

2020



# O RIENS

A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

FATHER JOEL SEMBER

# *Oriens*

A Pilgrimage Through Advent and Christmas

November 29, 2020–February 2, 2021

Fr. Joel Sember

Huntington, Indiana  
Our Sunday Visitor

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*Dedicated to the Queen of Heaven  
in gratitude for her visit to Champion, Wisconsin,  
on October 9, 1859*

+

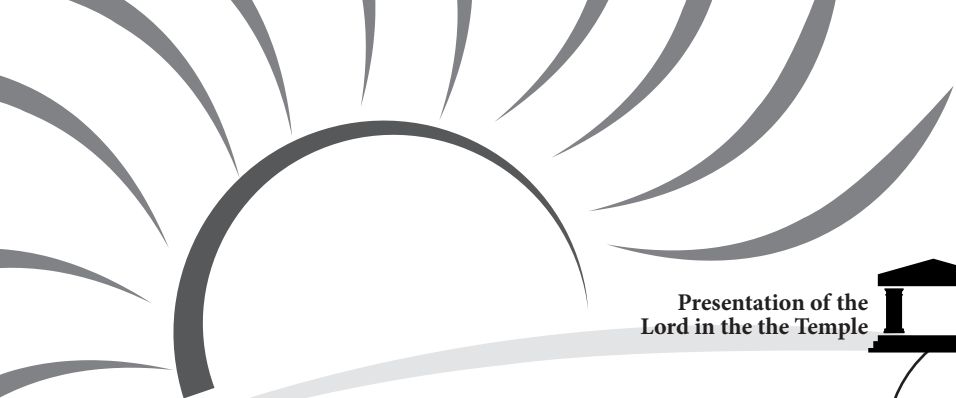
*and to Tim Schiebe,  
my first pilgrim partner*

+

*and to all my fellow pilgrims,  
who have walked with me  
on the way*

+

*¡Buen Camino!*



Presentation of the Lord in the Temple



WEEK 10

St. Thomas Agustus

Conversion of St. Paul WEEK 9

St. Agnus

WEEK 8

Nativity of Our Lord



Baptism of Our Lord

WEEK 7

Mary the Mother of God

Epiphany

WEEK 4

December 17: Christmas Countdown Begins

Holy Family

WEEK 6

Epiphany observed

Our Lady of Guadalupe WEEK 3

Immaculate Conception

St. Nicholas WEEK 2

St. Francis Xavier

St. Andrew

WEEK 1

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# Introduction

*Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day.  
Teach a man to pray, and you feed him for a lifetime.*

## **TEACH A MAN TO PRAY ...**

There are many wonderful Advent books full of moving meditations. This isn't one of them. Instead of giving you meditations I came up with, *Oriens* will teach you how to meditate for yourself. If you don't really know how to pray with Scripture, this book will teach you. If you already know how to pray, then it will help you pray better.

I left space each day for you to journal your prayer experiences. When you get to the end of the book, you will find it has become full of moving meditations — not my meditations but yours. I hope that, as you learn to go deeper in your conversations with God, prayer becomes your favorite part of each day and this season takes on a whole new meaning.

## **“DO YOU WANT TO WALK THE CAMINO WITH ME?”**

It was my third year of theology studies at the North American College in Rome. We had two weeks of Easter vacation to go experience Europe. A classmate and I decided to walk the *Camino Portugués*, a short version of the famous medieval pilgrimage route across Spain. (It's so famous that it's called *El Camino*, which simply means “the way” in Spanish.)

I bought some shoes and borrowed a backpack, and we flew to Lisbon. We took a train to the Portuguese border and then spent a week walking to the burial place of Saint James the apostle. Something special happened on the way. I started to see myself, and the ordinary world, in a whole new way. And I fell in love with walking pilgrimages.

Three years later I was back in America as a newly ordained priest. “We don't have to fly to Europe to walk down the road,” I thought. I scoped out a walking route to a local shrine, lined up places to stay every

twelve miles or so, and found people to bring us food each night. Twenty-two people joined me on the pilgrimage. Their lives were changed, and I became hooked on pilgrimages.

