Religious Education:
Week Beginning 29th November 2026:
First Sunday of Advent Year B:

Be Ready to Welcome Jesus:

First Reading: – Isaiah 64:1–9: A prayer crying out for God to rend the heavens and come down, acknowledging human frailty and asking the Lord—the potter—to shape and renew his people.

Psalm: – A plea for God to shine forth, restore his people, and save them.

Second Reading: – Thanksgiving for grace and spiritual gifts as believers await the revealing of Jesus Christ.

Gospel: – Mark 13:24–37: Jesus urges his disciples to "keep awake" and stay watchful, as no one knows the exact hour of the master's return.

Introduction:
The word 'Advent' means 'coming', and it is a time of waiting and expectation. Only God knows when the second coming will be, but in today's Gospel we are reminded that we must stay awake and be ready for Jesus when he returns at the end of time.

Sorry:
Close your eyes and speak quietly to God in your heart. Jesus taught us to pray: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'.

We must be ready to forgive anyone who has hurt us by what they have said or done, if we too want to be forgiven. We ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with the strength to do this, as we pray the 'Our Father'.

Gospel Reading: (Mark 13: 32-37:)
Jesus told his disciples: 'Only my Heavenly Father knows when the Son of Man will return, so stay awake and be ready so that you will not be taken by surprise. Like a man who goes on a journey and tells his servants to take care of his home, they must be prepared for his return at any time so that he will always find them ready to greet him.

Gospel Reflection:
Today we begin the season of Advent, which marks the start of a new liturgical year for the Church. The readings for Sunday Mass are arranged on a three-year cycle. Each year features a different Gospel—Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Readings from the Gospel of John are interspersed throughout all three years.

With this year's first Sunday of Advent, we begin Cycle B of the Lectionary, which focuses our attention on the Gospel of Mark. This week and next week, our readings from Mark's Gospel present two important Advent themes: the Lord's return at the end of time and John the Baptist's preparation for Jesus.

Today's Gospel is taken from the end of Mark's Gospel, the chapter that immediately precedes Mark's account of Jesus' Passion. Having been questioned repeatedly by the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus is now questioned by his disciples—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—who want details about his prediction of the destruction of the Temple. Jesus answers with many warnings about the difficulties that the disciples will face.

Today's passage comes at the conclusion of Jesus' warnings to his disciples. Jesus emphasises the need for watchfulness. The Son of Man will come without warning; only the Father knows the exact hour. The disciples must not be caught unprepared when this time comes.

Most people believe that Mark's Gospel was written around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Mark's audience consisted of Christians who were living in difficult social and political times, times of conflict. They were likely beginning to face persecution as followers of Jesus. In this difficult time, it helped to recall that Jesus had foretold of such difficulties. Early Christian communities took courage from Jesus' warning to remain alert and watchful, and they found in his words a way to persevere through suffering.

Today's Gospel also reminds us that Advent is about more than our preparation for the Church's celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas. Advent is also about preparing ourselves for Christ's return in glory at the end of time. Like the disciples and the faithful in Mark's community, we must also stay alert and watchful. Our faithfulness to God, through the good times as well as the difficult times, shows us to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man.

Advent is also a good time to 'spring clean' out our lives! To polish up the good things and make them shine, and to clear out the bad habits so that we can make a fresh start. By living each day as Jesus taught us, filled with goodness and love, we will be ready to welcome him when he comes again.

How is the First Sunday of Advent Celebrated?

While Scripture is central to the season, there are a variety of symbolic spiritual practices that reinforce the theology of Advent. The trees and wreaths that are symbols of Advent are great visual storytellers to help teach the Christian story.

The Jesse Tree:

The Jesse Tree, which is introduced on the first week of Advent, is an artistic depiction of the genealogical tree of Jesus. It is basically an extended genealogy that tells the entire biblical story of redemption. The symbol of the tree comes

from Isaiah 11:1: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”

During the week following the first Sunday of Advent (and each week thereafter), different ornaments are added to the tree, each symbolising an Old Testament figure in the family line of Jesus. In the first week, ornaments representing God, Adam and Eve etc are put on the tree, starting from the bottom and progressively moving upwards. Each week until Christmas, new figures are added as the story of the Old Testament progressively unfolds.

The Advent Wreath:

The Advent Wreath is an ordinary wreath with special candles added to it. Three purple candles and one pink candle stand around the outside of the wreath, and a white candle fills the centre. Each Sunday during the Advent season, one candle each representing something different is lit. Like the Jesse Tree progressively being filled in, the Advent wreath gets brighter and brighter as Christmas approaches.

