

THE FOURTH WEEK IN ADVENT

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Sunday The Fourth Sunday of Advent: “O Lord!”

Dec. 18 God Calls Us to Fidelity

A reflection by Fr. Karl Rahner

Mon Monday of the Last Advent Week: “O Root of Jesse”

19 Depending On God Alone

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Tues Tuesday of the Last Advent Week: “O Key of David”

20 God’s Work Through Us

A reflection developed from a text by St. Bede the Venerable

Wed Wednesday of the Last Advent Week: “O Rising Sun”

21 God’s Work in Each Christian Believer

A reflection from St. Ambrose Gospel Commentary

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A reflection taken from Hippolytus book against Noetus

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A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

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GOD CALLS US TO FIDELITY

A reflection by Fr. Karl Rahner

“This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother, Mary, was betrothed to Joseph, but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” The angel didn’t simply tell Joseph that Mary’s child was conceived through the power of God. Mary had told him that already and the angel confirmed it. No, the principle message was: Take Mary as your wife! It is a command to be a father to Jesus, to fulfill the duties of a father toward this child that Heaven has given to your bride

This duty was laid on Joseph by God. He isn’t foster father and guardian just because his bride happened to conceive but because God wished him to serve as father to the Son of God who had come to save the world. Joseph is told to give the child a name, and addressed as “Son of David”, because he was of that royal lineage through which the Messiah was to come. A message from God gives him a public and official role in the story of salvation; his isn’t a private role as spouse and husband of Mary but a public one as the officially appointed guardian and protector of the Son of God.

We too are called to be guardians of the Holy One, who dwells in us, works in our lives to save not only us but many others, and who has given us an official role in the story of human salvation. At first sight our everyday affairs may seem to have nothing to do with the history of the Kingdom of God and the salvation of the world. But we are not to be concerned only with the web of relationships that make up our lives of work, of friendship, of family and even of prayer and worship. We are called to be guardians of something holy and great. It is God’s grace for us and the world.

Is there anyone who hasn’t a trust to care for another, as caring for a child of God? The fact that no angel appears and no dream bids to care for such a person or persons, the fact that our relations with others seem purely incidental, doesn’t make that the truth. We are made responsible by God for something holy and divine. In all those we are called to care for and protect God’s grace and so God’s Son live. In caring for them we truly care for God become human.

It is said of Joseph that he was faithful. He spent his life caring for and guarding God as living in Jesus and in Mary. Without him how would that child have become the savior and life of the world? Without us how would salvation be realized in each of those for whom we care? We too are called to be faithful just as Joseph was! We are part of God’s plan of salvation.

DEPENDING ON GOD ALONE

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

In the liturgies of the end of Advent we are reminded again and again of the wonders God has done to ensure the fulfillment of his promises. In doing this God required people to hope when they had already given up all hope. Samson's mother had no hope of a child, nor did Samuel's, nor did Elizabeth, nor did these women's husbands. They were nevertheless all required to hope solely in God's word and promise, and to do this after they had given up hope. If God has done such marvelous things, won't God do marvelous things to fulfill the promises made to us?

Do you answer, at least in your heart, "But God hasn't made any special promise to me!"? But aren't the Scriptures of the New Testament filled with statements that God has promised salvation and everlasting life to those who believe in Jesus as God's Messiah and Savior for all peoples? Haven't we been assured that every promise made to God's Chosen People is made to us? On top of this, didn't Jesus tell us that we would do things even more marvelous than He did?

We don't have to wait until after death to see the fulfillment of the Divine Promises! Do you actually believe that? Do you show by your attitudes and words and actions that you take it for granted that this promise of Jesus will be fulfilled in and through you? Recall that Samson and John the Baptist lived as Nazarites. That meant, for instance, that they drank no beer (scholars have discovered that the word usually translated "strong drink" actually means "beer) or wine. What does that mean? It means they never relied on alcohol to give them the strength and go-power they needed to fulfill the missions entrusted to them. They relied totally on God for the strength to do what they were called to do. Do we live in a way that relies totally on God for the strength to care for those entrusted to us, to nurture God's life in those for whom we bear some particular responsibility?

We believe in God's Providence. That means everything which happens to us contains an opportunity for serving God and drawing closer to God. This is illustrated in many ways in the Christmas mystery. All things work together to bring people to God and salvation. God has shown us this truth and receiving it is part and parcel of accepting God's gift to us in Jesus. To receive it is to put it into action day by day, beginning today. Keep your eyes open so you will see the opportunities God gives you to be a channel for divine grace & peace.

GOD'S WORK THROUGH US

A reflection by St. Bede the Venerable

"Jesus was born of Mary, the betrothed of Joseph, a son of David."

The Evangelist Matthew gives us an account of the way in which the eternal Son of God, begotten before the world began, appeared in time as the Son of Man. The description is brief but absolutely true. Tracing the ancestry of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he brings it from Abraham to Joseph, her husband.

