

To Be Human Is to Be Aware

Awareness should characterize of human life; not just awareness of what we can see and hear around us, but also awareness of what we know through thinking.

We know, for example, with absolute certainty that we were born and we are going to die. This makes us aware that *life* for us means the same thing as *time*. What we do with our time is what we do with our lives. Whatever we give our time to, we are giving our lives to. And whatever we were given life for, that is what we have time for. It is all we have time for! To live in a fully human way, we need to be aware of this. To be caught up simply in “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,” working and surviving, is to lose sight of the limits of life; it is to lose the picture.

The Gospel tells us something we could not know except by faith, unless God told us: The real focus of time is on Jesus Christ’s coming in glory. The purpose of human life is to prepare and to be prepared for the coming of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we have been given to know with more than human knowledge that our goal is something more than human existence. The goal of human life is to grow into the fullness of Christ as members of his Body (see Ephesians 1:23; 4:13; Colossians 1:15, 19, 24). We need to remain aware, then, that we are here to spend our time on something more than human life.

Isaiah describes how God helps us do this: “In days to come / the mountain of the LORD’s house / shall be established as the highest of the mountains...all the nations shall stream to it. / Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD // to the house of the God of Jacob / that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14;
Matthew 24:37-44

The Church was established to be “the light of the world, a city built on a hill,” to give light to everyone who comes to be instructed in God’s ways and to walk in the divine path (see Matthew 5:14-16). For from the Church “shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD.” The Church—and that means us, all of us as a community and each one of us as a member of that community—is commissioned by Jesus to be the light of Christ, to preserve the light of Christ, and to provide the light of Christ to the world. If we lose our awareness of this and get caught up in “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”—that is, with the

immediate preoccupations of work and study, family and social life, professional and civic involvement—without relating these to the coming of Jesus Christ and the real goal of human existence, then we lose the light. Like the bridesmaids who fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom, we let our

lamps go out. We fail in faith and in awareness (see Matthew 25:1-13).

Saint Paul writes to the Romans and to us, “You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep...Night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and

*Christ continues to
prepare the world
for his coming.*

put on the armor of light.” We know what human life is all about. We know its purpose and where it is heading. We know we were created to find our fulfillment in Christ and to let Christ come to fulfillment in us. We fulfill our destiny and let Christ fulfill his destiny of uniting and reconstituting all things in himself, under his headship, through our surrender to his instruction, by keeping awake and aware so that we can “walk in the light of the Lord.”

In Christ, God has broken into history, intervened in human events and given a new direction and goal to human life. In us—through what we say and do, through the choices which shape us as persons, through the enlightened awareness which guides them and through the instruction he gives us through his Church—Christ continues to prepare the world for his coming. A fully human life includes awareness of this.

REFLECTING ON THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

First Week of Advent

Pray daily: O God, my heart desires the warmth of your love, and my mind is searching for the light of your Word. Increase my longing for Jesus. Amen.

Monday: Matthew 8:5-11. Jesus was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.” Who is Jesus for you? How do you relate to him?

Tuesday: Luke 10:21-24. Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” What is the difference between *knowing about* Jesus and *knowing* Jesus? What has been your experience of God’s action in your life?

Wednesday: Matthew 15:29-37. Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “I have compassion for the crowd... I do not want to send them away hungry.” What hunger in you does Jesus want to satisfy? How has he done

it in the past? How do you suspect that he wants to do it now?

Thursday: Matthew 7:21, 24-27. “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.” Can you say that your life is built on the words of Jesus? How do you use Scripture in your life?

Friday: Matthew 9:27-31. When he entered the house the blind men came to him. “And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this [heal you]?’” Do you really believe that Jesus can heal whatever is wrong in your life? What do you really trust to save you from your fears?

Saturday: Matthew 9:35-10:1, 6-8. “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.” Have you experienced parts of Jesus’ ministry (teaching, proclaiming and curing) in the Church? Have you experienced them as the action of Jesus in your life?

LIVING THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

As Christian: This week put your watch on a different hand or change the position of your clock to remind you that time has a new meaning.

As Disciple: Read the opening lines of each of the four Gospels, asking why the author chose to begin that way.

As Prophet: Reflect on your use of time. How does your daily schedule bear witness to the value Jesus Christ has given to time?

As Priest: Spend some time each day, even a few moments, ministering to other people.

As King: This week change one thing, no matter how small, at home or at work to make the world different because you were there.

