Christmas Day! And so, my waiting, reflecting an Advent spirit, was filled with hopeful anticipation. My excitement quickly turned to consternation when my designated day left me with two scripture readings that absolutely confounded me, even after I read several commentaries! I was at a loss.

What I discovered, however, in this disappointment, was an aspect of Advent that is rarely recognized by me and deeply hidden in my heart. Disappointment for me occurs when my hopes, wishes, and desires are not realized the way I want them to be. I am not devastated, and my life is not left in ruins, but there is a level of unfulfillment I experience. Advent is a time of waiting, joyful expectancy, and hopeful anticipation that God will fulfill all that God promises to us. Therefore, even when things do not turn out according to plan, we are invited to trust that God’s prophecies will be fulfilled. Perhaps disappointment, Advent’s subtle spirit, is God’s way of “dissing” our appointments; our engagements with familiar ways of knowing or seeing, so that the gift of watchfulness, our waiting in action, may help us to see as God sees. If we can do this, then the Incarnation becomes a reality far beyond the 25th of December and the Word is made flesh in every moment. This certainly is joy to the world!

So, I offer my reflection. Just perhaps in your reading, an Advent hope has been fulfilled, and you are left “dis” appointed.

Lord, grace me with the gift of seeing the world through Your heart that I might live according to Your will.

Amen.

Chuck Belzner

Week 3

Dec. 17 - 23



“New England Winter”
by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

December 17

“Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?

What do you have to say for yourself?” He said: “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘make straight the way of the Lord,’” – Isaiah 40:3

It is obvious from reading today’s Gospel that John the Baptist knows who he is. He acknowledges and stands firm in who he is when responding to the Priest and Levites that ask, “who are you?” It is a fascinating question and can rouse several different responses. I can’t always answer that question with the same conviction that John the Baptist has. It is not because I don’t know who I am but because it can be so easy to forget.

So, who are you? A child of God; it is that simple. As it states in our Fundamental Principles, “You were created by the God of love in God’s image and according to God’s likeness, to be a unique expression of that love. It is through you that God desires to manifest Love...” God sent us His son and allowed Him to be sacrificed because we forgot that we were all created out of love and that He desired us to share that love with the people in our world. Jesus took on the cross solely and purely out of love.

During Advent we should reflect on God’s unconditional love for us so that we ourselves can love as freely as Christ loved us. It is the same love we are asked to give our students, parents, co-workers, spouses, the poor, those in need, and our children. If we strive to do this one thing, it will be difficult for us to forget who we are: the beloved children of God.

God of love, we ask for the grace to love as You have loved us. Give us the fortitude to live and say with conviction who we truly are; Love.

Amen.

James K. Parker III

December 18

“They shall name Him Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us’ – Matthew 1:23

In just one week, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, God becoming man, a creature like one of us. This is almost too much to behold; indeed, without the faith of Mary and her willing response, “let what you have said be done to me” and the faith of Joseph who “did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him,” it is too much to behold. Thank God for faith!

There is so much to love about Christmas: the crèche, the tree, the music, the gifts, the family get-togethers, and for some, even the shopping. But above and beyond all this is what our faith celebrates: Christ was born in Bethlehem to Mary and God is with us. Slowly repeat those four words four times, each time emphasizing a different word. What an awesome realization!

To me, that is the true marvel of Christmas. The Creator has become one of His creation. Our God has come to dwell among us as one of us. When He walked this earth, He knew the joys and sorrows of everyday life just as we know them. He knew smiles and frowns, good days and bad days, satisfaction and disappointment, life and death. And so, regardless of which side of the coin I may be experiencing at any given moment, be it a good time or a rough time, Christmas especially reminds me that “God is with us.” What more can I ask for?

**Jesus, Emmanuel, no matter the time of the year or whatever the circumstance, help me to remember that You are with me always.
Amen.**

Brother Leonard Wojtanowski, C.F.X.

