

# **FIRST WEEK IN ADVENT**

## **THE FIRST WEEK OF LITURGICAL YEAR A**



- Sunday**    **The First Sunday of Advent**  
**Nov. 27**   **Preparing for Christ's Coming**  
                  A reflection by Fr. Carroll StuhlmueLLer
- Mon**        **Monday of the First Week of Advent**  
**28**           **Christ is Coming Now!**  
                  A reflection by Paschal Radbert, a monk
- Tues**       **Tuesday of the First Week of Advent**  
**29**           **The Realization of the Coming of God**  
                  A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Johannes Pinsk
- Wed**        **The Feast of St. Andrew, Apostle**  
**30**           **Loving Our Crosses**  
                  A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Thurs**      **Thursday of the First Week of Advent**  
**Dec. 1**      **Pilgrims Seeking the Kingdom of God**  
                  A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- Fri**         **Friday of the First Week of Advent**  
**2**            **Living Our Entire Life in Hope**  
                  A reflection developed from a text by Blessed Gueric of Igny
- Sat**         **Memorial of St. Francis Xavier**  
**3**            **The Zeal Born of Christian Love**  
                  A reflection inspired by letters of St. Francis Xavier



# **Preparing for Our Lord**

A reflection taken from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Although we can predict the exact date on which Christmas will come we cannot predict when Christ will come to us. “The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”, is Scripture’s warning. Yes, Advent is a time for peace and quiet of the sort that enables one to detect the hints and signals God uses to lead us out of our prejudices and fears and into a “new world”.

Despite the monumental preparation we hear of throughout the Old Testament the birth of Jesus took everyone by surprise. Yes, he was born at Bethlehem as predicted and he came in the “fullness of time”, but people had been and continue to be so preoccupied by their own self-centered activities that no one noticed the signs of his coming. There was little or no time taken to consider what God might be doing because everyone was so filled with the plans he or she had made already. Yet they hadn’t planned on what God did and that ruined all their personal plans.

During Advent we are asked to prepare for surprises and sudden changes. But how does one get ready for an unknown? We do it by patience with the ways others change their attitudes and by learning to tolerate gracefully others’ words and actions when they clash with our own plans and desires. We listen. We believe in others’ good intentions. We believe that in others, and in ourselves, there are hidden treasures that must come to light in order to bring joy into the world.

St. Paul paints an unwelcome picture of our world for us: “Let us live honorably as in the daylight and not in carousing and drunkenness and sexual excess and lust or in quarreling and jealousy.” This is how people live when they don’t listen to God. So Paul calls us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of mere flesh”. This is how to prepare—by making Christ’s way of living “my own”. God has given us so much and so many opportunities to share and care and support one another. That is the way one begins to live the life of God’s Kingdom now.

“Lord, cleanse us of our false values, aimless pleasure seeking, selfishness and narrowness of interests. Prepare us so that the hour of your coming will not take us by surprise but will fulfill all that is good and kind and loving in our hearts and our actions. Let Jesus’ way of life be the desire of my whole heart.”

# **The Lord is Coming Now!**

**A reflection from a text by Paschal Radbert**

**We must always be on the lookout for Christ's twofold coming. When he comes at the end of days we shall have to give an account of everything we have done. When he comes to us each day to stir our consciences he is helping us ensure that his Second Coming will not find us unprepared. If my conscience is burdened with sin what good would it do for me to know when the Day of Judgment will be? Unless the Lord comes to my soul beforehand and makes his home with me, unless Christ lives in me and speaks his word in my heart, it is useless for me to know if and when his final coming will take place. Only if Christ is already living in me and I in him will it go well with me when he comes in judgment.**

**So if I have already died to the world and am able to say, "the world is crucified to me and I to the world" then, in a sense, Christ's second coming is already present to me. Consider our Lord's warning: "Many will come in my name". The Antichrist and those who belong to him claim the name but do so falsely because they lack Christ's works and his true teaching. You don't find in Scripture the Lord declaring "I am the Christ"! But his works and teaching and miracles revealed clearly enough who he was. His works proclaimed the truth louder than a thousand words. Whether or not one finds someone describing himself as Christ, one has only to look at a person's works and teaching to know his relation to God and the truth.**

**The work of the Heavenly Father, God's message of love, acted out in all sorts of ways, declares that Jesus is the Christ. But those who possess neither godly deeds nor holy teaching are shown by this fact not to belong to Christ as his members. I don't personally believe that the Lord's apostles expected the Day of Judgment during their lifetime. But there is no doubt that they took every care not to be drawn from the right path. They kept watch, observing the universal precepts their Master had given them so as to be ready whenever he should come.**

**"Watch! You don't know the day or the hour!" This is said to all of us. We can apply it to ourselves because the Last Day and the end of the world will come for each of us on the day we depart this present life. That means we must make sure we die in the state in which we want to appear on the Day of Judgment. Guard against being led astray and failing to watch for the Lord's coming. If we are unprepared now then we will be unprepared when that last day finally comes. Be at every moment the person you want to be when Christ calls you.**

# **The Realization of the Coming of God**

A reflection taken from a text by Fr. Johannes Pinski

‘Advent’ means ‘coming’. The Lord is coming. If we want to celebrate Advent with God and the Church we have to seek first to understand what ‘coming’ means. Unfortunately two things get in the way.