Human Acts Reveal Grace

Isaiah presents a promise of divine goodness expressed in human acts, a vision of joy that gives hope. A human Messiah will come, “a shoot...from the stump of Jesse.” The “spirit of the LORD” will be visible in him through behavior which reveals what today we call the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, piety, fortitude and fear of the Lord. Divine power will be evident in the fruit of the Messiah’s mission: The wolf shall live with the lamb; “they will not hurt or destroy...for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” Grace will be visible.

John the Baptizer holds out the same hope and gives the same message, but his emphasis is different. He focuses on what we should do to let the grace and power of God appear in our lives: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.... Bear fruit worthy of repentance.... Every tree...that does not bear good fruit is cut down.” John calls people to express their response in human actions by being baptized and confessing their sins. He expresses his own faith by dressing in camel skins and living on locusts and wild honey.

What John shows us is Jesus impacting our lives like a meteor smacking into a planet. “The Messiah is here! The Reign of God is at hand! Wake up! Change! Get moving! Do something about it!” John believes in our ability to choose and respond, in the importance of our making human choices and acting on them. John presents Jesus Christ as the one who comes to bring us to life, to spark us into action. Jesus’ coming stimulates and activates our human powers.

But all is not human action here. John boldly an-

DECEMBER 7, 2025

2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9;
Matthew 3:1-12

nounces the action of God: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The “fruitful tree” is not the person who performs good acts, but the one who performs divine acts. Like the fruit of Mary’s womb, the fruit of our lives must be divine—the fruit of the Holy Spirit acting within us, acting through our human actions.

Jesus is God made man: fully human and fully divine. We who are the Body of Christ on earth are called to be fully human and fully divine in every-

thing we do—by letting God, who dwells within us and anoints us with divine grace, be reflected in everything we do. We live the life of grace; we grow in grace by letting it express itself in and through our human actions. We grow in faith by letting our faith in Christ’s teachings reveal itself in our lifestyle. We grow in hope by letting hope in Christ’s promises

guide our choices. We grow in love by letting our love for God take flesh in all our words and actions.

Saint Paul teaches that the source of our unity as a community is our common effort and encouragement

*We grow in love by
letting our love for
God take flesh in all
our words and actions*

of each other to live out what we believe. We will neither always agree on what we should do nor succeed in doing it; but if we have patience and encourage one another, we will be able to live in harmony “in accordance with Christ Jesus.”

To accept our humanness means accepting ourselves as imperfect and incomplete yet intended to grow toward perfection. Jesus, the shoot growing up from the “stump of Jesse,” represents God’s power acting in human events; this gives us hope (see Romans 14:1-15:13).

Paul’s practical advice is to read Scripture. “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” In Scripture God expresses to us divine truth in human words. By making human efforts to understand God’s human words, we grow in union with God. Then God’s grace will be visible in us.

REFLECTING ON THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

Second Week of Advent

Pray daily: *Lord, you came to share completely in our human condition except for sin. Give me a desire to share completely in your divine life. Draw me to study your mind and heart. Amen.*

Monday: Luke 1:26-38 (Immaculate Conception). “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” The Immaculate Conception requires us to believe that human beings have a part to play in redeeming the world. Is there anything new God is calling you to that you’ve been afraid to say ‘yes’ to?

Tuesday: Matthew 18:12-14. “If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?” Do you know any Christian who feels alienated from the Christian com-

munity? What can you do to show that person God’s love, concern and invitation?

Wednesday: Matthew 11:28-30. “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Is it a crushing burden to try to live on God’s level in all we do? What makes it light?

Thursday: Matthew 11:11-15. “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” What have we received from God that is greater than anything we could receive from our greatest efforts at prayer and fasting?

Friday: Luke 1:38-47 (Our Lady of Guadalupe). Elizabeth cried out, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” How are you blessed? How does your life bear divine fruit?

Saturday: Matthew 17:10-13. “I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him.” What things are happening in the Church that you might not recognize as God’s divine action?

LIVING THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

As Christian: When the water is added to the wine at Mass, ask God to join your humanity to Jesus’ divinity, totally and intimately.

As Disciple: Put a copy of the Bible in some visible place at home or at work to remind you to live out in daily life what you believe.

As Prophet: Each day this week make one choice that is a conscious, deliberate response to something Jesus said or did.

As Priest: Make a list of principles drawn from Jesus’ teaching that really are a unifying rule of life in your family or circle of friends.

As King: Ask what fruit you have borne for the Kingdom of God in your professional, social and family life.

Seeing What Is There

John the Baptist was in Herod's dungeon, expecting the Messiah to deliver him. Since John could not understand why Jesus did not do so, he finally sent a poignant message through his disciples, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus tells John not to let his preconceived ideas of what the Messiah should do block John from understanding what Jesus is doing: He is ministering to the poor and afflicted. If it isn't exactly what John expected, he must not let that be an obstacle to accepting Jesus as he is.