Every year for the past ten years, I've led a five-day walking pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in Champion, Wisconsin. I never cease to come away with some new gift, blessing, or lesson learned on the way.

A walking pilgrimage is a much different experience from a bus pilgrimage. When you ride a bus to a shrine, it's mostly about the destination. Pilgrims look forward to a big "Aha" moment when they arrive. Walking pilgrims, on the other hand, learn the joy of the journey. They see familiar roads in a whole new way. They appreciate the beauty around them. They enter into the ebb and flow of nature. They draw closer to the people they walk with. They learn to keep their eyes open for encounters with God along the way. Most of all, they learn to put one foot in front of the other and keep walking no matter what.

A walking pilgrimage is about more than the destination; it's a journey of the heart. It changes you in ways you never expected.

## THE ADVENT JOURNEY

So what does this have to do with Advent? We all struggle with Advent. The Church is telling us to slow down, but the world is telling us, "Hurry up." We rush around preparing for the birth of Jesus. We look forward to the big "Aha" moment waiting for us at Christmas. And we always seem to miss out somehow. How is it that every year Christmas seems less merry and bright than we were hoping it would be?

The problem is that we keep treating Advent like the busy bus on the way to Christmas. We expect to step off at Bethlehem and have some kind of amazing experience. Yet Holy Mother Church designed Advent to be more like a walking pilgrimage. You take a little step every day. If you're open to it, you learn to enjoy the journey. You connect with the people around you. You enter into a new rhythm. The ordinary things of life take on a new meaning. God meets you on the road.

Think of this book as a *Camino* guide. It will show you how to step off the Christmas bus and walk the Advent road one day at a time. You will learn that Advent and Christmas are more than destinations; they



involve a journey of the heart.

## **KEEP WALKING**

This book covers nearly ten weeks, from the first Sunday of Advent on November 29 to the feast of the Presentation on February 2. Why does it go so long? It is set up to let us spend four weeks preparing and forty days celebrating Christmas (kind of like the forty days of Lent followed by the fifty days of Easter).

We need those extra days. None of the people who saw the Christ Child in person understood the true meaning of Christmas. It was only in the days and years afterward that the “dawn from on high” began to rise in their hearts (Lk 1:78, Lectionary). The same is true for us in our ongoing journey of faith. Maintaining this devotional until February 2 will help us continue to see Jesus in the ordinary. Besides, it’s easier to find time to pray in the post-Christmas lull, and we need a little help getting through the low time in January.

You don’t have to walk the whole way with me; it’s your journey, and you can quit anytime. But let me encourage you to plan for the long walk.

Consider putting up your Christmas tree a little later this year. Put on the lights and ornaments, but don’t plug in the lights until the Light of the World is born on December 25. Then keep your tree lit all through the twelve days until January 6. Plan to keep at least your Advent wreath and Nativity scene up until February 2, the Feast of the Presentation (also known as Candlemas).

This *Oriens* journey may seem now like a long one, but you’ll be surprised at how quickly it passes. And you’ll really enjoy those extra days.

## **IF YOU MISS A DAY**

Even when you are too busy to pray, try to at least open this book and read the Scripture passage each day. If you end up missing a day or two (or even a week), don’t try to go back and do all the meditations you missed. Just skip ahead to the current day and pray that one well.

It is not important that you do every single meditation. What matters is that you put your heart into your prayer. Prayer is experiencing how our Father looks at you with love. Holiness is learning to live in his long, loving gaze every moment of your life.

## 12 Introduction

You might assume, because I wrote this book, that I'm great at praying. Far from it!

I was trained as a spiritual director through the Institute for Priestly Formation. I have taught countless numbers of people how to pray. I've been on pilgrimages and retreats and even a thirty-day silent retreat. But the truth is, unless I'm actually on a retreat or a pilgrimage, I usually pray badly. Most days I'm too busy, distracted, self-absorbed, or lazy to really pray well. And the problem is compounded during the busy Advent and Christmas season.

