

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT



- SUN** **THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**
Dec. 6 **Trusting God is Waiting Upon God**
 Inspired by a text of Carroll Stuhlmueller
- MON** **Memorial of St. Ambrose**
7 **Learning and Sharing God's Wisdom**
 Adapted from a treatise by St. Ambrose
- a
- TUES** **The Immaculate Conception of the BVM**
8 **Being Bearers of God's Salvation in Trust**
 Inspired by a text of Dianne Bergant
- WED** **Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent**
9 **Open Yourself to the Fullness of God's Grace**
 From a treatise by Origen of Alexandria
- THURS** **Thursday of the Second Week of Advent**
10 **Do You Need to be Shaken Up?**
 A prison meditation by Fr. Alfred Delp
- FRI** **Friday of the Second Week of Advent**
11 **Finding Advent's Hope**
 Reflections by Charles Peguy and H. J. Arnold
- SAT** **Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe**
12 **In**
 Inspired



Trusting God is Waiting Upon God

Inspired by a text from Carroll Stuhlmueller

The prophet Isaiah has proclaimed a magnificent hope. Of course the picture he draws of the realization of this hope is a creation of his imagination. That is why God seems so frequently not to fulfill the hopes prophets have proclaimed. Think of the hope for a Messiah who would come to inaugurate God's Kingdom. What Jesus did was nothing like any prophet had imagined. Thus, in the Letter of James we hear about the problem which the apostolic Church was having with people who took the picture Jesus drew of his Second Coming as a literal description of what was going to happen, and soon! But Jesus spoke of the "end of time" in words taken from parts of the Hebrew Scriptures and that meant using pictures people had created to picture how they wanted God to fulfill their hopes.

God has given us marvelous hopes. We can hope for the forgiveness of all our sins with absolute confidence. It is just what Moses reported God had said to him. But God also said that forgiveness did not "clear people"—of what? I think of what we call the effects on us and others of our sins. The sins are forgiven but we have harmed ourselves and others by our sins and those effects do not go away when we accept forgiveness. But that is only my explanation. Maybe the hope of forgiveness is different than I expect, just as the Messiah's coming was different than anyone had expected.

What does this all mean? It means we must wait upon God to show us how the hopes we have been freely given will be fulfilled. To wait upon God is to trust in God's ways of fulfilling the promises we have received. Many of Jesus' contemporaries couldn't give up the picture of political liberation that they imagined the Messiah would bring. If Jesus didn't bring that then he couldn't be the Messiah "they were waiting for"! But if that was the case they weren't waiting for God's Messiah but for a Messiah created by their own imagination.

Adam and Eve, we are told in the Book of Genesis, wanted something that God had not planned for them. They preferred their idea of a good life to God's. This is what we do when we sin. The Angel Gabriel told our Blessed Mother that Jesus would free his people from their sins. That includes freeing them from their determination to have things their way rather than God's. That, after all, is the root of sin.

To open ourselves to Jesus' coming to us now we have to adopt the stance indicated in the three readings of our Sunday Eucharist. We have to wait upon the Lord and let the Lord show us as things happen just how he has planned to bring us to a life of serving in the footsteps of Jesus and to life everlasting in the fully realized Kingdom of God. We may not look only to the end of all time but to the time during which God prepares us, and probably countless others, to become fit to share Divine Life, even as Jesus did and does. That is our daily task: We wait on the Lord, trusting that he will fulfill his promises to us and through us in the best possible way.

Learning & Sharing God's Wisdom

Adapted from a treatise by St. Ambrose

Scripture calls upon us to speak of God's precepts at home and abroad, whether busy or resting (Deuteronomy 6:7). So let us ever have the study of wisdom in our hearts and on our lips. Let our tongues speak of justice and let the law of God be in our hearts. But the Lord Jesus is God's wisdom. So let us speak of the Lord Jesus who is the word and God's Word.

Another Scripture says: "Open your mouth to speak the Word of God" (Proverbs 31: 8). Spread this word abroad, let the Lord's discourse resound everywhere, let us always meditate on Jesus and speak of Jesus. When we speak of this wisdom then Jesus is present. When we explain the virtues, Jesus is present. When we deal with justice, Jesus is present. When we talk about peace, Jesus is present. When we speak of truth, of life, and of redemption, Jesus is present.

