

1st Sunday of Advent

**"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love
for one another and for all." (1 Thess. 3:12)**

*"It's not the grandeur of the things that we do;
it's the minute things, like if we answer a call for help."*

Advent: answering the call for help

Today marks the beginning of the season of Advent. We no doubt have many memories of how we have observed Advent - from prayer and fasting to anticipating the arrival of Jesus, and for the young - gifts. And in some ways, these all rhyme with each other.

Advent comes from the Latin word meaning "*coming to*." It traditionally meant preparing for the coming of Jesus in Bethlehem. Since the time of [Bernard of Clairvaux](#) (d.1153), Christians have spoken of three comings of Christ: in the flesh in Bethlehem, in our hearts daily, and in glory at the end of time.

This is a story which exemplifies how Christ comes into our hearts daily. It is in the current issue of NCR titled: "*Friars and nuns from Brazil bring food, prayer to LA's Skid Row*."

"Friar Benjamin of the Most Holy Trinity walked down Towne Avenue in [Skid Row](#), one hand wheeling an ice chest filled with oranges and bottled water, the other clutching plastic bags of peanut butter and ham and cheese sandwiches, chips and fruit snacks.

"Dressed in a full habit, a straw hat and brown flip-flops, Friar Benjamin, 42, along with three other friars, one religious sister and three volunteers, shouted, '*Cold water! Free food!*' as they made their way along the tent-lined streets in 90-degree heat.

"They moved slowly, taking time to talk with people about their lives and to ask if they need a prayer. Tyrone Tankins, who has lived on Skid Row for eight months, asked them to pray for his sick grandmother. Even though he survived cancer and a gunshot wound, he said it's his grandmother who needs help. '*I'm worried about her,*' he said. The group gathered in a circle, joined hands with Tankins and prayed with him. A woman requested a prayer for her car to be fixed, a man asked to sing for them.

"By the time they finished circling the block, they had given away all their food and water, even the ice from the cooler. Together with another team of friars, nuns and volunteers, who walked a different block, they distributed 400 sandwiches to 200 homeless people in a single Saturday afternoon.

"Friar Benjamin is a member of the *"Friars and Sisters of the Poor Jesus,"* a religious order founded in Brazil with the mission to minister to the neediest and most marginalized members of society.

"Los Angeles Archbishop Gomez invited the order to the city earlier this year. A band of four friars and four sisters set out for Skid Row every weekend in hopes that free sandwiches and bottled water will be the first step in lifting the city's growing homeless population out of poverty and despair.

"We're trying to address not only the homeless situation, but also the problems we have as a society when we neglect the spiritual side," said Friar Benjamin. The religious order was founded in 2001 by Brazilian Fr. Gilson Sobreiro. Troubled by the violence, gang activity, drug addiction and poverty that he saw in Sao Paulo, Sobreiro rented a house where addicted youths could live and recover. From this, the order spread to 12 countries, including Paraguay, Argentina, Nicaragua, El Salvador, France and Canada. In 2012, the first members arrived in Kansas City, Missouri. *'We live for the poor,'* Friar Benjamin said. *'We always go to the worst areas of the cities, places where you find more violence, drugs, gangs, prostitution, you name it.'*

"In LA's Skid Row, more than 4,000 of LA County's 53,000 homeless people" Friar Benjamin agreed that spirituality is at the core of their mission. *'We give out simple food, but we develop friendships. Once they realize that you care about them, and that what we do goes beyond food, then they understand, and something internal happens, and it's like a strength comes and they start fighting for their lives again.'*

"To better serve poor people, the friars and sisters strive to live in poverty themselves. It means having minimal personal possessions — a few changes of clothes and no cellphones — sleeping on the floor and eating only what has been donated. To raise money, they make rosaries and other crafts that they sell in local parishes.

"Such a life of simplicity rooted in poverty drew Sister Maria to the order. She first encountered the order during a retreat as a teenager in Brazil. She was struck by how young its members were and the joy they radiated, making her want to learn more. They didn't have any of the material possessions she had considered the key to happiness, yet they were joyful.

"So at age 15, Sister Maria, now 25, joined the order. She ministered in Brazil, Paraguay and Kansas City before coming to Los Angeles. She says, *'The Gospel of the Lord says that when one person converts, the heavens rejoice. If one person can change, or if we can help one of them, or if after going there many, many times and if one of them says, 'Oh, maybe I have a way to change,' and it's only one — then it's worth it to be there.'*"

One of the three comings of Christ is said to be into our hearts daily. I just experienced an example of this this morning (yesterday morning) when some members of our parish community came together to share in our "*Come and See*" series that we have each first Saturday - people coming together to share with each other something important "about" themselves, and in the process of doing so discover something new "in" themselves - a new intimacy with God in themselves with each other. We're going to do this more each month. We'll let you know.

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This is the season of Advent. Let us make it a story of our own.

Happy Advent Everyone!