

December 3 | Sunday

ISAIAH 63:16B–17, 19B; 64:2–7; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3–9; MARK 13:33–37

Putty in His Hands

Yet, LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you our potter: we are all the work of your hand. **ISAIAH 64:7**



Wait, we're the clay? We're not buying or making the clay, or donating it to a classroom? This might be tough for parents. Our wheelhouse is directing clay activities or showing our kids how to clean up clay messes. But *being* the clay? Us? On this first day of Advent, reflect on Isaiah's image of you enfolded in God's loving hands. Take a moment and think about how God continues to mold you—through your experiences, the people in your life, and how you respond. You might make this a mini Advent project: Take a minute each day to stop, notice, and—deep breath—accept God's work on you.

FAMILY PRAYER *Gather around an Advent wreath. Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line: **We are the work of your hands.***

Lord God, our Advent wreath reminds us that
without you, we are candles in the darkness.
We light one candle to show that you are the One
who lights our way. (*Light a candle.*)
Amen.

ADVENT ACTION If you don't have an Advent wreath, make a simple one using any four candles you have. Or cut a wreath and four candle shapes out of paper and have your kids color it in. No need to be fancy.

December 4 | Monday

ISAIAH 2:1-5; MATTHEW 8:5-11

Approach Without Caution

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him. MATTHEW 8:5



To the Jewish people of Jesus' time, the centurion represents what's despised and feared: occupying Roman rule. Military might. Injustice. Brutality. So, a centurion approaching Jesus might provoke suspicious stares or sharp intakes of breath all around. But instead of ordering Jesus, the centurion appeals to him. He sheds pretense and shares his concern and worry. And Jesus responds. We might consider how we approach Jesus in prayer. Do we watch how the rest of the world perceives us and assume Jesus sees us this way too? Do we avoid his presence, maybe because of something we've done or haven't done? As you approach Jesus in prayer today, be yourself, and be free. Ask for what you need. How does Jesus respond?

FAMILY PRAYER *Lead the prayer. Invite family members to share after each line.*

Father, we come to you with our worries and concerns...

We come to you with our joys...

We ask your help and blessings in the name

of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION The *ad* in "advent" is from the Latin word meaning "to" or "toward." Kids often worry about what's going to happen, so try framing conversations around this. You could start by asking: What is something you are looking forward to tomorrow? What is something you're not looking forward to? No need to provide "solutions" here. Sometimes a listening ear is all that's needed.

December 5 | Tuesday

ISAIAH 11:1-10; LUKE 10:21-24

How Are You?

*For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea. ISAIAH 11:9*



We've talked about approaching Jesus with our needs, but we can seek him in other ways too. Pope Francis reminds us that Jesus was often surrounded by people seeking healing or other assistance, but not wanting to simply *be* with Jesus. The Holy Father encourages us to sometimes say, "How are you?" to Jesus to "enter into a true, sincere relationship ... with the Lord, who wanted to share his life with us to the full." He continues, "It does us a great deal of good ... to learn to be with the Lord ... exactly as it happens with people we care for: we wish to know them more and more, because it is good to be with them." Try it today: "How are you, Jesus?" Then, as you would with a family member, simply experience how good it is to be with Jesus.

FAMILY PRAYER *Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line: **How are you, Lord?***

Lord Jesus, thank you for gathering us together.
Help us find time every day to seek your presence
and share your love.
Amen.

ADVENT ACTION Invite your kids to draw a picture of themselves with Jesus. Maybe Jesus is with them as they play their favorite sport or do an activity. Or perhaps they are just sitting with Jesus, enjoying his presence.

December 6 | Wednesday

ISAIAH 25:6-10A; MATTHEW 15:29-37

The Grace of Grace

Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples... **MATTHEW 15:36**



The blessing prayer Catholics say before meals is a great but underappreciated little prayer. We start by asking God to bless us. Imagine saying this at every meal—that’s a lot of blessings! When we ask God to bless “these thy gifts,” we’re helping our kids (and us) reframe food as a gift from God. (If young kids have trouble with the word “bounty,” you can substitute “goodness” or “generosity.”) Finally, we invoke Jesus’ name, remembering all he has done for us. If you haven’t already, teach your kids this prayer. If you have, try making a habit of saying it yourself at other times of the day—before your morning coffee, as you plan or prepare meals, or even as you fill your water bottle. What blessings, insights, and graces will you discover?

