



Thursday of the First Week of Advent

Jesus said to his disciples: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined."

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I come before you in humility and with a spirit of hope. You no doubt have something to tell me. I approach you in prayer, confident of your love and trustful of your grace to enable me to carry out whatever you ask. I offer this prayer for those in my family who might be far away from you.

Petition: Lord, help me deepen my life of faith and charity, to better prepare for the trials ahead.

1. The Façade: It is easy to address Jesus as "Lord, Lord." After all, we know by faith that he is the Son of God. His miracles and the endurance of his Church attest to his

divine nature. Yet, our recognition of his divinity isn't enough. Our admission that "Jesus is my savior" won't guarantee us a place in heaven. Faith in Christ can't just remain on our lips; it must penetrate our hearts and minds as well. Faith, then, implies doing the will of God the Father – in thoughts, words and deeds. How does my faith in Christ translate into acts? Am I satisfied with saying a few prayers, and little else?

2. Out of Sight: Christ exhorts his disciples to build their faith on rock, not on sentimentality. To dig a solid foundation of faith takes hard work. It demands constancy in prayer, charity and generosity. It also requires humility and purity of intention, since the work of preparing a foundation is not glamorous. There's nothing particularly beautiful about a big hole in the ground at a construction site. So it is in the spiritual life, too; digging a foundation forces us to go deep, to remove our worst faults. The process isn't pretty. It forces us to face our vices honestly and to rip away the mask we might wear in front of others. Without this step we risk building our lives on sand. How well am I digging my foundation?

3. Too Late: Foundations seem firm when all is calm. Fair weather doesn't test the strength of a building. The real test comes when the climate turns nasty. The same occurs in the spiritual life. When serenity reigns around us, peace blossoms effortlessly. But when a crisis befalls us – a rejection, an illness, a bit of opposition over a moral matter – that's when we learn the sturdiness of our faith. Peter, who boasted that he would stand by Our Lord "though all may have their faith in you shaken" (Matthew 26:33), learned the hard way that his courage wasn't what he thought it was. He abandoned Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, as did all the apostles. How well do I face ordinary temptations and setbacks? How well could I face a serious crisis?

Conversation with Christ: Lord, I fear sometimes that I'm not much better than Peter, who bragged that he would stand by you, but then fled when the guards arrested you on Holy Thursday night. I want to be a true Christian witness in the world, but I need your help to overcome my human respect and laziness.

Resolution: I will do one external act of witness to the faith.