December 19

“Be my rock of refuge, a strength to give me safety” – Psalm 71: 3-4

Many years ago I first heard the expression, “Let go and let God”, and wrestled with its implications. It asks me to trust in God more than myself, to be strong, and to have the courage and faith to know I am loved by God, a power stronger than any meager efforts I may assert to try and gain control of chaos and uncertainty.

Today’s readings epitomize trust. Manoah’s wife, hearing the angel’s announcement that, although barren, she was now with child, trusted the message, shared it with her husband, cared for her health and the unborn infant. Zechariah was fearful when an angel appeared to him, understandably so. He and his wife were old, and he questioned the announcement that his wife would conceive. Her response was to trust the truth of God’s love, “the Lord has done for me at a time when He sees fit.”

Most of us learn to trust by truly knowing someone, listening to their values, ideas, and sharing our own. Through the bond of trust, our minds and hearts come together. Through prayer, in all its forms, we share our hearts and hopes, our fears and our truths. In those conversations, we listen and feel God’s presence and love. Just as the women in today’s readings, we carry His light inside us, tending it with faith and trust, to share with world.

Advent is a perfect time to trust more profoundly; to let go and let God enter deeper into our lives.

Lord, nurture my soul with Your love, that I may more completely live in faith, and spread Your light.

Amen.

Gail Dennig

December 20

“O Key of David, opening the gates of God’s eternal kingdom, come and free the prisoners of darkness!”

– “O” Antiphon for Dec. 20

Three turns clockwise and stop at the first number. Pass the second number once going counterclockwise and return to it. Go to the last number going clockwise. Push up and open.

I know a bright and thoughtful young man with whom I’ve been privileged to enjoy a good relationship during his time at Malden Catholic. We’ve developed a fun and playful rapport and I’ve learned a fair bit about him as time has gone on. And yet, I’ve never taught him. I’ve never coached him. I’ve never had him for homeroom or advisory. But I did open his locker once.

Today’s readings taken together paint a portrait of a God who desires to open up a personal relationship with us and is not shy about it. Ask for a sign from the LORD! Let the LORD enter! The Lord is with you! Have you noticed in these readings how God becomes more and more insistent on being with us until that relationship is finally realized in the flesh of the child who is Emmanuel?

As we surveyed the freshman corridor back in September, a longtime colleague of mine remarked how astounding it is to him that so many of our boys will carry their enormous books around with them all year rather than acknowledge that they can’t open their locker, that they just need a bit of help. Surrounded by the gazes of their freshmen brothers, asking for help to open a locker is a powerful expression of vulnerability.

And how incredible it is that God expresses this same vulnerability in Luke’s Gospel by relying on Mary’s help! So if you’re ever lucky enough to help a nervous freshman open their locker, maybe you’ll be able to catch a glimpse of the God who asked a young girl in Nazareth for a little help with opening His relationship to the world.

Lord Jesus, by the intercession of Mary and Joseph, the ones who opened You to the world, make us available for You to become more present, through us, to the world.

Amen.

Robert Gregory

December 21

“Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” — Luke 1:45

As my wife and I have spent this year expecting our second child — a daughter — our growing family is a daily reminder of how God is present in all of us. Just as Mary’s greeting caused Elizabeth and her unborn child to be filled with the Holy Spirit, God’s presence in each one of us fulfills in ways we could not otherwise be nourished. The belief that Elizabeth had in the Mother of our Lord, and that belief that was felt in her womb, demonstrates to all of us how our ability to believe in the word of God is rewarded every day.

Looking forward to becoming the father of a young girl, I am forever impressed with and in admiration of all the strong women who play such an important part of our development, culture, and spiritual life. Each day we pray on the Xaverian charisms of patience, trust, zeal, compassion, and humility. These charisms are seen so clearly in the Mother of God, and in all mothers who have heard the voice of the Lord. We are all God’s children, and we are indebted to the mothers who make it possible for all of us to experience His grace.

