



ADVENT 2016

LITURGICAL YEAR A

A top-down photograph of a diverse group of people of various ethnicities and ages, all with their hands clasped together in a large circle on a light-colored floor. The hands are of different skin tones, and some individuals are wearing watches or rings. The overall atmosphere is one of unity and community.

**ATTENTION
WELCOME
ADHESION
OPENNESS**

*Teach us to discover the value of each thing,
to contemplate with admiration,
to recognise that we are profoundly United with all creatures
in our path towards Your infinite light.*

Prayer for Our Earth, Pope Francis

*“As life and the world are dynamic realities,
so our care for the world must also be flexible and dynamic.
Merely technical solutions run the risk of addressing symptoms
and not the more serious underlying problems.
There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures,
and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes
an historical process which takes place
within a cultural context and demands
the constant and active involvement of local people from within their
proper culture. Nor can the notion of the quality of life
be imposed from without,
for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols
and customs proper to each human group.*

Laudato Si, Pope Francis

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT	6
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT	10
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	14
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT	18

INTRODUCTION

Advent has arrived, as the beginning of a new liturgical year, Year A, inspiring us to propose a new **Path on the 4 Attitudes towards Sustainable Development: Attention, Welcome, Adhesion and e Openness**. Over this year, FEC has had the chance to witness different life stories within the project Together for Change - joint action for sustainable lifestyles. These are paths of change that inspire more sustainable lifestyles from different realities, geographies, areas, which show us that ecological sustainability concerns us all. And, after all, what is a sustainable lifestyle? Each one will have a different answer, but all will have common ground: lives that are attentive to what is around us, welcoming others, adhering to and committing to a fairer world, opening the way to full participation of all. This ecological sustainability is rooted in the virtues of Care, Patience and Kindness, building a Common Home. The great change that we need, which responds to the environmental and social collapse we are witnessing, is made of concerted policies, but these can only be born from more united, conscious and active people and communities, who embrace alternative ways of a simpler and shared life. Change happens in the integration of everyone's small changes. For Christians, this change is rooted in the Great Story of Change from Before to After Christ. In fact, the Story of Jesus inspires all men and women of good will, believers and non-believers. It is a Story of Truth, Justice and Joy, accessible to all and that all can live, transforming us and making us become transformers, generators of Light and Life. The sustainable development agenda needs this Root and this Light, it needs this Advent. Light arises in the Darkness of our life, of our homes, of our communities, of our Society. A Point of Light inspiring other points of Light that spread, transmit and give strength and light to seek for and bring to the center those who remain insistently forgotten in the darkness.

Making development sustainable is not so much about extending our purchases, but rather to extend our creative capacity. Making development sustainable, therefore, implies that each person, present and future, shall have not only the goods necessary to live, but rather the possibility to participate in their production. Making development sustainable does not mean to extend the duration of the current model, but rather to invente another development model, a development thought from the place that each person is occupying, rather than from their ability to access the necessary goods. (Elena Lasida, Le Goût de l'Autre, Albin Michel, 2011)

INTRODUCTION

FAITH AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Launched in September 2009 by FEC (Faith and Cooperation Foundation, www.fecongdo.org), the Faith and Development initiatives aim to raise awareness and mobilise the Catholic Church in Portugal for global development issues. Taking advantage of all the richness and diversity of the action of local Church, with the desire to deepen the sense of communion with the universal Church, the Faith and Development initiatives aim to be a space for meeting, learning, sharing and participating, strengthening the interconnection between the Church and civil society.