"Open your mouth to speak the Word of God". You open and Jesus speaks. David said in psalm 85, "I will hear what God proclaims". The Son of God says, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it" (Psalm 81). But not everyone can understand wisdom; not everyone can make sense of it. Yet everyone is given the Spirit of Wisdom, in accord with one's capacity and in the measure of one's faithfulness. If you believe you will possess the Spirit of Wisdom.

Mediate always, speak about the things of God "when you are resting at home", Scripture says. What does the word 'home' refer to? First it points to the Church and secondly to our innermost self. Speak thoughtfully in both "places" but do not speak too much, to avoid sin. When sitting, like a judge, speak like one who judges. When in the street, speak as Christ spoke. Speak not only to others but to yourself.

Listen to what Jesus says: "It is my wish that in every place you shall offer prayers with blameless hands held up to God and free from anger and dissension" (I Timothy 2:8). Speak, you who believe, even when you are asleep—lest the sleep of death overtake you by surprise. How can one speak when asleep? By keeping vigil. Scripture says "I will give my eyes no sleep, my eyelids no rest, till I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob" (Psalm 132).

When you get up and are awake, speak of Jesus. Fulfill what is commanded you. Jesus says: "I heard my brother knocking". That is how we are made awake to love. Again Scripture says: "I adjure you, arouse and stir up love" (Song 3). When we actively love another then we are awake in Christ. In this way too we can pray and love always.

Being Bearers of God's Salvation in Trust

Inspired by a text of Dianne Bergant

“Hail, filled with grace! The Lord is with you!” Mary was puzzled by this greeting. And if she was puzzled by the greeting she must have been amazed at the message. She was to bear a child and that child would inherit the throne of David and so be king. Did that mean he would be the long-awaited Messiah? But which of the various ways of imagining the coming of the Messiah would he enact? She was going to conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, instead of in the usual way. The child would be called “Son of God”—whatever that might mean.

We do Mary a disservice if we think she truly understood the angel's message. All the more, then, is her response a beacon of faith and trust in God for us. “Let it be done in me according to what you have said!” After all, who am I but the Lord's slave? Who am I to question the will of my Lord? Let God do as he has decided. No, the Gospel reading from today's Eucharist is not misplaced from the Feast of the Annunciation. It is about Mary's being “graced”, “full of grace” as we usually translate the word used. It is about the universal need for salvation and about how God's grace has brought us all salvation through the salvation of one who seemed just a very ordinary young woman from a backwoods town of no account.

All this is spelled out for us at our Eucharist. A reading from the Book of Genesis reminds us that we have all refused to follow God in one way or another and that this has divided us and set us against one another, even where we would expect to be most one; i.e., in our marriages. The woman suffers through her relation to her husband and he suffers through his efforts to provide food and the necessities of life for her and their family. We all suffer through one another's wrong choices and we don't know what to do about it. God promises salvation, but we have no idea what this will amount to. We must hope without understanding; trusting in God.

St. Paul repeats the message. He says that we too have been “graced” in and through Jesus Christ. We sinned and we need salvation but have been graced in spite of our sin. God's grace “saved” Mary from being so wounded and made her the door through which salvation incarnate entered our home and became one of us. God's grace is saving us too. What difference does God's different way of saving us and saving Mary make? We don't really know—though there are many theories, guesses. So we, like Mary, don't half understand God's message to us but have to respond as she did—in trust and faith. Can we do this? Yes because we know we are God's, just as Mary knew she was. We have a savior, who came to us through a young woman in Galilee. We are called to let God come to others through us—though in a very different, and to us unknown, ways. We know what God tells us he is doing through us. We do not see it happening. We must walk in faith and wait upon the Lord. One day God will show us how he has saved others through us as bearers of Christ and his message. Walk in faith!

Open Yourself to the Fullness of God's Grace

From a commentary by Origen of Alexandria

“The word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert”. He began to go through the Jordan valley because there he had water for baptizing. But note also that the word ‘*jordan*’ means “coming down”. Jesus Christ is the coming down, the rushing down like a flooding river, a river of God’s grace. It is in this river, Christ, that we have been baptized. Christ’s is the life-giving water that washes away the sins of those baptized in Him. Now it remains for us to amend our lives, to let them be changed for the better.