**Dear God, help us to honor the mothers, sisters, and daughters in our life. Allow us to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as Elizabeth was.
Amen.**

Robert DiRe

December 22

“The Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is His name” – Luke 1:49

As I was growing up, this festive season would always get as upcountry as a family. It was a time for family gatherings. After almost a year away from the extended family the pressure we piled on my father to let us celebrate Christmas upcountry was enormous. We needed new clothing and shoes for Christmas (we were five boys), our grandparents also depended on him, not to mention the very many relatives who would drop by to be given a Christmas gift. By this time of year, the atmosphere was jovial, we were already in a celebratory mood.

Now that I’m grown up, I realize the burden that was on my father’s shoulders. To be smart in life one needs to select what is important and filter out what is not. My father selected his family.

After the annunciation, Mary had a long, difficult journey of faith as she was left to cope alone with the consequences of her YES. Pregnancy outside marriage was punished by being stoned to death. Her whole life was turned upside down, Joseph would not understand. She could have complained and blamed God but from her lips came a song of praise a song that echoes the words of Hannah, her ancestor of the Old Testament.

My dad did not complain, feel sorry for himself, nor blame God for the burden we were to him as an extended family.

When I am overwhelmed, these words from our Fundamental Principles echo in my mind, “Be, patient therefore with yourself and with God.”

Lord, let Mary’s example help us to trust in Your love whatever the circumstances and to praise You.

Amen.

Brother Bernard Mujibi, C.F.X.

December 23

“I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; And suddenly there will come to the temple the LORD whom you seek” - Malachi 3:1-2

Today’s readings speak of two of the greatest prophetic voices in scripture, Elijah and John the Baptist. Both were called by God to prepare the hearts and minds of their people to see and feel in a new way. During Advent, I am often reminded (sometimes told) to slow down, to be still and to prepare “myself” for the coming of the Christ Child. Yet the readings today remind me that while these attitudes are all well and good for me to embrace during Advent, I should not forget that I am also called to be a prophet of the Word to prepare the path for the coming of the Christ into our world and our lives. When I think of who has exemplified a selfless life of preparing others to receive Christ, my thoughts are drawn to my mother.

My mom gave birth to twelve children and because of my father’s’ work, she became the main caretaker for my siblings and me. While she graduated at the top of her class in nursing school, she sacrificed her career so she could take care of us. Mom poured out her life for us and her days were consumed with everything it takes to nurture her children into becoming good, healthy, and loving adults. We would wake up to a warm breakfast, lunches packed for school, and at the end of the day a wonderful dinner. I still remember the weary look on her face after a long day as she would say “sweet dreams” before sending us to bed. Like Elijah and John, mom prepared the way for a wonderful life by her sacrificial love. At a deeper level, what she had been doing was preparing us to receive the Christ of love, gentleness, and mercy.

Every day my brothers and sisters reflect my mom’s selfless compassion and love as they pass these values to their families and to all they encounter in life. While my mom was serving our needs and preparing us for life, she was teaching us to do the same. I believe we are all called in our various vocations to lay the path for Christ to enter our world through how we love and serve one another.

Loving God, may we take time today to remember the people in our lives who, like Elijah and John the Baptist, humbled themselves to help us grow in love and understanding of You through their sacrificial love. May we embrace the gift they have given us and in turn give this gift to all those in need.

Amen.

Ben Kresse

Week 4

Dec. 24 - 25



"Winter Dusk - Boston"
by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

December 24

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

As we prepare for the birth of Christ tomorrow, today’s reading includes one of the most beautiful moments in the Bible. It is the ultimate lesson on what it means to give ourselves completely to God and to trust His will. We cannot lose sight of the bravery and obedience of Mary in that moment when Gabriel reveals to her that she will carry the Son of God. As she faced the possibility of losing Joseph and being rejected by her community, this trusting and obedient young lady said ‘yes’ to God. She gave everything over to God with that one word.

Would you say ‘yes’?

I often think about Theodore Ryken and how he said ‘yes’ to God. He said ‘yes’ to a life of serving others, and his ‘yes’ turned into a congregation of Brothers who also said ‘yes’ to God. Those ‘yeses’ gave us many remarkable Xaverian schools where young people are challenged each day to listen for God’s call and be prepared to answer. All because Theodore Ryken, like Mary, gave everything over to God and said ‘yes.’ That short word is so simple, and yet, when it comes to answering God’s call, it is profound.

