

*Ad*VENT *and*  
CHRISTMAS  
WISDOM  
— *from* —  
SAINT  
VINCENT  
DE PAUL

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ADVENT *and*  
CHRISTMAS  
WISDOM

— *from* —

SAINT VINCENT  
DE PAUL

Daily Scripture and Prayers Together  
With Saint Vincent de Paul's Own Words

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*Compiled by John E. Rybolt, CM*



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# Introduction

Saint Vincent de Paul (1580/81–1660) is commonly called the Saint or Apostle of Charity. In search of a comfortable living, he became a priest at a very young age, but his attitude changed as he encountered the poor. For him, the poor and most abandoned were the privileged site for encountering the Lord. From his thirties on, he dedicated himself to their care.

In art he is often depicted with children, but his true concentration was evangelization to the poor of all ages. He founded two communities to carry on this work: the Congregation of the Mission (called Vincentians or Lazarists) and the Daughters of Charity. For them he developed a new, even radical, style of life. The sisters were to dress in secular clothing and live an active apostolate. Like Vincent de Paul, the priests and brothers were contemplatives in action.

We're fortunate to have much of his correspondence. Also valuable are his talks, or "conferences," given to both congregations. This book endeavors to present his thoughts in a way that can lead to a deeper relationship with God, a better appreciation of our own Christian life, and greater love for all, especially the poor.

The meditative texts used here are taken from conferences to his confreres. Vincent de Paul didn't often reflect on Advent and



Christmas, but he was keenly aware of the greater issues of our life in Christ, whose incarnation is celebrated at this season.

You can use this book in several ways. You can simply read the material each day, or you can also write ideas or resolutions in a journal. In rereading your notes later, you'll find added strength in the inspirations you receive.

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# *How to Use This Book*

Advent—that period of great anticipatory joy—is a time of preparation for the celebration of Christ’s arrival in Bethlehem as a helpless infant. In the Western liturgy, Advent begins four Sundays prior to December 25—the Sunday closest to November 30, which is the feast of Saint Andrew, one of Jesus’ first disciples.

The annual commemoration of Christ’s birth begins the Christmas cycle of the liturgical year—a cycle that runs from Christmas day to the Baptism of the Lord. In keeping with the unfolding of the message of the liturgical year, this book is designed to be used from the first Sunday of Advent through twelve days of the Christmas cycle, or until January 6.

The four weeks of Advent are often thought of as symbolizing the four ways Christ comes into the world: (1) his birth as a helpless infant; (2) his arrival in the hearts of believers; (3) his death; and (4) his arrival on Judgment Day.

Because Christmas falls on a different day of the week each year, the fourth week of Advent seldom lasts a full week—it is abruptly, joyously, and solemnly abrogated by the annual coming of Christ at Christmas. Christ’s Second Coming will also one day abruptly interrupt our sojourn here on Earth.

In this book, each day’s passages begin with the words of Saint Vincent de Paul. Next is a related excerpt from Scripture, which

is followed by a prayer built on the ideas from the two preceding passages. Finally, an Advent or Christmas action suggests ways to apply the messages to daily life.

Because the length of Advent varies, this book includes material for twenty-eight days. These daily readings make up Part I. You can skip the “extra” entries, or you can fit them all in by doubling up on days or weekends.

Part II begins with Christmas Day and contains materials for twelve days of the Christmas season.

Part III proposes two optional formats for using each day as part of a longer liturgical observance similar to Night Prayer, combined with a version of the Office of Readings. The purpose of these readings is to enrich the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season of the liturgical year and set up a means by which individuals, families, or groups can observe the true meaning of the season.

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PART I



READINGS

*for*

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ADVENT



## *Meditation*

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*M*editation is a sermon we preach to ourselves to convince us of the need we have to turn to God and to cooperate with His grace in order to uproot vices from our soul and implant virtues in it.

CONFERENCE 68



## SCRIPTURE

*In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God.*

LUKE 6:12

*The Spirit drove him out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.*

MARK 1:12–13

## PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you spent whole nights in fasting and prayer, in loving communion with your Father. Help me as I begin this quiet time of Advent to imitate your devotion to prayer and recollection. Give me the inner silence to grow in mindfulness of your love and care. When Christmas comes, may I celebrate the anniversary of your birth with greater devotion.