The first purple candle, lit on the first Sunday of Advent, is called the prophecy candle. In conjunction with the Scripture readings for the week, it represents hope and expectation for the coming Messiah. As the candle burns throughout the week and becomes smaller and smaller, it helps us remember that time continually passes and the return of Christ becomes nearer and nearer with each passing day.

Advent is rich with theological significance, and the Scripture readings and spiritually symbolic practices of the season help focus our attention on the first and second coming of Christ. The Advent season is a sombre time of personal reflection, hope and longing, and joyful expectation for the coming of Jesus.

First Week of Advent:

This week, our school community has begun the season of Advent, a special time of preparation as we look forward to celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

Throughout the week, students and staff will gather in prayer and reflection, taking time to consider the Advent themes of hope, peace, joy and love. Our Advent wreath has already been blessed and the first candle, the Candle of Hope, will be lit, reminding us that Christ is the light who brings hope to the world.

Students will engage with Advent reflections during form time and collective worship, reflecting on how they can prepare their hearts for Christmas through

prayer, acts of kindness and service to others. Across the school, displays and prayer spaces have been updated to reflect the season, helping us all to focus on the true meaning of Christmas amidst the busyness of this time of year.

As we journey through Advent together, we are encouraged to be people of hope and to share God's love with those around us, particularly those who may be lonely, vulnerable or in need of support.

We pray that this Advent season will be a time of blessing, renewal and joyful anticipation for all members of our school community.

Prayer:
Dear God, on this first Sunday as we light the advent wreath, turn our hearts and minds toward your son, Jesus Christ. Fill us with hope as we remember His coming and await His return. As we light the candle of hope, we recall your faithfulness. You are a God who fulfils all promises and our hope is in your alone. Strengthen us today to live while serving you and loving others because of all that Jesus has done for us. Amen.

'The God Who Speaks'
"And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." **(Psalm 1:3).**

"He answered and said, 'Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not; one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." **(John 9:25).**

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." **(John 3:16).**

Short Reflection about St Francis Xavier: Feast Day 3rd December
St. Francis Xavier (1506–1552) traded worldly ambition for a life of restless service. Challenged by St. Ignatius of Loyola's question "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul? "he became a founding Jesuit and travelled tens of thousands of miles across India, Southeast Asia, and Japan.

His life invites a simple check on our daily priorities:

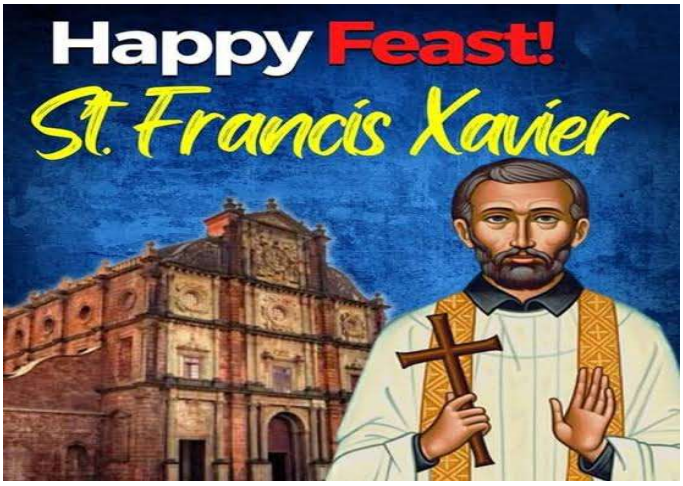
- **Anchor before acting:** Busyness without direction wastes energy. Xavier paired constant travel with deep prayer so his work stayed rooted in God rather than ego.
- **Meet people where they are:** In unfamiliar lands, he learned local customs and languages instead of waiting for others to come to him.

- **Hold plans lightly:** Xavier died in 1552 on Shang Chuan Island before reaching mainland China. Faithfulness often means planting seeds whose harvest you never see.

Prayer:
Lord God, on this feast of St. Francis Xavier, we thank you for his restless courage and zeal for the Gospel.

Like Francis, who left behind comfort and status to carry your love to distant shores, free our hearts from small ambitions. Give us the grace to meet every person we encounter today with patience, humility, and genuine care. When our own plans fall short or feel unfinished, help us trust that you bring every good work to completion.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Year 7 Retreat:

Yesterday and today, we had the privilege of taking the second half of our Year 7 students on retreat. The day provided an opportunity for students to step away from the busyness of school life and spend time reflecting on their relationship with God, themselves, and one another.

Through a variety of activities, discussions, prayer, and reflection, students explored how they can live out our school values in their daily lives. It was wonderful to see their enthusiasm, engagement, and willingness to support one another throughout the day.

We thank all the staff who helped make the retreat possible and pray that the experience will continue to inspire our Year 7 students as they grow in faith, confidence, and friendship throughout the year.

Elaine Henry
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