Are you ready to say ‘yes’?

God calls all of us, as He called Mary and Theodore Ryken, and we must have our spirit open to answer Him. Saying ‘yes’ is not a one-time event. Walking with God is an ongoing journey, and every day, He presents new opportunities to be a part of His plan. Now is the time to cast your fears aside and trust His invitation, so that each day, you are ready to say ‘yes.’

Lord, as we anticipate the birth of Your Son and our Savior, help us to be prepared to say ‘yes’ to Your call.

Amen.

Amy Sample

December 25

The Nativity of the Lord

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of a Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" – John 1:14

In recent years I have become rather dependent on using aids on my computer for obtaining driving directions, and, if necessary, making arrangements for lodgings, meals, etc. I would therefore find it daunting to undertake the trip Joseph and his pregnant wife Mary were facing. It is estimated that the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem would take from seven to ten days traveling on foot. Upon completing this arduous journey, they were then faced with the lack of suitable lodging, especially for someone in Mary's condition. And so, we find ourselves gathering around the humblest of all possible shelters to witness the event that will truly alter the course of history.

We read in Sacred Scripture that this remarkable happening was witnessed by a few shepherds and, in contrast, some educated scholars, referred to as Wise Men or Magi. As a youth I recall when we would set up our creche each year we would have both of these groups represented simultaneously, but that would be unlikely. The point we should draw from this narrative is that Christ had come to our world in order to save all people, regardless of class or social position. Therefore, it would seem to me, that it is incumbent upon all Christians everywhere, as well as all people of "good will" to endeavor tirelessly to spread the message of Christmas!

Lord, may the blessings of Christmas come upon and remain with all of us throughout the coming year!

Amen.

Brother Paul LaBelle, C.F.X.

About the Authors

Chuck Belzner is a Xaverian Associate and retired school counselor from Mount Saint Joseph High School. Chuck resides in Kingsville, MD with his wife Kay.

John Berger began his career as a Xaverian educator spans over two decades. He is the Director of Campus Ministry at Saint John's High School. John and his wife Andrea are parents to William (SJ class of '27) and two daughters, Nicole and Anna.

Raisa Carrasco-Velez is a woman, mother, wife, faith-based educator, and lifelong learner who is committed to serving youth and co-creating equitable communities. She lives with her husband and two adult children in MA, and serves as Director of Multicultural Affairs at St. John's Prep and Adjunct Lecturer at Merrimack College.

Ellen Ciampi is a member of the Board of Directors at Xavier High School. She serves as Chair of the Mission Committee. She is a small business owner, mom of two adult children and a Religious Education instructor.

Gail Dennig is a Xaverian Associate and Co-Chair of the English Department as well as English Teacher at St. John's Prep where her vocation led her 20 years ago.

Robert DiRe is the Principal of Nazareth Regional High School. He has been working in Catholic education since 2012, and within the Xaverian network since 2017.

Brother Robert Green, C.F.X. joined the Xaverian Brothers in 1965. The first 40 years of his ministry were spent as an administrator in several Xaverian Schools. Since 2013 he has served as Community Director at Xaverian House in Danvers, MA.

Robert Gregory serves as the Boys Division Leader at Malden Catholic where he also coaches the mock trial team and teaches AP Capstone. Now in his 11th year at MC, he has also participated in the XBSS Emerging Leaders Program (2021-2022) and served on the XBSS New Teacher Orientation team (2016-2020).

Brother Joseph Kibambe Ngoie, C.F.X. is Master of first and second year Postulants at the formation house in Likasi, Congo. A former student of the Xaverian Brothers at Tutazamie college in biology - chemistry, he began his initial formation in 2002.

Limnyuy Konglim is the Executive Director for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice at Our Lady of Good Counsel High School. Prior to this, she was a social justice and child rights advocate working to advance the rights of marginalized communities all over the world. Her professional experiences, as well as her own lived experience as a first-generation American, drive her to remain community and people-centered in all her personal and professional endeavors.

