

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

THE WEEK OF "O" ANTIPHONS

- Sun Let All Rejoice Sunday: "O Sapientia"**
Dec.17 Preparing the Way for Christ
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon Late Advent Weekday: "O Lord, Adonai"**
18 There is but One Lord and Savior
A reflection from "On Contemplation of God" by William of S t. Thierry
- Tues Late Advent Weekday: "O Root of Jesse"**
19 Letting God be our Only Lord
A reflection from "The Letter to Diognetus"
- Wed Late Advent Weekday: "O Key of David"**
20 The Key that Opens our Eyes to See God
A reflection developed from "Against Heresies" by St. Irenaeus of Lyon
- Thurs Late Advent Weekday: "O Rising Dawn"**
21 Magnify the Dawn Coming from on High
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- Fri Late Advent Weekday: "O King of nations"**
22 Our King is the King of Peace
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A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

PREPARING THE WAY FOR CHRIST

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine

“There was a man named John sent by God; he came as a witness to testify to the Light, so that through him all might believe.” John was a voice and the Lord Jesus is the Word! John was a voice proclaiming that Word, but only for a little while. Christ is the Eternal Word. Take the word away and what becomes of the voice? A wordless voice strikes the ear but it can't set the heart aflame. It is just like hearing a word without understanding it. That word is empty noise.

The Word is given us to bring our hearts alive. Suppose I am thinking of what to say to you. When I do that I have a word already in my mind and heart and I am doing is looking for a way to speak so what is in my heart will be in yours too. I am searching for a way to convey to you what is in my heart. I use my voice to help me communicate a meaning, the meaning of the word that I have in my heart.

What I want to communicate to your heart is this: *“Jesus must increase and we must decrease!”* These are words which John the Baptist, the voice sent by God, spoke for our sake. John points to Jesus with his voice and then the voice dies away and only Jesus is left. Thinking about this, John said to his disciples, “Now my joy is complete”. When we have the Word that is Jesus in our hearts then John's joy is complete. That is what we hope for when we speak to anyone about Jesus. If we see Jesus enter that person's heart our joy is complete.

What became of John's baptism? He ministered and went away. Today people flock to the baptism of the Christ. We all now believe in Christ. We all hope to be saved in Christ. This is the message of the Word, salvation, and it was the message that the voice sought to communicate to all who heard it. His mission was to be *“a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord!”*. What does that amount to? It is to live with a humble heart. For an example of humility take John. He was seemingly mistaken for Christ. He doesn't try to take advantage of this to gain some kind of glory for himself. *“I am not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor The Prophet”*. John did not claim anything for himself except being a voice and a preparer of the way for Christ.

John saw clearly where salvation was to be found. He knew himself to be a guiding light, showing the way to that salvation. He knew that the fire of Spirit came from Christ and he feared lest any breath of pride from him might blow it out in someone's heart. We too share the mission of John, though we perhaps understand the message we proclaim more clearly than he did. But do we live with a humility as great as John's?

Do we speak only words, as so many do, or do our words show the way to salvation? Do we show it as the way to Jesus Christ, and to imitating his love for God and for all people? That is how one best prepares the way! God's word to us is a call as it was to John. We are to cry out: Prepare Christ's Way! This is what can fill us with joy. Then share the joy God has given you!

LETTING THE LORD BE OUR ONLY LORD

A reflection developed from “Contemplating God” by William of St. Thierry

O Lord, you alone are Lord! Since to serve you is the same as to have you save us, you are our Savior. From you come all blessings for you are the author and maker of all. Where, then, can salvation lie except in the grace you give us to enable us to love you? Surely, it was this love that caused you to send us Jesus. He is Savior, for Scripture tells us that “he will save his people from their sins and adds that “there is no other name by which we may be saved”. But remember, he taught us to love by first loving us. He even embraced the cross and death upon the cross out of love for us. By loving us so completely, God arouses in us a love for the One who loved us first, and to the very end.