FEC - FUNDAÇÃO FÉ E COOPERAÇÃO

FEC is a Non-Governmental Organisation for Development (NGDO) that was founded in 1990 by the Portuguese Bishops Conference, the Conference of Religious Institutes in Portugal (CIRP) and the National Federation of Religious Institutes (FNIS). Its MISSION is to promote an integral human development through cooperation and solidarity between people, communities and churches. In a society in constant evolution and change, FEC believes that each person can create the future, be a builder of a new polis and protagonist of a fairer society. For such, FEC is committed to work in partnership and be part of networks, and gives priority to access to Education and Health. It promotes Gender Equality, Human Rights and Environmental Sustainability, and develops Social Advocacy actions towards political, economic and religious decision-makers, national and international, in favour of Justice and Social Equity. FEC is a member of several networks, among them: the Portuguese Platform of NGDO, the Portuguese Confederation of Volunteering and CIDSE - International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies. FEC is recognised by the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by the European Union.



FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT



ATTENTION

“KEEP WATCH, SO THAT YOU ARE PREPARED”

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LITURGY

- 1st READING - Is 2,1-5
- RESPONSORIAL PSALM - Psalm 121 (122), 1-2.4-5.6-7.8-9 (R. cf. 1)
- 2nd READING - Rom 13, 11-14
- GOSPEL - Mt 24, 37-44

On this first Sunday of Advent, we are invited to wake up and be alert during the time that is starting. “You know what time it is. The hour has already come for you to wake up from your sleep”, St. Paul tells us. It is time to prepare Christmas, in the true sense of the word. Christmas means birth, it means starting our own (re)birth. Are we awake to the change that the world asks of us? Are we attentive to the small details of everyday life in which we are called to an ecological conversion, an interior conversion that is expressed in concrete changes in our daily routines? Are we aware that the change the world needs is within the heart of each one of us?

St. Matthews asks us to be aware that *the Lord is coming* (“*Know this: that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, also be ready, for in an hour that you do not expect, Son of Man will come*”). How many times in our lives have we apologised for postponing our changes because we believe that “someone else will do it”? How often do we stop worrying about the environmental issues of our planet because we believe we have no responsibility on that?

Change only happens if each of us takes ownership of, and commits to small changes in our lives. In his encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis tells us that “*happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer*”. It is urgent to be aware, it is urgent to take ownership, it is urgent to commit to concrete gestures of change.

Nowadays, with the obsession to maximise time – doing as much taking as less as possible –, we end up not having time to reflect on how we manage our time and, consequently, we do not value it properly. Are not we wasting our most precious resource? And how do we manage our knowledge? Change will only be

ATTENTION

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possible with the awareness that only happens when there is information, understanding, reflection. In turn, knowledge and a more sustainable consciousness awakens creativity and the management of personal talents to look for solutions, not only individually, but also, and above all, collectively.

QUESTIONS

- Am I aware of the importance of a good resource management (time, relationships, knowledge, talents) in my personal and community life?
- Am I aware of the need to establish consistent local networks that promote an effective sustainable development?

CHALLENGES

- On this Sunday, I stop and think: is there anything I would like to do but for which I never have time? I go to the website <http://www.rescuetime.com>, download and install the app “rescuetime” to monitor the time of everything I do on my computer. From reading emails, working on Word, watching videos on YouTube and spending time with social networks, I will be able to get a clear view of how much time I invest in each activity, allowing me to analyse all this information, week by week. This way, I can plan my day taking into account the time that is slipping through my fingers on the computer, wasting my energies.
- Just like in the app, I also record everything I do during a day and the time spent with each activity. I make an analysis of my time: is there any activity that is taking up too much time? Can I spare time from any activity or devote it to the other, for instance?



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT



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**WELCOME
“CHRIST SAVES ALL MEN”**

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

WELCOME "CHRIST SAVES ALL MEN"



LITURGY

- 1st READING - Is 11, 1-10
- RESPONSORIAL PSALM - Psalm 71 (72), 2.7-8.12-13.17 (R. cf. 7)
- 2nd READING - Rom 15, 4-9
- GOSPEL - Mt 3, 1-12

The Christ whom we prepare to welcome, comes to save all men. Why would we count on only a few? On this second Sunday of Advent, we are invited to welcome the Spirit of Wisdom and Intelligence, Council and Strength, which encourages us to make our lives a place for everyone, and to make our world a place of Peace and of relationship between apparent opposites (*the wolf will live with the lamb, the nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra*), ensuring the participation of all in the development of each one and of the Community. Is not this the secret of Sustainability? This is what Pope Francis points out in the Encyclical *Laudato Sí: A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalised economy, has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity. Attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical interventions can lead to overlooking the complexities of the community, which demand the active participation of all member of the community. New processes taking shape cannot always fit into frameworks imported from outside; they need to be based in the local culture itself.* (LS 144).