I wrote this book because I need it too! I will be praying with you and for you this whole season. Please pray for me and for your fellow *Oriens* pilgrims. We each make our own journey, and every journey is unique, but no one walks alone. ¡Buen Camino!

~Fr. Joel Sember  
*Priest, Pastor, Pilgrim*

# Suggested Calendar for the Advent and Christmas Season

**November 29, First Sunday of Advent:** Light the first candle on your Advent wreath.

**December 6, Second Sunday of Advent:** Light the first and second candles on your Advent wreath. (*Optional: Give some treats for Saint Nicholas Day!*)

**December 8 (Tuesday):** Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Put up your crèche (manger scene).

**December 13, Third Sunday of Advent:** Light the first, second, and third (rose) candles on your Advent wreath.

**Before December 17:** Put up your Christmas tree. Decorate it, but don't plug the lights in. Wait until the Light of the World is born.

**December 20, Fourth Sunday of Advent:** Light all four candles on your Advent wreath.

**December 24 or 25:** After attending Christmas Mass, put the Baby Jesus in the crèche, and light up your Christmas tree. Change the candles in your Advent wreath to white.

**January 1 (Friday):** Octave Day of Christmas, Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. Start the New Year with Mary.

**January 6 (Wednesday):** Epiphany. Have a family party to bless your home with blessed chalk. Afterward you can take down the tree (if you want to) and the decorations, but don't put away the Advent

## 14 Suggested Calendar for the Advent and Christmas Season

wreath or the crèche.

**February 2 (Tuesday):** Feast of the Presentation. Have one last Christmas party! Light the candles on your wreath, and have a family Candlemas procession to the crèche. Sing Christmas carols. Then put away any remaining Christmas decorations.

# Blessing of an Advent Wreath

The use of the Advent wreath is a traditional practice that has found its place in the Church as well as in the home. The blessing of an Advent wreath takes place on the First Sunday of Advent or on the evening before the First Sunday of Advent. When the blessing of the Advent wreath is celebrated in the home, it is appropriate that it be blessed by a parent or another member of the family.

**All make the sign of the cross together:** + In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** Our help is in the name of the Lord.

**Response:** Who made heaven and earth.

**Leader:** A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom  
a light has shone.  
You have brought them abundant joy  
and great rejoicing;  
As they rejoice before you as at the harvest,  
as men make merry when dividing spoils. ...  
For a child is born to us, a son is given us;  
upon his shoulder dominion rests.  
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,  
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.  
His dominion is vast  
and forever peaceful,  
From David's throne, and over his kingdom,  
which he confirms and sustains.  
By judgment and justice,  
both now and forever. (Is 9:1-2, 5-6)

## 16 Blessing of an Advent Wreath

**Leader:** The Word of the Lord.

**Response:** Thanks be to God.

**Leader:** Let us pray.

Lord our God,  
we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ:  
He is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples;  
he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us;  
he is the Savior of every nation.  
Lord God,  
let your blessing come upon us  
as we light the candles of this wreath.  
May the wreath and its light  
be signs of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.  
May he come quickly and not delay.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**Response:** Amen.

The blessing may conclude with a verse from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel":

O come, desire of nations, bind  
in one the hearts of humankind.  
Bid ev'ry sad division cease,  
and be thyself our Prince of peace.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

—From *Book of Blessings*

# **Week One**

# *Lectio Divina*

This first week we will use an ancient prayer form called *lectio divina* (pronounced “LEK-si-o di-VEE-na”). It has four simple steps, known by their Latin names: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). Don’t worry about each Latin word. The prayer form is as simple as this: read, think, talk, listen.

We read a passage of Scripture, and lots of thoughts come to our mind: What does this word mean? What is the cultural and historical context? How have scholars interpreted this particular idea? Those aren’t bad things to research. Some of those questions can form the *meditatio* part of prayer. But we need to avoid getting stuck in our own heads.

Reading Scripture isn’t really prayer if it doesn’t turn into a conversation. That is why we read, think about what we have read, talk to God about what we are thinking, and then listen to him.

