

Awaiting Emmanuel

Bearing Fruit

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

Maybe you've heard the phrase, "It's not what you know; it's who you know." And maybe you even know of a situation when this was the case — when someone secured an opportunity because of a connection rather than on ability alone.

John the Baptist tells the Pharisees and Sadducees that claiming to be a descendant of Abraham will not be enough when the wheat is separated from the chaff. "Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance" (Mt 3:8).

There's no better time than Advent for us to begin bearing fruit for he who is coming, both at Christmas and the Second Coming. Fortunately, we have clear instructions on how to do that.

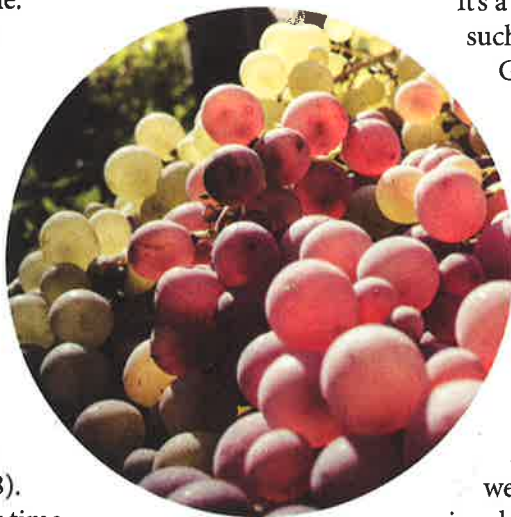
"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law," St. Paul

writes in Galatians 5:22–23.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adds, "The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory" (1832).

It's a challenge to bear such fruit. But with God's grace and the help of the Holy Spirit, we can "prepare the way of the Lord, / make straight his paths" (Mt 3:3). As you light the second purple candle on your Advent wreath this week, consider ways in which you can bear fruit.

We learned last week that we can't know the hour at which Jesus will come again. But when he does, he will take into account what you know (the Faith); he'll consider who you know (the Father); and he'll consider what fruit you've borne. So may this Advent result in a lush and abundant harvest!



POINTS TO PONDER

- ▶ How can you keep the fruits of the Spirit in mind? Do you need a daily reminder on your phone? Can a book or journal help?
- ▶ What are some ways you can put action toward each of the fruits of the Spirit?
- ▶ Consider seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation this week and, as John the Baptist urged, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2).



The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Prepare the way of the Lord with a clear conscience. Most parishes offer times for confession or communal penance services during Advent. Feeling uncertain because it's been a while? That's okay — see the steps on the next page for a reassuring guide.



Steps in the Rite of Reconciliation



You may confess face to face with the priest or privately behind a screen. Either way, relax. The priest is there to help you experience God's mercy.

The priest will welcome you and invite you to make the Sign of the Cross. It will be helpful for the priest to know a little about you if he doesn't already, and the time of your last confession. You may choose to begin with the traditional opening, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (weeks, months, years) since my last confession."

Confess your sins in your own words to the priest. An appropriate way to conclude is by saying, "I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."

The priest will help you from there.

After you have confessed your sins, the priest will offer encouragement for your moral and spiritual growth. He then gives you a penance — which may include a brief prayer — and asks you to make an act of contrition. Then the priest absolves you from your sins. After this you may leave the confessional.

Complete the penance the priest gives you. Thank God for his mercy. Promise yourself and God that you will try to avoid these sins in the future. Talk to God and ask for his help especially in avoiding temptations — those near occasions of sin.

Awaiting Together

Make waiting for Jesus an active task with these ideas, or create your own list!

- Bring more *joy* to your days and those of others by consciously remembering to smile more, which can affect your mood and that of others.
- Increase your *generosity* with an offer of money, goods, or service to causes for the least of those in your community.
- Life presents endless moments that test our *patience* and *kindness*. Choose one aspect of your everyday experiences in which to be wildly patient or kind. Maybe it's toward other drivers when on the road. Maybe it's with your coworkers. Maybe it's those chaotic hours between the end of the school day through dinner and homework. Be extravagant, just as Jesus is with his love and grace.



THE IMMACULATE Conception



There's endless confusion about the Immaculate Conception. Many people think it refers to the conception of Jesus by the Virgin Mary. Instead, we celebrate the conception of the Virgin Mary — the doctrine that states that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin.

This year we celebrate the Immaculate Conception on Monday, December 9. You could honor the Blessed Mother by praying the Rosary or the Hail Mary.

*Hail Mary,
full of Grace,
the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary,
Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now,
and at the hour of our death.
Amen.*

An Advent Prayer

Dear Holy Spirit, I ask you to fill me with your strength and guide my thoughts, words, and actions, so that I might bear great fruit worthy of your grace. Amen.