Ben Kresse grew up in Iowa. He received a BA in biology from Loras College in Iowa and a MA in theology from the University of Dayton. He teaches Theology and coaches wrestling at St. Xavier High School. Ben is married and has three grown children.

Brother Paul LaBelle, C.F.X. is a Xaverian Brother in his 63rd year in the congregation. He currently resides at Xaverian House in Danvers, MA.

Donald Macrino started his career in 1973 as an English teacher at New London High School and then served as principal of Waterford High School for 17 years. In July 2014, he came to Saint Bernard School and has served as Head of School ever since. He is an avid auto racing fan and loves to spend time with his family.

Brother Richard Mazza, C.F.X. is one of the coordinators for our New England Associates. He recently joined our retirement community at Xaverian House, Danvers, MA.

Anif McDonald is the Director of Community, Culture, and Equity at Xaverian Brothers High School. He is also a proud graduate of XBHS and loves building the XBSS network. Outside of work, he enjoys playing rugby and spending time with family and friends.

Brother Bernard Mujibi, C.F.X. is a trained catechist and works in South Sudan as a catechist, and director of St. Daniel Combonni Primary School. He's the firstborn in a family of six and he's also a poet and an actor. He loves sharing his talent with others.

Brother Hubert Mulenga, C.F.X. is the regional secretary of the Congregation for the Xaverian Brothers in Congo.

Brother Stephen Obara Okech, C.F.X. is from Kenya. In July, he made his perpetual profession as a Brother. He serves as Deputy Principal at St. Xavier Secondary School in Bungoma, where he teaches English and Literature.

James Parker is from Temple Hills, MD. He has an undergraduate degree in Music Education from Providence College and a Masters in Orchestral Conducting from the University of South Carolina. James is the Dean of Student Life at St. Mary's Ryken High School.

Robert Peace is the Director of Xaverian Mission at Mount Saint Joseph High School.

Amy Sample is the principal at St. Xavier High School. She has spent 24 years working in Catholic education with the last six years at a Xaverian Brothers Sponsored School.

Salvatore Tinervia is a 1997 graduate of Xaverian High School. He is a Campus Minister and teacher in the Religion Department at Xaverian. In June 2023 he completed his 20th year.

Brother Leonard Wojtanowski, C.F.X. joined the Xaverian Brothers in 1963. For 41 years he taught junior high school students in NJ, SC, and the Lower East Side of New York. He now resides in Marcy, NY, volunteering at various institutions and programs in the Utica area.



Project Contributors

Dr. Benjamin Horgan was initially formed by the Xaverian Brothers while at St. John's High School and 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 Edward Driscoll, C.F.X. has served the educational ministry of the Congregation both in the U.S. and Bolivia. After his term as General Superior, he dedicated himself to teaching immigrants English, to the ministry of spiritual direction and to the promotion of racial justice.

Joshua Kinney serves the mission of the Xaverian Brothers as the Director of Communications. He is a storyteller, writer, photographer, and world traveler who has spent his career working in mission-driven, faith-based organizations.

Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X. is a gifted watercolor artist. Since 1998, he has been recognized as a distinguished local artist and framer who frequently participates in art exhibits and is a regular art instructor at local senior centers. You can find his artwork online at: www.edwardrice.net

Brother Daniel Skala, C.F.X. was elected to serve as General Superior in 2019. Previously, he had served as a teacher, administrator, and headmaster for over 40 years. Since 2007, he had served on the leadership council of the Congregation.

Stephanie Stricker serves the mission of the Xaverian Brothers as the Executive Director of Advancement and Director of Planned Giving. She recently celebrated her 20th year with the congregation. In August 2023, she received the Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy designation through the American College of Financial Services.



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.

NOTES

NOTES



May your Advent
journey give you hope,
and help prepare you
for the real meaning of
Christmas, and may the
coming of Jesus give
you peace.



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