This fourth step, to listen, guarantees that our prayer won’t be a one-sided conversation. Many people find this *contemplatio* to be a difficult step; they worry about whether they are “doing it right” or “if it’s really God.” Don’t try too hard. Just be quiet and receive.

Prayer is not so much about getting something from God as it is about being with God. We use Scripture as a conversation starter, but conversations with God go deeper than words. Don’t worry, I’ll walk you through it.

**Grace of the Week:** Each week has a particular theme or focus. The first week will focus on the creation of the world, the plants, the animals, and human beings. The simplest things can be the easiest to forget and the most profound when they are rediscovered. Pray for the grace to wonder anew at the marvel, mystery, and miracle of God’s creation.



# November 29 — Sunday

## First Sunday of Advent

### MARK 13:33–37

[Jesus said to his disciples:] “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Today we begin our Advent journey. Let’s take time to plan the trip. Look at the calendar, and make some notes about how you can really enjoy Advent and Christmas this year.

You have twenty-seven days until Christmas. But Christmas is not the only stop on our journey. We will stop to enjoy Saint Nicholas Day next Sunday. Immaculate Conception is a holy day of obligation, so plan to attend Mass on Tuesday, December 8. When will you put up your Christmas tree? Try to make it a family event. Whenever you put up your Christmas tree, I encourage you not to light it until after Christmas Mass. When will you put out your Christmas crèche? Take some time to plan these activities in advance.

For now the only things you need to do are put out the Advent wreath and light the first candle. Everything else can happen in time. While you’re looking at your calendar, you might want to plan time for baking, sending cards, present wrapping, and quality family time — whatever makes Christmas special for you.

Right now, as the season begins, you might feel a little anxious. It’s normal to be anxious during Advent and Christmas. But this year we’re doing something about that: not just planning Christmas but planning to pray through Christmas. To make this journey together, you’ll need





## November 30 — Monday

# Monday of the First Week of Advent

### SAINT ANDREW, APOSTLE

Right from the beginning, Andrew is an evangelist. He has just met Jesus, and he immediately goes to find his brother, Simon Peter, and introduce him (Jn 1:35–42). Andrew is said to have preached the Gospel in Greece, where he suffered martyrdom at Patras. Bound by ropes to an X-shaped cross, he preached to the crowds for two days before expiring.

Saint Andrew is the patron of Greece, Scotland, and Russia. There is a tradition of beginning a Christmas novena on his feast day. Let us ask Saint Andrew to introduce us to Jesus in our prayer time.

**Preparation:** Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten the eyes of my heart (see Eph 1:18).

**Lectio:** We begin *in the beginning*, with the creation of the world. The Bible starts by explaining that everything that is comes from God. The details are not as important as trying to get a sense of the majesty and mystery of it all.

Read the passage below, slowly and prayerfully. Picture an ancient patriarch telling this story to his grandchildren as they sit around a campfire. They have heard it many times before, but still they hang on his every word.

### GENESIS 1:1–5, 14–19

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth — and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters —

Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good. God then sepa-

rated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” Evening came, and morning followed — the first day...

Then God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the seasons, the days and the years, and serve as lights in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth. And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning followed — the fourth day.

***Meditatio:*** The Bible opens with a scene of a windswept sea in total darkness. The Hebrew word for wind also means “spirit” and “breath.” The wind is the spirit or breath of God.

God is here, and he breaks the silence with four simple words: “Let there be light.” And so it is. Then God’s word becomes physical in the sun, which gives light and life, and in the moon and stars, which light the night. They are visible signs that point to the Creator. What do they say about God? Read the passage again.

***Oratio:*** The word *Oriens* comes from a Latin verb that means “rising,” “dawn,” and “East.” It gives us the English words *Oriental* and *orientation*. We find it in the Canticle of Zechariah: “In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us” (Lk 1:78, Lectionary). It can also mean “rising one,” perhaps a veiled reference to Jesus’ resurrection.