## ADVENT ACTION

In today's busy world with our multiple responsibilities, it's difficult to find time even for a few minutes of meditation, let alone devote whole nights in prayer like Jesus did. Saint Vincent's faithfulness to meditation throughout his adult life shows in his insights and practical charity. Make a special resolution at the beginning of this Advent season to spend some quiet time preaching a sermon to yourself. Nourish it with reading, particularly from the New Testament.





## *Prudence in Speech*

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*P*rudence helps us to speak wisely and at the right time, causing us to converse discreetly and judiciously of things that are good in their nature and circumstances and to keep silent about and suppress those that are contrary to God or which may harm the neighbor or tend to our own praise or to some other bad end.

CONFERENCE 35



## SCRIPTURE

*Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.*

JAMES 1:19–21

## PRAYER

Holy Spirit, giver of all good gifts, grant me the grace of prudence in my speech. Help me control my urge to speak without thinking about how my words may wound others, especially those closest to me.

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## ADVENT ACTION

Ask yourself whether a particular conversation during the day hurt you in any way, and how this happened. Then examine the same conversation from the other side, and ask how your words may have hurt others. What should you do to avoid such unfortunate interactions?





## *Pilgrimage*

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*H*ave you ever gone on pilgrimage to some place of devotion? On entering it, we usually feel as if we're outside of ourselves, some finding themselves suddenly lifted up in God, others moved to devotion, others filled with respect and reverence for that holy place, and others have various good sentiments. What accounts for this? It's because the Spirit of God is there.

CONFERENCE 7



## SCRIPTURE

*I rejoiced when they said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”  
And now our feet are standing  
within your gates, Jerusalem.  
Jerusalem, built as a city,  
walled round about.  
There the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the LORD,  
As it was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.*

PSALM 122:1–4

## PRAYER

Almighty Father, grant me the grace to be ever more aware of your Holy Spirit when I'm in church or praying with others. Touch me deeply, move me, and transform me into the worshiper I should be, in spirit and in truth.

## ADVENT ACTION

Take Saint Vincent's suggestion seriously during this Advent, and if possible visit a church of special devotion. Enter, sit quietly, breathe deeply, and sense the presence of God's Holy Spirit. Get in touch with others' devotion, their gestures, and their awareness of the Divine.





## *Advent Simplicity*

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*H*e strongly urged us to be simple, especially since, where simplicity existed, God, who was simplicity personified and totally one and who did not tolerate being of two minds, was found there; *cum simplicibus sermocinatio ejus* [“his conversation is with the simple”; see Proverbs 3:32].

CONFERENCE 16

## SCRIPTURE

*Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say.*

MATTHEW 10:16–19

## PRAYER

God, loving Father and Creator, you are infinitely one, simple and whole. Your son Jesus taught us that quality of wholeness: never divided, never devious, never of two minds. Give me that strength to imitate him in my life. May my words be clear and simple, and may my attitudes likewise be stripped of whatever is devious.

## ADVENT ACTION

Take a few minutes during the day to examine your approach to difficult situations, especially relationships you find difficult. What is your leading principle: being honest, direct, free of deceit, or being complex and dishonest? Do others trust you to tell the truth? If not, Advent is the time to clean out habits that are so unlike those of Jesus.





## *Gentleness*

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*T*o foresee the occasions when we might fail in gentleness, to think about what topics might provoke angry reactions, and form mentally in advance the acts of gentleness we intend to practice on all occasions.

CONFERENCE 47

## SCRIPTURE

*A mild answer turns back wrath,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger.  
The tongue of the wise pours out knowledge,  
but the mouth of fools spews folly.  
A soothing tongue is a tree of life,  
but a perverse one breaks the spirit.*

PROVERBS 15:1–2, 4

## PRAYER

Gentle Savior, you taught that the gentle will inherit the earth. Grant me your virtue of gentleness, that I may be ever more like you and represent you in this world. Banish from me all that is harsh and angry, and heal the roots that sprout into sin in my life.

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## ADVENT ACTION

We bear the name *Christian* not because we belong to a club of Christians, but because we have been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. We are a new creation and are bound to act in his name. Look at yourself today in a kind of spiritual mirror to see whether you have truly become Christlike. Examine this from the perspective of gentleness.