The differences often divide us and push us towards barricades, which increasingly push us away. We look for those who think like us, who follow our lifestyle... we go on ignoring, avoiding, fearing and even despising all those who seem to be different. Isaiah presents us with a different proposal, a very concrete lifestyle: Righteousness will be his belt and Faithfulness will sash his waist. They will no more practice evil or destruction... and *the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters fill the sea*. John Baptist translates this lifestyle in the simplicity of his clothing and food. Only one thing worries him, to announce the coming of Jesus, Meaning and Light to all men and women. People came to Him from everywhere. His simplicity and truth appealed to everyone and paved the way for awareness and for change. May the intercession of St. Paul encourage us to discover our sustainable lifestyle: may the *God of Patience and Consolation lead us to welcome one another*, as Christ has welcomed us.

WELCOME

“CHRIST SAVES ALL MEN”



QUESTIONS

- How can I make my life more sustainable? In what “dresses” (justice, patience, loyalty, simplicity) do I feel that I must invest? What Spirit do I need to welcome at this stage of my life - Wisdom, Council, Strength? Who do I need to learn to welcome? Do I need to let myself be welcomed?

CHALLENGES

- This Sunday, I organise a shared lunch that is fair, inclusive and responsible. The challenge is to jointly prepare a meal that only consists of local and seasonal products, giving each family member or group of friends a specific task in its preparation. With patience and curiosity, we look for the ingredients produced by fruit and vegetable producers in my area, and we learn the history of what we are going to eat, which we can share and discuss at lunch. I invite unlikely friends for this lunch: a neighbor, the producer...
- During the course of this week, I collect several testimonies (recorded in vídeo format) representing different perspectives on what a sustainable lifestyle is (see example at <https://www.facebook.com/fundacaofecooperacao/videos/1488379881177800/>). I gather the testimonies in a small film and, from it, I organise an evening debate on sustainable development.



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT



ADHESION
“STRENGTHEN YOUR HEARTS”

ADHESION

“STRENGTHEN YOUR HEARTS”



LITURGY

- 1st READING - Is 35, 1-6a.10
- RESPONSORIAL PSALM - Psalm 145 (146), 7.8-9a.9bc-10 (R. cf. Is 35, 4)
- 2nd READING - Tg 5, 7-10
- GOSPEL - Lc 3, 10-18

On this third Sunday of Advent, we are now fast approaching the day when He is born in us. We are approaching the day when He comes to transform the world and dwell in our lives. We are invited to adhere to His message and to His call, as Our Lady did without hesitation.

Humanity already consumes more natural resources than the Earth his capable of replenishing. We currently live a culture of discarding and consumerism, generating a structural injustice that we shall revert, for the sake of the Common Good. Do you buy everything you want? Or do you only buy what you need? Do you need everything you buy? A conscious consumption is a way of co-responsibility for the care of our Common Home, the only one we have. Dialogue among all should impel push and mobilise, not only for the debate on the environment, but for an ecological conversion that is deep and integral, centered on solidarity and on respect for everything that is part of Creation. Within such ecological conversion, there should be a conversion to an **increasingly conscious consumption**, so that we consume in a critical and responsible way, thinking about the consequences of our buying acts on the quality of life on our planet and on the lives of future generations.