It is indeed fitting in every respect that when God decided to become incarnate for the sake of the whole human race none but a virgin should be his mother, and that, since a virgin was privileged to bring him into the world, she should bear no other son but the son who is God. Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he will be called Emmanuel, a name which means "God-with-Us". This name signifies that two natures are united in one person. Before time began he was God, born of the Father, and in the fullness of time he became God-With-Us, Emmanuel.

When the Word was made flesh and lived among us he deigned to unite our frail human nature to his own person and without ceasing to be what he had always been, began in a wonderful way to be what we are. He assumed our nature without losing his own. Mary gave birth to a firstborn son, the child of her own flesh and blood and brought forth the God who had been born of God before creation began, and in his created humanity rightfully surpasses the whole of creation. She named him Jesus which, according to the angel's explanation, means he will save his people from their sins. In doing so he will also deliver them from any defilement of mind and body they have incurred on account their sins.

The title "Christ" implies a priestly or royal dignity. In the Old Testament it was given both to priests and kings on account of their anointing with holy oil. They prefigured the true king and high priest. Because of his coming into the world he was anointed with the "oil of gladness" above all others. From this anointing, or chrismation, he received the name "Christ". Those who share in this anointing, which he himself bestows as the grace of the Spirit, are called "Christians" and given duties toward each other, royal, priestly and prophetic offices. We are to care for one another, help reconcile one another to God, and continually renew one another's hope. In showing us how to discharge these responsibilities he leads us into the Kingdom. We not only celebrate his fulfilling of these duties but his promise that we too will be given all we need to come to their fulfillment.

GOD'S WORK IN EACH CHRISTIAN

A reflection from St. Ambrose's Gospel Commentary

After revealing the mystery of the Incarnation, the angel told the Virgin Mary that an elderly and barren woman had conceived a child. It was to strengthen her faith that God can do whatever He wills. On hearing this Mary set out in haste for the hill country where Elizabeth lived. She didn't doubt the angel's words but was eager to serve and hastening to share the joy of God's blessing.

Where should we hasten if not upwards as did the one who was pregnant with God? The grace of the Holy Spirit allows no delay in bringing about God's mighty purposes. The blessings of Mary's presence and the Lord's were immediately apparent, for as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting her child leapt in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth was the first to hear Mary's voice but John the first to experience the grace. Now we experience it also. The mothers talked about God's gifts but children, who were God's gifts, brought about a mystery of God's love for their mothers and for us. A child leapt for joy and its mother was filled with the Spirit.

Like Elizabeth and Mary our spirits rejoice because of what God is doing in and through us because of our faith. You are blessed because you have believed. These words are intended not only for Mary but, by the Spirit's hidden intent, for us. You who have heard God's word and have believed are blessed. Anyone who believes conceives and even brings forth the Word of God inwardly, then acknowledges God's work in words. Let each of us magnify the Lord. If the Spirit is in us we too can rejoice in our God. There is but one mother of Christ according to the flesh but everyone who receives the Divine Word is freed from sin and made just before the Lord. Such a one may well magnify the Lord, as Mary did, and such a spirit may well rejoice in God our Savior.

The Lord is truly magnified, even as we read in another Scripture, not because anything can be added to the Lord or the Lord's word by any merely human utterance, but because God is magnified in each such person. Christ is the image of God and a person who does anything excellent or devout magnifies the Image of God in whose likeness all of us are created and redeemed. In magnifying God's Image we are exalted and participate in the greatness of our God. Our God and Savior sends us to one another so that the Image we are may both rejoice and serve as Mary did. We too bring Christ to one another and so bring joy and newness of life and a renewal of God's image in that person. Do not fail to bring the Supreme Image of God to one another in all you do this day.

GOD HAS GIVEN US A WORK TO DO

A reflection from Hippolytus' book Against Noetus

There is one God and only through the Holy Scriptures do we come to know that God. We must acquaint ourselves with everything the divine Scriptures proclaim and accept what they teach. Our belief in the Heavenly Father must be in accordance with God's own will, and that Will must be our guide as to how we should think of the Son and understand the Holy Spirit. Let us not interpret the Holy Scriptures, which are a gift from God, according to our own preconceived ideas nor distort their meaning by reliance on our own reasonings but find in them what God wills to teach us.

God was all alone and nothing existed but God when God determined to create the world. God thought of it, willed it, spoke the word and so made it. Apart from God there had been nothing in existence yet, even if alone, God was manifold. That Word which God had within was invisible and God made him visible. Giving utterance to that Voice that was already within God engendering Light from Light.

God brought forth the world through that Lord who is God's own mind. This is God as made known in the Son of God. All things came into existence through that Son and the Son alone is begotten of the Heavenly Father. God gave the law and the prophets, and by the Holy Spirit God compelled those who were sent to speak out. From the Heavenly Father's power they received the inspiration to proclaim God's purpose and will. In this way the Word was made manifest.