FAMILY PRAYER *Say the prayer together at mealtime today.*

Bless us, O Lord... *(Have everyone say their name.)*
And these thy gifts... *(Have everyone say something they like about the meal.)*

Which we are about to receive
from thy bounty (goodness), through Christ,
our Lord. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION Help build your family’s awareness of where your food comes from. Together, read labels and find sources, if possible. Talk about what went into preparing tonight’s dinner, even if it’s fast food.

December 7 | Thursday | Saint Ambrose

ISAIAH 26:1-6; MATTHEW 7:21, 24-27

Building Plans

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”

MATTHEW 7:24



We've been praying and pondering, but now, Jesus is calling us to act. Take time today to look up some of Jesus' words in the gospels. You might choose a teaching like the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12); or a parable like the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46), or the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). Or something else. Let one word or phrase from Jesus settle within you. Perhaps Jesus calls you to work on forgiveness, feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, or comforting the lonely or sick. Perhaps it's more general—simply following more closely Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself. Make Jesus' words your guide for building your family's Advent season.

FAMILY PRAYER *Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line: **Your words guide us, Jesus.***

Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you.

Help us listen to your words with our whole hearts.

Give us strength and courage to act on your words
today and always.

Amen.

ADVENT ACTION Read the gospel passage you've selected to your family. Share your thoughts and invite your family to do the same. Together, begin forming a plan for how your family can act together on Jesus' words this Advent.

December 8 | Friday | Feast of the Immaculate Conception

GENESIS 3:9-15, 20; EPHESIANS 1:3-6, 11-12; LUKE 1:26-38

We Have Questions

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be...?"

LUKE 1:34



Today's feast celebrates Mary's conception without sin, not the announcement of Jesus' birth. But today's gospel is about... well, the announcement of Jesus' birth, which means a lot of us get confused about today's feast. Catholics have so many glorious feasts, saints, prayers, practices, and devotions that it's nearly impossible to know them all. And that's a little bit OK, because I don't know about you, but whenever I start thinking of myself as an "expert" about anything, I close myself off to learning something new. Worse, I run into trouble with pride. If that's you, too, let's celebrate and imitate Mary's beautiful humility today by accepting that we don't always have answers, but we do have questions, just as Mary did. What is something you don't understand about faith or life or... anything? Spend time with God on it.

FAMILY PRAYER *Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line: **Hail Mary, full of grace!***

Blessed Mary, our mother, teach us to be like you.
Show us how to be curious and open to God's will.
Help us in our studies, our work, and our play.
Amen.

ADVENT ACTION Andrew, Francis Xavier, Charles de Foucauld, Barbara, Nicholas, Juan Diego, Lucy, and John of the Cross are just a few Advent saints to celebrate. Pick one or two and learn more about them together.

December 9 | Saturday

ISAIAH 30:19-21, 23-26; MATTHEW 9:35-10:1, 5A, 6-8

Stop for Directions

*Your ears shall hear a word behind you:
"This is the way; walk in it."* **ISAIAH 30:21**



We all know that what our ears hear doesn't always lead us to God. But we can't get inside our kids' heads and supervise what's happening there, so we do our best to teach our children to listen to the Holy Spirit themselves. We're not alone here. Receiving the sacraments gives our kids help directly from God. We have Scripture and Church teaching. And we can set a good example by choosing to listen to the voices of people who are themselves trying to walk the path toward God. Today, think about who you're listening to or following (including on social media). Is there anyone whose language or actions call you away from Christ and his love? What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about this?

FAMILY PRAYER *Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line: **Help us follow your way.***

Good Jesus, help us make good choices today.

Give us your grace to stop, think, and pray.

Guide us in your way of love, peace, and goodness.

Amen.

ADVENT ACTION Find out when your parish offers the Sacrament of Penance (also called Reconciliation) during Advent and make plans to go with your family. If it's been a while, the Church has lots of helpful resources for you. Visit usccb.org and navigate to "Prayer and Worship," then "Sacraments."