One of the rich symbols of Advent is the light overcoming the darkness. Our hearts long for more than just physical light: We long for spiritual light. Yet even if prayer feels dark, faith tells us that we are not alone. The Spirit of God is moving here.

Break the silence, and speak to your Maker. What do you want to say to God?

**Contemplatio:** Open your heart to receive whatever God might want to give you. How is God’s light shining on you?

Read the passage very slowly, a third time. Don’t sweat this step. Think of it like sensing the direction of the wind or basking for a moment in the sun’s light. Contemplation is being in relationship. Be with the God who is always with you, and receive his loving presence with you and for you.

### QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALING

1. What was my most noticeable thought, feeling, or desire during prayer time today?
2. Did I notice God’s presence in any particular way? If I did, how would I describe that? If not, how did I feel about it?
3. Can I name one area in my life where I want God’s light to shine a little more brightly this Advent?

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December 1 — Tuesday  
**Tuesday of the First  
Week of Advent**

*Preparation:* Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten the eyes of my heart.

*Lectio:* Read the passage slowly and prayerfully.

**PSALM 104:1–3, 5, 19–22, 30**

Bless the Lord, my soul!

Lord, my God, you are great indeed!

You are clothed with majesty and splendor,  
robed in light as with a cloak.

You spread out the heavens like a tent;  
setting the beams of your chambers upon the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot;  
traveling on the wings of the wind....

You fixed the earth on its foundation,  
so it can never be shaken....

You made the moon to mark the seasons,  
the sun that knows the hour of its setting.

You bring darkness and night falls,  
then all the animals of the forest wander about.

Young lions roar for prey;  
they seek their food from God.

When the sun rises, they steal away  
and settle down in their dens....

Send forth your spirit, they are created  
and you renew the face of the earth.

*Meditatio:* The heavens are always above us, yet we rarely notice them.



The times and seasons all speak to us of God's providence.

Many of us had chances to get out in nature over the summer. Recall a time when you marveled at God's handiwork, when his creation really spoke to you. What was it saying? How did you feel?

**Oratio:** Read the passage again slowly. What does it mean to be surrounded by creation? How does the vastness of the universe strike you? What about the intricacies of trees and forests, hills and valleys?

Speak to God, who is both engineer and artist of all these things. Bless the Lord, my soul!

**Contemplatio:** Very slowly read the passage again. Open your heart, and let your Creator speak to you. Receive whatever God wants to give you. You are worth more than all creation. Rest quietly for a moment or two in God's loving presence.

## QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALING

1. The ancients saw all creation as a cosmic symphony singing God's praises. What part of the symphony most speaks to me? What is it saying about God's glory?
2. I have a part in the symphony too. How am I called to sing along?
3. I left prayer wanting ...

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## December 2 — Wednesday

# Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

*Preparation:* Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten the eyes of my heart.

*Lectio:* Read the passage slowly and prayerfully.

### GENESIS 1:20–25

Then God said: Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky. God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of crawling living creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw that it was good, and God blessed them, saying: Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth. Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.

Then God said: Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: tame animals, crawling things, and every kind of wild animal. And so it happened: God made every kind of wild animal, every kind of tame animal, and every kind of thing that crawls on the ground. God saw that it was good.

*Meditatio:* Are you a dog person or a cat person? Think of the incredible variety of animals: cows and kangaroos, chickadees and elephants. All kinds of fish, from minnow to marlin. Birds that swim and mammals that fly. Lots and lots of insects.

What are some animals that you just love? What animals do you fear or find creepy? God made them all, each and every one. Every animal has a purpose. Let your thoughts and feelings rise to the surface. Read the passage again slowly.

**Oratio:** Turn to God, and speak to him about what is on your mind and in your heart. When you are done talking, read the passage one more time.

**Contemplatio:** Open your heart to conversation with God. What does God want to give you? Or what might he be communicating to you? Don't talk; just be open to receive.

## QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALING

1. When I think of the animals as created by God with purpose and intention, how do I see them differently?
2. How do I see myself differently, surrounded by God's creatures?
3. My strongest thought, feeling, or desire during prayer was ...
4. I sensed God communicating to me ...

