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“Everyone who listens to my words and acts on them will be like the wise person who built his house on rock” (Matt 7:24).

Isa 26:1-6; Matt 7:21, 24-27

Jesus’ command to his disciples to take the Gospel to “the ends of the earth” has had special appeal for some saints. St. Paul was eager to go to Spain. St. Francis Xavier, whose feast we commemorate today, was eager to go to China after his exhausting ministry in India. St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, named after Francis Xavier, asked Pope Leo XIII to send her and her sisters to China, but he sent her to the United States instead to care for the flood of Italian immigrants arriving here. Pope Francis hoped to be sent by his Jesuit superiors as a missionary to Asia, but God had other plans for him.

The idealism and enthusiasm that moves some saints to want to “go the distance,” taking on hardships and the total reorientation of their home culture and identity, must be well grounded to succeed. Many have felt drawn by the romance of travel and the chance to serve in far away places, but when the novelty wears off the real cost is apparent. In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that listening to his words is not enough. They must also put them into action. The familiar parable about building a house on rock instead of sand makes the point.

Advent is a short season of preparation, but it reminds us that our lives as Christians are a long-haul pilgrimage that requires constant renewal and fresh motivation to us keep going. We need to be well grounded. Wherever we are in our pilgrimage, early or late, the call to listen to the Word is always fresh and intimate. “Going the

distance” may be doing what we have been doing all along, or it may be to take the next step in a continuum of discernment that leads to something new.

We are blessed with God’s Word during Advent. Listening to it prayerfully and reflecting on it with ears alert to act on it will lay a strong foundation for each day.

Then, when the winds rise and the storms come, we will be grounded in faith and ready to live the message we have heard.

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