In baptism the sins of those who are determined to cease sinning are forgiven. If someone comes to baptism but intends to continue in sin that person’s sins aren’t forgiven. One cannot present oneself for baptism while continuing to live in sin; one has to think very carefully about what one is doing and show, and know, that one really means to change one’s way of living. When you cleanse yourself inwardly from sin and avoid committing it than you have begun to devalue sin, to see that you don’t need it. You are forgiven your sins if you renounce them in deed.

We read in the prophet Isaiah: “A voices cries out in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord; build him a straight highway!” What sort of highway are we to prepare for the Lord? Is it an ordinary highway? Could the word of God “travel” in an ordinary way? We must prepare a highway within ourselves! We need to make our hearts and minds straight and level so the Word of God may enter. But how can such a thing come to be inside a human body? The fact is that the human heart and mind are vast because they can hold so many things. But what the Lord wants to give can be “held” only the heart and mind are pure.

Would you like to grasp the capacity of your heart and mind? Then reflect on the vast amount of knowledge about divine things it can contain. Solomon said: “God gave me knowledge of all that exists. God taught me about the structure of the universe and the properties of the elements, the beginning and the end of ages and the periods between them, the variations of the seasons and the succession of the months, the circle of the year and the positions of the stars, the nature of living things and the instincts of animals, the kinds of plants and the medicinal properties of roots.” The human heart and mind are not small if they can contain all this.

Let me give you a common example. If you passed through a city you remember its streets and buildings, what they were like and where they are located. You have a mental picture of the roads you traveled. As I said, the heart and mind that can contain so much are not small. So prepare a way for the Lord to enter you; let the Wisdom of God come in.

We receive God’s wisdom in order to live a good and holy life. But you receive it in fullness only as you lead such a life. You do this by beginning to do good works. Let God’s Word give you a knowledge of his mysteries and his coming so that you can do such deeds. They are deeds of love such as Jesus himself did. That is how one prepares a way for the Lord. Let us begin.

Do You Need to be Shaken Up?

From a meditation by Alfred Delp

Advent is a time when we ought to be shaken and brought to new realizations about ourselves. The necessary condition is renunciation of the presumptuous attitudes we use to build ourselves an imaginary world. God uses reality to force us back into His world. Walking up and down in my cell, three paces this way and three paces that way, with my hands manacles, and ahead of my uncertain future, I have a new and different understanding of God's promise of redemption & release.

Two years ago I was given an angel figure. It bore the inscription: "The Lord is near, rejoice!" The angel was destroyed in a bombing attack and the man who gave it to me was killed too. The horror of these times would be unendurable unless we kept being set upright again by God's promises. If all we know are the four walls and the prison window of our gray days and are no longer shaken, even exalted, by an angel's whispered words, then it is all over for us.

So many kinds of Advent consolation stream from the expectant Mary. She has conceived a child, sheltered it and given it birth. The world has come under a different law. We must remember this today, with courage. Deep down in our being, our days and our destinies bear the blessing and mystery of God, and we must wait until the hour has come.

O Lord! Today we know once more, and in quite practical terms, what it means to clear away the rubble and make paths smooth once again. We will have to do it for years to come. Let the crying voices ring out, pointing out the wilderness and over-coming all the devastation—from within.

We ask for clear eyes that are able to see God's messengers of annunciation. We ask for awakened hearts with the wisdom to hear your words of promise. Let us ask for faith in the motherly consecration of life as shown by Mary of Nazareth. Let us be patient and wait—wait with Advent readiness for the moment when it pleases God to appear in our night, as the fruit and mystery of our times. We must not close our ears to God's call, lest those who are today our executioners become tomorrow our accusers, because we have remained silent.

Today's Advent is the time of promise. To eyes that do not see it still seems that the dice are being cast on the battlefields, in the camps and prisons and bomb shelters. Space is still filled with the noise of destruction and annihilation, the shouts of self-assurance and arrogance, the weeping of despair and helplessness. But just beyond the horizon the eternal realities stand in their age-old longing. These shine on us the first mild light of the fulfillment to come. This is today. Tomorrow the angels will tell us what God has done with loud rejoicing voices. We shall be glad, because we have believed and trusted in Advent.

A few days after writing this Father Alfred Delp was hung by the Nazis.