The first is that we try to take a second step before we take the first. The first is accepting God and not making ourselves worthy of God’s coming. St. John said this very clearly: “This is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us.” God has loved us first and loving God is our response to God’s coming in love.

The second problem is that we think God’s coming in love is just an interior and spiritual affair. That makes God’s coming equivalent to God’s revelation and to contemplation and study of the words of Scripture. But God’s coming is equally an exterior and concrete matter. God comes to us when we begin to live love and mercy as Jesus did, and does.

These truths I have pointed out are very familiar. That God has come to us is an idea so familiar that we tend to think everything has already been fulfilled. Hasn’t God come in Jesus Christ? Isn’t God with us through grace and by faith and in the sacraments? Yet each individual Christian personally, and the Church of Christ as a community, has to live daily as a sign of the fact that God’s love has come in person and is with us forever.

Jesus has already said: “*See, I am with you always, even to the end of the world!*” What’s more he said this when he was with us. Yet he is with us really only when we live in and with him and live the life he lived. He is with us in deed only when we live God’s love and mercy in our deeds daily.

We Christians are so conscious of the joy caused by our belief in the presence of the Lord, above all in the Eucharist, that we almost forget that Christ himself continued to talk about his coming even when he was actually present. He did this right up to the end of his earthly life. We need to realize that there is a promise, and an expectation, of more. The Revelation of John makes this clear.

“*The Spirit and the Bride say, Come!*” We have to respond, “Yes, I am coming now!” We have to cry out as a congregation, “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” Yet this coming is realized in our daily deeds of love and mercy and care. That is how our Lord comes to us today and comes just as truly as He will on the Last Day.

# Loving Our Crosses

A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

Today we celebrate the festival of St. Andrew. If we ponder its message lovingly we shall find much for the building up of our souls. Begin from the words we are told St. Andrew spoke as he faced his cross: *“O cross so long desired and now made ready for my eager spirit! With joy and confidence I come to you; receive me gladly as the disciple of the one who hung on you. I have always been your love and have longed to embrace you..”*.

Notice how St. Andrew was strengthened in the Lord. This shows itself in the burning words he uttered through the Spirit. His mouth spoke from the abundance of his heart; the love that burned within him shows itself by the eagerness of his words. What is the source of such an unheard of joy and exultation? Where did he get such constancy, weak and fragile as he was? Whence came such spiritual ardor and burning love? Far be it from me to imagine that it came from his natural strength. It is a perfect gift coming down from the Father of Lights who does such wonders!

Brethren, it was the Spirit who came to his aid and gave him a love as strong as death. It is the Spirit who has been poured into our hearts and makes us stronger than death! God grant us always a share in this Spirit! If the Holy Spirit is present our weakness is turned into strength. What the Spirit did for St. Andrew on the cross and in his death, the Spirit will do for us in our toils and penance. Not only will he make them seem no longer burdensome but will make them a delight and something to be desired!

Let us seek this Spirit, my brethren, and let us do our utmost to accept it if it is not already within us. Anyone who doesn't have the Spirit of Christ doesn't belong to Christ! St. Paul says that *“we have not received the spirit of this world but the Spirit which is from God, and so that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God”*. We must take up our crosses with St. Andrew, or rather with the Lord, our Savior, whom St. Andrew followed. The cause of his joy was that he died with Christ, in the way Christ died. He suffered with Christ that he might reign with Christ. *“If anyone would come after me let that person take up the cross and follow me.”* It is our salvation, if only we cling to it all the days of our life.

# **Pilgrims Seeking the Kingdom**

A reflection taken from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

On the First Sunday of Advent we set off on a pilgrimage. We are looking for the fulfillment of God's promises and plans for our salvation. That means passing from self-indulgence and disdain for others, from small mindedness and fear, from escaping feelings we don't like and seeking peace with others, mutual respect and reconciliation and a new attitude to reality, even that of the cross. Are will filled with anticipation and urgency?

We began shortly after the celebration of Thanksgiving and that may remind us of the Puritans who came to this country on a religious quest, a kind of pilgrimage. They were anti-liturgical but we think of the liturgy of Advent as preparing us for that of Christmas and the beginning of the real-life drama of our salvation that begins with the Incarnation. It is a lifelong journey toward the fulfillment God offers us. This is so wonderful that the prophet Isaiah described it as a flood of people from all nations seeking God's House in Jerusalem where they expect to find the Lord himself.

That means people are seeking a new kind of life. We are going to learn how to live so that good things come for all and all the antagonisms and hatreds that fill our world are swallowed up in God's love and peace. But that requires that we be genuine pilgrims and not tourists. We have to be willing to let go of all that gets in the way of living like Jesus. We have to be prepared to accept whatever hardships may be involved.