All that God announced through the prophets is summed up by St. John when he shows that it was this Word through whom all things were made. "*In the beginning, he says, there was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made.*" Further on St. John adds, "*The world was made through Him, but the world did not know him. The Word came to what was his own but his own did not receive him.*" All these things are said to remind us that we have received the Word of the Father and through us this Word should come to many.

The Word has been born in us and we are to bring forth this word, as once the prophets did, so that all may come to believe and may receive the Heavenly Father's Word of being, life and salvation. Even as you hear these words, God works within you by the Holy Spirit to effect what you hear and are to do. That is God's will for you. You have only to allow yourself to be a ready instrument of God's will.

LIVING THE NAMES OF JESUS

A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

We have all sung the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”. Who is Emmanuel? We answer, “Jesus”. What does this mean in practice? “Emmanuel” means “God-is-with-us” and is meant to be a profession of faith. Recall last Sunday’s reading from the Prophet Isaiah. He tells a king to stop trying to save God’s People by his own cleverness and put his trust in God. What about us? Do we ever feel threatened and look desperately for means to ward off the perceived danger without letting our efforts depend first on the God who is with us?

The name ‘Jesus’ means “God is salvation”. When we need to be saved from danger do we look to Jesus? Or do we think that we need a “more practical” help? We profess Jesus is our Lord. A Lord guides others so they come to no harm. But do we think that the Lord Jesus won’t save us from the sort of harm we fear? Recall last Sunday’s readings. The Prophet Isaiah told his king that the way he had figured out to save himself was going to destroy his kingdom in the long run. To avoid this he would have to let God do the saving and be the actual Lord, even of himself as king. This is what God asks of us as well.

Actually to believe God is with us and is a God who saves and saves from every sort of harm means believing even when we fear illness will bring about the death of a loved one. We have to trust in our actual Lord to save. We give God many titles, as we do Jesus. Each is a challenge to our faith. We are challenged to actually believe they describe our God and what our relationship to God will bring about.

Think of the way the birth of a child changes the lives of the parents. The parents’ relationship with one another is altered. The parents’ priorities are reordered and schedules are redone. In a real way everything is different. Well, a child is born to us! Do we attempt to go on living as though this hadn’t happened?

Perhaps the real challenge we face lies in the fact that we have to continually alter our living and thinking even though a crying and demanding baby is not there refusing to be ignored. We are free to pretend that Jesus hasn’t been born. But he has been born and demands that we reorder our lives. Mary and Joseph believed the child they could see they were about to welcome was God-with-them and their Savior. We have to believe too, and share our faith with one another. That is what Christmas means. We are summoned to let Christ’s coming accomplish in us the salvation and life God promises—to those who believe.

WHAT WE ARE GIVEN IN JESUS

A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

“Truth has sprung up from the earth, and justice has looked down from Heaven.” Mankind, awake! For our sake God has become human. Awake, all who were asleep! You can rise from the dead because Christ will enlighten you. I say it again, for our sake God has become human. If our God had not been born into time, we would all have been dead for all eternity. If God had not assumed the likeness of sinful flesh, we would never have been freed from sin and death. Except for God’s mercy we would have suffered everlasting misery; had God not shared our death we would have perished.

Let us joyfully celebrate the coming of our salvation and redemption. Let us hallow the day when God, great and everlasting day, came from the endless day of eternity into our own brief days and times. God has become our justice, our holiness, our redemption so we who would glory may glory in the Lord. Christ, who said “I am the truth” is born of a Virgin. Whoever believes in this new-born child is justified, not by self but by God. Truth has sprung up from the earth for the Word is made flesh. Justice has looked down from heaven because every good and perfect gift comes from above.

Truth has sprung up from Mary’s flesh and justice becomes human by God’s grace; we receive nothing unless it is given by God. Since, then, we are justified by faith let us have peace with God. You see, justice and peace have embraced through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the truth sprung up from the earth. Through Christ we have access to the grace in which we actually stand. Our boast is in our hope for God’s glory, not in our our glory but God’s. Justice has not come from us but down from heaven. So let whoever glories glory in the Lord.

When our Lord was born of the virgin, angelic voices sang of glory to God on high and of peace on earth among those of good will. How could there be peace on earth unless truth has sprung up from earth—in other words, unless Christ had been born of our human stock? It is Christ who is our peace, making all one, so that all may have good will and be bound together in loving harmony.

So let us rejoice in this grace. Let our glorying be in the testimony of a good conscience and our boasting be not in self or accomplishments but in the Lord. This is why the Scripture says, “He is my glory, the one who lifts up my head”. What greater grace could God have caused to dawn upon us then to make the Only Begotten Son become a “son of man”? Now all the children of men can become children of God. Let this be what we seek and rejoice in every day.