This is the measure of all I can say. You, Lord, loved us first, so that we could be brought to love you in return. You stood in no need of our love but you did all this simply because we would be unable to reach that perfection for which you had designed us in any other way than by loving you. O God, you spoke once through your prophets but now have spoken to us through your Son, and through him come all strength and order there is in the universe.

O God, to such a length and with such intensity have you loved us that you refused to spare even your only Son and delivered him up for the sake of us all. He too has loved us even to the extent of delivering himself up for our sake. This, Lord, is how you and your Word, your omnipotent word, deal with us. How are we called upon to deal with you?

While all things were wrapped in silence, you plunged into our depths, which were filled with error and sin. You came down from your royal throne to make our lot easier, for we were trapped in the harsh life caused by our sin. You came to plead with us for tenderness and love toward one another. Whatever Jesus said or did during his time on earth—however much he was insulted, struck or spat upon—he remained your Word and offered us your love while stirring up within us a response of love for you.

You are our maker. How well you know that no one can be forced to love but must be drawn in freedom. Where there is constraint, freedom can find no place. Wherever freedom is excluded so too is justice. What all are “due” is love, but none can give it apart from freedom. You, Lord, are supremely just and you intended to save us, but you can’t save unjustly. So you will that we come to love you freely and so come freely to salvation.

Indeed, only in loving you could we find salvation in accord with justice. But we couldn’t love you until you made it possible by loving us. As your beloved Paul says and we repeat, God has first loved us! Indeed, you have to first love anyone who would turn to you in love. So it is that we love you, and by the very love you implanted in our hearts. How do we know this? By knowing you are our only Lord, and in you finding the fullness of pardon and love and joy. Grant we may never cease to thank and glorify you!

LETTING GOD BE OUR ONLY LORD

A reflection developed from “The Letter to Diognetus”

No one has ever “seen” God or known God as God is, but God has revealed himself to faith. Only through the eyes of faith is it given to human beings to know God truly. Now we know that the Lord is creator of the universe, made all things, and assigned each its place. He revealed this to us out of love and because of forbearance. These have always been the characteristics God has shown in dealing with us. God has shown himself kind, good—indeed only God is fully good—slow to anger and true. Only this God is Lord of all and we must recognize it in gratitude.

God conceived a momentous and amazing design. Only the Son knew what it was, and only when the Son came among us and became one of us was it revealed. Then we saw that God’s gifts surpass our wildest expectations. So until it was time for this, God allowed us to go our ways as slaves to passions and to sensuality and to lust. This was not because God took pleasure in our sins or lacked power to set us straight.

God waited until we had shown ourselves that we couldn’t, of ourselves, either make our lives as good as we wanted them to be or enter into the Kingdom of God. Then we were ready for the revelation of God’s plan. Our wickedness had brought us to the point of seeing that we could expect nothing beyond death and a punishment that was self-inflicted. At this point God revealed his love and benevolence.

God doesn’t hate us. God doesn’t reject us. God doesn’t hold a grudge against us. God has born with us patiently and, in the end, God took our sin upon himself and gave his own Son as our ransom. The Holy One was given for the unholy, the innocent for the corrupted, the immortal for the mortal, the just for the unjust.

What else but righteousness could atone for our sin? In whom but the Son of God could lawless and impious persons such as we were be sanctified? O wonderful exchange! This is a work beyond our understanding; it is a blessing undreamt of! The wickedness of millions has been taken away by the deeds of a single person. The holiness of one has sanctified countless sinners.

In the beginning of our race we refused to recognize God as our Lord and guide. We determined to go our own way, even when it was against the stated will of our Lord and God. Now we have been saved from the consequences of this sin. Now is the time for us to acknowledge God to be our Lord in all that we do and say. God has given us the opportunity. We must not refuse it. We must help one another worship the One God and submit to him as our only Lord.