Finding Advent's Hope

Reflections by Charles Peguy and J.H. Arnold

A newborn child means hope. So God says: Now hope! That's something that astounds me. Even me! It is truly astonishing how these children of mine see the way things are going and yet believe that somehow, tomorrow, things will be better. How they see the way things are going today and believe they'll be better tomorrow morning just because they've woken up. It's really astonishing and the greatest marvel of our graces. I'm astonished at it myself.

This means that grace must be unbelievably powerful for me. It must flow from an inexhaustible source, like a great river. Since it first began to flow it has been flowing for all time. It is natural and supernatural creation. It is spiritual and corporeal creation. It is mortal and immortal creation. Since that first flow—O that first time when it flowed like a river from the pierced side of God's son.

What grace! What power in that grace—in order that tiny hope, flickering before the hot breath of sin, trembling in every wind and disturbed by the least draught, should also be so unwavering, so faithful, straight and pure, so unconquerable and immortal, so impossible to extinguish. This little sanctuary light which burns forever in its faithful lamp, a candle flickering amidst the darkness of the worlds. a candle glowing across the span of the ages, a candle shining fitfully through the depths of the night!

Since that first time grace has been flowing for the conservation of the world. For all the time that the blood of the Son flows for the salvation of the world there is a flame which is impossible to extinguish, even death cannot blow it out. Hope is what astonishes me! I can't get over it. Hope can be so little as to be scarcely noticeable. God's little daughter, Hope. And she is immortal!

Jesus' life began in a stable and ended on the cross between two criminals. The Apostle Paul said he wanted to proclaim nothing but the crucified Christ. We too have nothing to hold on to except Christ. We must ask ourselves again and again: Are we willing to go his way—from stable to the cross?

As disciples we are not promised comfortable and good times. Jesus says we must deny ourselves and suffer with him and for him. That is the only way to follow him. But beyond it lies the glory of life, the glowing love of God. It is so much greater than our hearts and our lives.

Why We Can Trust God's Endless Mercy

Inspired by a text from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

One day a man we choose to call "Juan Diego" (his real name is Cuatitlan-tonatzin, pronounce it at your own peril) was headed past Tepeyac hill toward Mexico City proper and saw a marvelous sight. A beautiful woman, surrounded by a glob of light as bright as the sun, spoke to him in Nahuatl, his native tongue. Here is what she said.

"My dear son, I love you. I want you to know who I am. I am the Ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God who gives life and keeps creation in existence. He created all things and is in all places. He is Lord of Heaven and Earth. I want a church built here, where your people may experience my compassion. All who sincerely ask my help in their work and in their sorrows will experience my mother's heart in this place. So go quickly now to Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) and tell the bishop what you have seen and heard."

This is a masterpiece of acculturated Christian faith and psychological subtlety. Mary called herself "To-nan-atzin", "Our-Mother-Foundation of Life", the name of the Earth-goddess conceived as mother of all living things. Mary also wore the "uniform" that was proper to this role. The vision presents Christian faith as an Aztec would spontaneously understand it. "Juan Diego" was an "Eagle Knight", a person who had captured many enemy warriors so their blood could be offered to ensure that "creation would continue". Mary tells this man that Jesus has done all this and there is no need to keep offering human sacrifices. He understood immediately, everything made perfect sense and he obeyed.

The bishop was not receptive. Eventually, he asked for a sign. And Mary, who had waited all these hours, promised one the next day. But that day he had to get help for an uncle who was mortally ill. On the way he met Mary. He was worried that he had offended her. She responded: "Do not be worried, my son. Am I not your mother and am I not here with you? Aren't you under my shadow and protection? Your uncle will not die at this time so you don't have to find a priest; his health is restored as of this moment. Go to the top of the hill and cut the flowers that are growing there; bring them to me."

In the picture-symbol writing of Central America a flower is pictograph for 'word'. Mary's words were flowers, and Spanish roses to speak to Spanish missionaries, given when it was freezing cold and not a time for roses to bloom. But most of all she sent a picture of herself as the supreme word. Mary is a master evangelist and persuader. The bishop could only fall to his knees. Juan Diego spent the balance of his life as custodian of the chapel on Tepeyac hill.

How far will our God go to show us love? How far does God's compassion reach? There are evidently no limits. Love, we say, always finds a way. God knows exactly how to speak to our hearts and asks only that, having heard, we share what we have received—love, compassion and mercy beyond measure. We are to imitate the Mother of the True God, who creates and keeps all going. The first gift is life and then life in Christ. Now we know how to share it too.