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Close with a brief conversation giving thanks to God for your prayer experience. You may be tempted to skip this, as you’ve already talked to God. But keep in mind that the goal of prayer is not to have nice notes in a journal but to have a deeper encounter with the God who loves you. So after praying, reflecting, and journaling, have one more little chat with God. Think of it like talking to a friend as you walk them out to their car after a nice visit. Thanks, God! Then pray one Our Father.

December 3 — Thursday

# Thursday of the First Week of Advent

## SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

A native of Spain, Francis Xavier met Saint Ignatius of Loyola while studying at the University of Paris. He became one of the first seven members of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). He was sent to preach the Gospel in the Orient. His travels took him to India and Japan, and in ten years of missionary work, he brought over thirty thousand souls to the light of Christ. He died on the doorstep of China. He is a patron saint of missions.

**Preparation:** Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten the eyes of my heart.

**Lectio:** Read the passage slowly and prayerfully.

## GENESIS 1:26–28

Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.

God created mankind in his image;  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.

**Meditatio:** God pauses to think before he creates the next thing. Human beings are the crown of creation. In their intellect and free will, they are images of God. If you want to know what God looks like, look in the mirror. Sit back and think: I am an image of God.

And so is every person on this earth. Even those who know nothing of God are made in his image. Our sin can erase the likeness of God but not the image of God. Yet we are meant to be both image and likeness. Read the passage again slowly.

**Oratio:** What is this prayer time stirring up inside you? Chew on your thoughts a little bit, then talk to God. Tell him what you are thinking and feeling. Share your heart with the One who made it. When you are done talking, read the passage one more time.

**Contemplatio:** Open your heart to conversation with God. What does God want to give you or say to you? Don't try too hard to "get it." Just be open to receive.

### QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALING

1. I am surrounded by God's beautiful creatures, but I too am a beautiful creation. How does it feel to be a creation of the Creator?
2. How does it change my view of myself to think of God as the artist and myself as his handiwork, a unique and unrepeatable masterpiece?
3. I sensed God wanted me to know ...
4. I struggled with ...
5. I ended prayer wanting ...

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Close with a brief conversation giving thanks to God for your prayer experience. Then pray an Our Father.



December 4 — Friday

# Friday of the First Week of Advent

*Preparation:* Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten the eyes of my heart.

*Lectio:* God not only created the world, but he also governs it. The sun shines on all creation, sees all things, and provides warmth and light to all things. In a similar way, God looks down from the heavens and sees and hears everything. He governs all things, providing commands that guide us wisely.

Read the passage slowly and prayerfully.

## PSALM 19:2-12

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the firmament proclaims the works of his hands.

Day unto day pours forth speech;  
night unto night whispers knowledge.

There is no speech, no words;  
their voice is not heard;

A report goes forth through all the earth,  
their messages, to the ends of the world.

He has pitched in them a tent for the sun;  
it comes forth like a bridegroom from his canopy,  
and like a hero joyfully runs its course.

From one end of the heavens it comes forth;  
its course runs through to the other;  
nothing escapes its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,  
giving wisdom to the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right,

rejoicing the heart.  
The command of the Lord is clear,  
enlightening the eye.  
The fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever.  
The statutes of the Lord are true,  
all of them just;  
More desirable than gold,  
than a hoard of purest gold,  
Sweeter also than honey  
or drippings from the comb.  
By them your servant is warned;  
obeying them brings much reward.

**Meditatio:** God hears and sees all things, even a whisper. Does that realization give me comfort or make me uncomfortable? Do I see God's words as creative and life-giving? Do I meditate on God's laws and draw wisdom and sustenance from them? Or do I see the law of God as something oppressive and burdensome?

God is not only active in the world but active in our lives. When have you noticed God's presence and action guiding and governing your life? Read the passage again slowly.

**Oratio:** God hears all things. What do you want to say to him? Speak from your heart. When you are done speaking, read the passage one more time.

