SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2015   SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Clear the way
Remember your post-Christmas resolutions last year? That determination to simplify and hold on to the spiritual essence? Well, as Saint Paul might say, "Now is the acceptable time" to resist the eternal commercial that Christmas has become. Make the hard decisions about gifts, away from the latest fad or toy, toward the smiles that light the faces of a poor mother who finds she and her children are not forgotten. A scriptural metaphor for Advent is the Lord making rough ways smooth and winding roads straight. For whom might you make life smoother today?

> TODAY'S READINGS: *Baruch 5:1-9; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6 (6). "John went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."*

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7
FEAST OF AMBROSE, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
Backed by popular acclaim
Church history is full of surprises that teach us that things haven't "always been this way," as some like to argue. Today we celebrate Ambrose, one of the giants of our tradition who holds the lofty titles of "church father" and "Doctor of the church." Yet he wasn't even a baptized Catholic, much less ordained, when he was chosen bishop of Milan by popular acclaim! His reputation for holiness and charity preceded his title and office. Don't confuse outer symbols of holiness such as honorific titles or flowing robes for inner sanctity. Focus on the well-being of your soul and all the rest will take care of itself.

> TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 35:1-10; Luke 5:17-26 (181). "We have seen incredible things today."*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8
SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
Enter the Year of Mercy
"How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God," said Pope Francis in proclaiming the Holy Year of Mercy, which begins today. "May the balm of mercy reach everyone." Not sure just what Christian mercy entails? Review the church's teaching on the corporal (physical) and spiritual works of mercy and then prepare your action plan for steeping the world in mercy.

> TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38 (689). "In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ."*

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9
FEAST OF JUAN DIEGO CUAUHTLATOATZIN
The power of a great story
There are many accounts of the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe in 1531 to Saint Juan Diego, an indigenous Mexican who had converted to Catholicism after the Spanish conquest. There are also many questions about the historical accuracy of those accounts. But great stories also serve a purpose beyond historical literalism—they speak to our hearts of greater truths that are sometimes best captured in epics. A great mythic story is not necessarily false—it is true at a different, deeper, more symbolic and powerful level than facts approach. Dip into some deeper truth by searching online for good accounts of the Guadalupe story.

> TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 40:25-31; Matthew 11:28-30 (183). "I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10   ADVENT WEEKDAY
Work for liberty for all
Remember in your prayers today—International Human Rights Day—prisoners of conscience. Among them is Catholic priest Father Nguyen Van Ly, who has been imprisoned in Vietnam for more than 15 years for advocating religious freedom, democracy, and human rights. What can you do to ensure liberty for all? Start by knowing what rights the United Nations named as inalienable in the <u>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</u>, which Pope John Paul II called, "one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time."

> TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 41:13-20; Matthew 11:11-15 (184). "I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them."*

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11   FEAST OF DAMASUS I, POPE
A pope for the harried mother
One might think that being pope when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire would be a triumph. However, church politics, heresies, exile, difficult relations with other bishops and with the Eastern church made it anything but a glorious time for Damasus. His era was so fraught with controversy and contention, both personal and political, that he might be an intercessor for the harried single mother, the worker juggling three part-time jobs, anyone feeling life's burdens, especially at Christmastime. Where can you help someone else carry their burden?

> TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 11:16-19 (185). "Wisdom is vindicated by her works."*

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12   FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
Embrace the day!
One bright December morning in 1531 in what is now Mexico City, Juan Diego was on his way to daily Mass in honor of Our Lady when he encountered a vision of a woman dressed in regal robes who spoke his indigenous language, Nahuatl. Our Lady of Guadalupe, as this vision of Mary is known, pledged to protect Diego, bringing forth roses in December as a sign of her love and fidelity. A healing presence, Guadalupe has become a symbol of the way Mary embraces all peoples, whomever and wherever they may be. May we always be so faithful and welcoming: Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, pray for us!

> TODAY'S READINGS: *Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab; Luke 1:26- 38 or Luke 1:39-47 (690A). "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you."*

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CAIAPHAS	GALILEE	HEROD
ISAIAH	JOHN	JORDAN
JUDEA	PATHS	PILATE
PONTIUS	PREPARE	PROPHET
ROADS	SINS	STRAIGHT
TIBERIUS	VOICE	WINDING