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Memorial of St Nicholas, bishop

Date: Saturday, December 6, 2025 | **Season:** Advent | **Year:** A
First Reading: Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 147:1–6 | **Response:** Psalm 30:18d
Gospel Acclamation: Isaiah 33:22
Gospel Reading: Matthew 9:35–10, 10:5a, 6–8
Preached at: The Jesuit Institute **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa**.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we gather with a quiet hope burning within us: that God is nearer than we think—guiding, healing, and sending us to tend a wounded world.

Let one image carry us through today's Word: a gentle voice guiding a traveller through thick mist. Advent is like walking before dawn. We move forward with more trust than clarity, listening for the whisper that says, This is the way. The Scriptures today draw us into that whisper—inviting us not only to listen, but to become guides for others walking in deeper darkness than our own.

Isaiah speaks to a people worn thin by false hopes and broken trusts. They had turned to false gods, empty alliances, and found only silence. Yet even in their failure, God is not distant. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way; walk in it. The Hebrew word for teacher, moreh, carries the sense of one who points out the path. Isaiah paints a God close enough to feel his breath on your neck—not a voice shouting from the sky, but a guide just behind you, steady and sure.

Isaiah's vision isn't naïve optimism. It's prophetic realism: a world reordered by mercy, where even the moon shines like the sun, and wounds are bound with compassion. The land flourishes not by power, but by tenderness.

We see glimpses of that vision now—in the resilience of young people who refuse to give up, in neighbours who share food before feeding themselves, in quiet acts of courage and grace. These are places where the whisper speaks: This is the way.

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The Psalm continues this thread: the Lord who counts the stars also counts our tears. He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. Imagine that with Ignatian eyes: sit beside Jesus as he binds the wounds of someone you love—or someone you avoid. What is his face like? What does he say? Which wounds of your own does he gently notice?

Then Matthew brings Isaiah's dream into the present. Jesus walks through towns and villages, teaching and healing. The word used for his compassion—*splagchnizomai*—means a deep stirring in the gut. Not out of pity, but out of a deep sense of conviction and solidarity.

And then he sends the Twelve. What moved him now moves them. Freely you have received, freely give. The Teacher behind us now walks ahead of us, sending us out as guides into the misty morning.

This Advent, Christ calls us to notice those walking without light: the unemployed youth, the elderly raising children, the hungry, the anxious, the silent. We are not told just to pray for them. We are told to go to them. The Gospel is not calling us to perform a vague kindness, bur rather to a specific reconciliation.

Our Catholic Social Teaching echoes this call. Justice is not an idea. It is a relationship. We are called to serve in ways that restore dignity, to speak with the voiceless, to listen to the silenced, to challenge injustice with the tenderness of Christ.

Today we remember Saint Nicholas. Not the figure of festivity, but the bishop of hidden generosity. He gave mercy without noise, saving a family from ruin in the dark. He teaches us that the holiest gifts are often the ones no one sees.

Ignatius invites us to enter the Gospel with imagination. Picture Jesus walking through your neighbourhood. Watch him stop beside someone in pain. Notice how he looks at them. Hear what he asks of you. The Exercises remind us that God does not guide with orders but with desire. Where you are drawn toward healing and justice, there the Teacher speaks.

So perhaps all today's readings offer one truth: God guides us by grace, heals us with compassion, and sends us to be light for others. Advent is the season when the mist begins to lift. And if we listen closely, we will hear that gentle voice again: This is the way, walk in it.

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Let me end with three questions for prayer:

- Where in my life do I hear God’s quiet guidance, and how am I responding?
- Who around me walks in darkness, and how might I accompany them?
- When I imagine Jesus sending me out, what fear rises within me—and what hope rises beside it?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today’s readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.