**Contemplatio:** Open your heart to receive what God wants to say to you. Maybe it is a thought, a word, or a sense of peace. Maybe you just feel more grateful. Spend a moment receiving.

## QUESTIONS FOR JOURNALING

1. I obeyed God and experienced much reward when ...
2. My strongest thought, feeling, or desire during prayer was ...
3. I struggle with ...



December 5 — Saturday  
**Saturday of the First  
Week of Advent**

**REVIEW**

*Preparation:* Come, Holy Spirit, enlighten the eyes of my heart.

Let's take some time to savor the Lord's presence. Flip through your past week's journal entries. Notice what emerged in the conversations. Here are some questions to help you:

1. Where did I notice the presence and action of God?
2. What was he doing, saying, or giving me?
3. How did I respond to what God was doing?
4. I really struggled with ...
5. Prayer really seemed to click when ...
6. I'm grateful for ...

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# Once a Pilgrim, Always a Pilgrim

Pilgrimages seem to end abruptly. You plan your destination, you struggle on the road, you wonder if you'll ever get there. And suddenly you have come to the end of the road. Then it is back to your old life.

But the journey has changed you.

How have you changed during this journey? How does the world look different? What have you been able to let go of? What have you picked up that you intend to keep carrying? What are you going to do differently?

I always tell pilgrims that they need to keep walking. Our journey is not done until we come to the end of our life and enter the presence of God. Here are some suggestions for continuing your journey:

\*Pray with the daily Scripture readings. You can find each day's readings at [uscgb.org/bible/readings/](http://uscgb.org/bible/readings/). Depending on the reading, you can use *lectio divina* or imaginative prayer. Pray each day.

\*Buy a journal. You can journal using the questions that I gave you, as they apply to your daily Scripture readings. Keep notes from your time in prayer. At the end of each day, write where you saw God that day. Use ARRR to pray about your daily experiences.

\*Need more help journaling? Check out the Monk Manual at [monk-manual.com](http://monk-manual.com). This resource provides reflection space and prompts for you on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. It helps you live life with more reflection and purpose.

\*Subscribe to a monthly missal. There are many good ones to choose from. I have used *Magnificat* for years, and I find it very helpful. It includes prayer for morning and evening, the daily Mass readings, reflections, and additional prayers.

\*Subscribe to my homily podcast. Learn more at [PilgrimPriest.us](http://PilgrimPriest.us).

\*Our Sunday Visitor (OSV) has a number of Bible study resources. Browse their offerings at [www.osvcatholicbookstore.com/product-category/bibles-bible-studies](http://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com/product-category/bibles-bible-studies). Consider participating in a Bible study or even leading one at your local church or in your home.

\*Lent is coming soon. Start reflecting and praying about a theme for Lent and about how to live Lent more intentionally.

\*Consider making a real, honest-to-goodness walking pilgrimage. My diocese hosts the Walk to Mary every year, a one-day walking pilgrimage. Learn more at [walktomary.com](http://walktomary.com) Check out my website for the article “A Step-by-Step Guide to Walking Pilgrimages.”



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And thank you, my fellow *Oriens* pilgrim. I wrote this book for you. I hope we meet someday, in this life or the next.

The best is yet to come!

# About the Author

Fr. Joel Sember was ordained a priest in 2007 for the diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin. He has extensive experience as a parish priest and served two years in campus ministry. He made a thirty-day Ignatian silent retreat and later completed the Spiritual Direction Training Program through the Institute for Priestly Formation in Omaha, Nebraska. He holds a B.A. in philosophy and Catholic studies from the University of St. Thomas, a bachelor's in sacred theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, and a license in sacred theology from the Pontifical University Santa Croce in Rome. He has completed a dozen walking pilgrimages. He currently serves as pastor of three parishes in rural northeastern Wisconsin.

Between ministry and parish meetings, Fr. Joel rides a motorcycle and paddles a kayak around great Wisconsin lakes. You can listen to his homily podcast every Sunday at [PilgrimPriest.us](http://PilgrimPriest.us).