The prophet Isaiah tells us to “strengthen our weary hands and stop the trembling of our knees”, inviting us to walk without fear, to advance in spite of all the contradictions that we face on our way. St. James warns us of the patience that is needed for this journey: “Wait patiently for the coming of the Lord”. No change happens out of a sudden. No change shows its fruits immediately, patience and perseverance in waiting are needed. And St. Matthew invites us to tell others the wonders that happen when one of us changes: “Go tell John what you have seen and heard”.

ADHESION
“STRENGTHEN YOUR HEARTS”



Sustainable changes only make sense if we mobilise more and more people. It is a mobilizing and transforming process that should involve everyone. We are all connected in a network, often invisible, and we all have in our hands the power of change.

QUESTIONS

- Am I aware of the importance of conscious consumption, both personally and at the community level, for an effective sustainable development?
- - Am I aware of the impact my actions have on the lives of those around me? Am I willing to change in order to be more and more with the other and for the other?

CHALLENGES

- This Sunday I will organise a “Sustainable Day” at home with my family: today the showers will be fast (avoiding an excessive use of water), meals will be composed only of what each one can effectively eat (thus avoiding food waste), I will reduce the volume of rubbish that is produced daily at my home, etc.;
- This Sunday I will record everything I use daily and that I really need, and I will organise everything that I have in excess to be able to give to someone who actually needs it.



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT



OPENNESS

**“JESUS WILL BE BORN OF MARY,
THE BRIDE OF JOSEPH, THE SON OF DAVID ”**

OPENNESS

**“JESUS WILL BE BORN OF MARY,
THE BRIDE OF JOSEPH, THE SON OF DAVID”**



LITURGY

- 1st READING - Is 7, 10-14
- RESPONSORIAL PSALM - Psalm 23 (24), 1-2.3-4ab.5-6 (R. 7c e 10b)
- 2nd READING - Rom 1, 1-7
- GOSPEL - Mt 1, 23

We get to the fourth Sunday of Advent, and we can already see the Light of the Nativity in today's readings. A Light passing through the Openness with which Mary and Joseph lived their life. Trusting and guided by God, their concern was to live righteously. When living moments of doubt and difficulty, they kept respecting the Mystery and practising the good, as Joseph teaches us. In the midst of the confusion of an expected wedding, but with so much that was unexpected, their focus was on doing Good, trusting in the Lord. And this was the door for the Light to enter, not only in the house of this small Family of Nazareth, but forever in all the Earth. Was it easy? Certainly not. When plans change, we often stubbornly resist, block and do not want to move on. But if we practise the Good and the Justice, and if we ask for His Light to guide us, then surely, as we pray in the Psalm, the *Lord will come* and bless us. This is the precious engine for the changes, small and big, to which we are constantly called in life. And the Lord does not leave us in silence. He wants to show us His presence at every step of the Way, He wants to be in relationship with us: *ask for a sign*, He said to Ahaz; *do not fear*, He said to Joseph. This relationship with God and with Life is what allows us to wake up from our dreams and open to the development of our dreams, known and unknown, being sure that, if we practise the Justice and do Good, all should fit in this Dream.

OPENNESS

**“JESUS WILL BE BORN OF MARY,
THE BRIDE OF JOSEPH, THE SON OF DAVID”**



QUESTIONS

- How have I been feeling lately? Asleep? Dreaming? Dreaming with my feet on the ground or trying to escape from reality? Do I feel open to life, to others, or on the contrary closed or blocked? Thinking of Joseph, do I seek the Lord and concentrate on doing the daily good that is within my reach and practicing justice in my daily life? Sooner or later, the Light will come. This Christmas it will be good to be able to live like this.

CHALLENGES

- This Sunday, I devote time to order and open “my home”, inside and out. Maybe I have postponed changes/arrangements/conversations, or simply decisions to take, something that I carry in the subconscious and that I simply need to put into practice. I devote part of my time to letting the Light into what is messy/stagnant/dark/confused. I will see how to reuse or recycle the result of my cleanings and conversations, and will then evaluate the next steps to take.



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