Recall that Jesus in the Sunday Gospel reminded us of Noah's Flood. It caught everyone but Noah and his family unaware. It was like a thief that comes unexpectedly while people are asleep. The point of the story is not the tragedy that befell our race but our unpreparedness. But ask yourself, if I knew when God would come to end the present world and begin a new one would that help me prepare for this? Do we prepare when we know that some tragedy is imminent? Very often no!

The goal of Advent is to get us to change the attitude that makes us so unprepared. We put aside all those things that seemed so much more important than getting ready for living in God's Kingdom. We have so many things to do before we will be able to take the time to prepare. The challenge of Advent is to begin to change our priorities. That is very hard for most of us. But Jesus and the Holy Spirit can give us the determination and the strength to do just that. Are we open to their working this change in us, starting today?

# **Living Our Entire Life in Hope**

A reflection taken from a homily by Blessed Gueric of Igny

We are waiting for our Savior. Such waiting is a joy to the righteous. Are you waiting in joy? Is your heart at rest in living the Lord's commands? Can you say to the Lord, "I know that you won't disappoint me after such a wait as mine!" What kind of wait? One filled with love for our Savior. Waiting is a joy for those filled with loving anticipation. Already such people are "with the Lord" in their hearts.

Are you able to say, "Every smallest possession of mind, Lord, is entirely yours." Is your treasure in heaven? Have you given all to the Lord by renouncing everything? Do you realize that only what the Lord keeps for you is safe, and, besides, will be restored a hundredfold with eternal life besides? How blessed are the poor in spirit who are laying up for themselves treasures in Heaven and keeping their attention fixed on high. With St. Paul you can say, "Our abiding place is in Heaven, from where we are expecting a Savior!"

Oh hope of all peoples! Everyone who waits for you will not be disappointed. Our ancestors waited for you, all the righteous from the beginning of the world, and they were not disappointed. They have now received the fullness of your mercy and sing "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Trustfully I have waited for the Lord and he has turned toward me."

Just as the Church awaited in the holy ones of old the first coming, so in us she expects the second. This looking forward in hope raises all eyes above earthly concerns. There are some who neglect the Lord's advice and seek the prizes the world offers. But blessed are those whose entire hope rests in the Lord and take no notice of false and empty foolishness. They know that it is better to be humble and meek than to share ill-gotten gains with the proud. "The Lord is our shepherd, we wait for him!" The Lord is my share and I will wait for Him!"

Lord, I still trust in your word. You are good to everyone who trusts in you. It is good to stand quietly, ready to do the Lord's bidding. My soul longs for your salvation, Lord. As Scripture says, "Hope long delayed grieves the soul, and desire unfulfilled brings it weariness". But I absolutely trust in Him and so I will go on waiting in spite of delays. As Isaiah says, "The Lord delays so that he can be merciful, and thus he is honored for having spared us. Blessed is everyone who waits for the Lord.

# **The Zeal Born of Christian Love**

**A reflection developed from letters by St. Francis Xavier**

All have heard St. Francis Xavier's famous wish to go through Europe's universities and persuade students seeking only this-worldly careers to give themselves to the task of bringing the Gospel to the 80% of the world which had not yet heard it. *"I wish they would work as hard at this as they do at their books, and so settle accounts with God for the learning and talent entrusted to them!"* He could have said the same thing to many of us. We too often show little zeal for sharing the fervor of the love which led us to dedicate our lives to the service of our God.

One who reads the letters St. Francis Xavier wrote is often impressed by the fact that most of the hardships he faced were very ordinary. He was, for instance, traveling by boat to a mission on the coast of southern India. The ship, as he remarks, was not large but even so the keel was constantly scraping the floor of the ocean and the wind was strong. *"If we had encountered any rocks the ship would have been wrecked, or if the water had become shallower, the ship would have been stranded."* All those on board felt an acute anxiety.

One doesn't have to go to the missions to experience like anxieties. Think of those that each of us faces in meeting the demands of our daily work. Do we respond by renewing or deepening our confidence in God? Do we find ways to relate such feelings to our promise to follow Christ wherever he may lead us, and to do this in ways that will show those with us how to trust in God no matter what happens?

These are only two of the tasks proper to Advent. God sends us such trials in the form of uncomfortable feelings and anxieties and fears and they are marvelous opportunities to grow in trustful hope in God and in Our Lord, Jesus Christ. But perhaps we don't pause so as to become aware that opening ourselves to grace in these circumstances makes us more like Our Lord as well as a blessing to others.

Our God constantly offers us graces needed to make all the events of our lives opportunities to draw closer to Christ and to imitate him more closely. The key to accepting them is the zeal we have for loving in Christ's way. Advent is intended to be a season that awakes good zeal. Where some see no opportunity for loving others as our Savior does, the ones filled with zeal see many such opportunities. Seek and you shall find! Seek zealously; seek with the eyes of Christ. Each day will reveal many opportunities to love others as Christ loves them. A good deed or word, Scripture tells us, is a great gift.