Jesus is calling on John—and through him on us all—to believe in Jesus by a free choice. He wants us to believe because we freely choose to recognize him as Savior and as God. Every rational conclusion, as a matter of fact, is a free choice, a judgment for which we take responsibility. Faith is no exception to this. But because faith is an acceptance of the person of Jesus Christ, the choice to believe in him is also an act of love. In the last analysis, to believe in and hope in Christ unconditionally, we need to love him unconditionally. It is a theme of the Gospel According to John that our recognition of truth depends on our love for goodness (see John 8:42-47).

Isaiah invites us to keep our love alive by dreaming of what God's messenger comes to do: The desert shall rejoice and blossom; we will see the glory and majesty of our God; the blind will see, the deaf hear, the speechless will sing, the lame shall leap like deer. Those whom the Lord has ransomed shall return and come to Zion with singing. Sorrow and sighing shall flee. Our God is coming. We need to recall this in order to strengthen weak hands and feeble knees and to reassure ourselves when we are fright-

DECEMBER 14, 2025
3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10; James 5:7-10;
Matthew 11:2-11

ened.

James writes similarly in his letter, "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." James offers three practical suggestions: 1) Be patient like farmers who wait for the earth to produce its crop. 2) Don't criticize one another. Focusing on faults and failings in the Church often fosters only discouragement. 3) Look to the prophets for encouragement, to those who have borne witness to Christ regardless of the cost to themselves.

In effect, James simply reworks what Jesus said to John, "Persevere in faith and hope out of love. Do not

judge God or the Church by what is not happening or get fixated on what you think God should be accomplishing through the Church. Look at what *is* happening. Those blind to faith are beginning to see; those deaf to God's word are beginning to listen; the poor are having the gospel preached to them. Ministry

is taking place and God's power is working through all of it. Grace is visible in human beings, in human actions in the Church, right now for those who have eyes to see."

When we see God embodied in the human—as in

*Ministry is taking place
and God's power is
working through all of it.*

Jesus, the “shoot from the stump of Jesse”—or when we see in the Church grace made visible in human actions grounded in faith, hope or love, this encourages us. It confirms our faith, strengthens our hope, excites our love. When God’s presence and action through grace are made visible in human actions, we find it easier to believe the divine promises, the vision of joy and peace which Isaiah holds out to us.

That is why we need saints and modern-day prophets. Such prophets point out to us how the general, abstract teachings of Jesus apply to the concrete circumstances of our time and place. We are consecrated by Baptism to do this for each other by enfleshing in our lives the attitudes and values of the gospel.

REFLECTING ON THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

Third Week of Advent

Pray daily: Lord, give me the grace never to turn away from you or from your Church because my own expectations are not being met. Teach me to look always at what is most authentic and most inspiring; help me to embrace these for myself. Amen.

Monday: Matthew 21:23-27. Jesus said to them in reply, “I will also ask you one question. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” Can you say without hesitation that the Church is of divine origin? How does that help?

Tuesday: Matthew 21:28-32. Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.” Do you take the benefits of your religion for granted? Who are some modern-day prophets?

Wednesday: Luke 7:18-23. “John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’” What disappoints you in the Church? Does it come more from human weakness or from malice? Would focusing more on the blessings of God’s word, the sacraments, the example of the saints help you deal with this disappointment? Does it require other action?

Thursday: Luke 7:24-30. “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? Someone dressed in soft robes? A prophet?” What are you really seeking from the Church’s ministers? Are you willing to be shaken up? Challenged? How have you responded to modern-day prophets?

Friday: John 5:33-36. “He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.” Has anyone in the Church inspired you? How? Have you ever changed something in your own life because of someone else’s example?

Saturday: Matthew 1:1-17. Matthew’s Gospel begins: “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” If God despised the human race, would God have become in Jesus a member of the human family? Do you recognize Jesus as a fellow member of the human race?

LIVING THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

As Christian: Make a fully conscious, deliberate, personal, adult act of faith in Jesus as the world’s Savior and your Savior.

As Disciple: Read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), looking for what Jesus taught. Has any of this been so watered-down by the actions of Christians that we now take a lower ideal for granted? Which parts?

As Prophet: Choose from Scripture one principle which Jesus taught; you could start with Matthew 5:38-42. Focus on living it out this week. Find a new and creative application of this principle to your own circumstances.

As Priest: Select one thing that bothers you in the Church or in other people. Then follow the advice in James 5:7-10.

As King: Look around you at work, at home, in your social life. Ask what is not yet the way it should be when Christ returns. Make the appropriate changes.