THE KEY THAT OPENS OUR EYES TO SEE GOD

A reflection from “Against Heresies” by St. Irenaeus of Lyon

There is one God. This God, by a divine Word and divine Wisdom, made all things. This God set all things in order. The Word by which God did this is Our Lord, Jesus Christ. In these “last days” the Only Son became human, and one of us, with the goal of uniting the beginning, God, with the end, the last of God’s creations, humankind.

The prophets received the gift of speaking God’s word so that they could foretell the coming of that Word, and through him the union and communion of God and humankind. It was the Heavenly Father’s will to do this. From the beginning, it had been prophesied that human beings would “see” God. Not only would we see God but God would live with us on earth and talk with us.

God was to be with humankind for our salvation. Making himself known to us, we would find ourselves freed from the hands of all who hate us; i.e., from every evil spirit. We would become able to serve God in holiness and righteousness all our days. This would be brought about through the reception of God’s Spirit, who would bring us to the glory of the Heavenly Father.

The accomplishment of this divine design, as proclaimed by the prophets, would make it possible for mankind to see God. This promise is echoed by our Lord: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”. Yet hadn’t God said to Moses, “No one shall see God and live”?

The Heavenly Father is inexpressible in glory and incomprehensible. Yet in love and gentleness God grants even this—to those who love him. God can do all things! We are allowed to see God, even as the prophets had foretold. “For what is impossible for human beings is possible for God!”

Of course, no human being can see God by merely human powers. But if it is God’s will that human beings see God then it is possible. Of course, it is accomplished as God wills and when God wills. It begins when God reveals something of himself through prophecy. Then more is revealed through the Son. We are now “sons” by adoption, and so share what the Son promises us through the Heavenly Father’s will. The process is completed in the Kingdom of Heaven. There God will show us the divine being as it is and so show us our Heavenly Father. Eternal life comes to all in thus “seeing” God.

Just as those who see the light are within it, bathed in its brightness, so those who see God are within God and bathed in God’s glory. To share that glory is to “see” God. That makes seeing God the entrance into life. The Spirit prepares us for the Son and the Son leads us to the Heavenly Father. The Father frees us from all change and decay and thus leads us into the very divine being. But keep it clearly in mind that the key to receiving this gift is receiving the Son. That is why we welcome Our Lord Jesus Christ with such gratitude and joy!

MAGNIFY THE DAWN WHO COMES FROM ON HIGH

A reflection developed from St. Bede's commentary on Luke's Gospel

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior!” The Lord, Mary tells us, has honored her with a unique and sublime task. Even the love one bears for the Lord is little help in understanding what is asked, of her and of us. We must therefore do what Mary did. We must continually praise and thank our God with all our heart, using all our powers of discernment in contemplating the greatness of the One who had come to us from on high—come bringing light to the entire world and beginning the new and final day of creation. Gladly will we join Mary in being God's servant. To us has been given a Savior, Jesus. He will be the fruit of our lives as he was the fruit of Mary's womb.

“The almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name.” Only one for whom God has done great things can magnify God in a worthy way. That is why Mary invited us to join our praise to her praise. Here we see that one who knows who God is and has such esteem for God as to proclaim God's greatness to the very best of one's ability will enter the Kingdom of God. But such a one wants to enter the Kingdom as the least.

God has come to the help of Israel, his servant, and it is not any one of us who has brought that about. It is done by the Son, born for us in Jesus, the Christ. Who are we in comparison? Mary speaks of herself as the slave of the Lord, and says this happily and in gratitude. It is, after all, from the Lord that we receive our obedient and humble savior, and it is from him that we learn obedience and humility. If one has no regard for humility then one is quite beyond redemption. We couldn't say, with the prophet that God is my helper who upholds my life; I humble myself and become like a little child. One who says this in truth shall be the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In magnifying the Lord, Mary speaks most properly of her spiritual rather than of her physical descent from Abraham. All those can share in her praise and thanks who, whether Abraham's physical descendants or not, have inherited the faith of Abraham. It was his faith that justified him and it is our faith that makes us his co-inheritors. This was why the promise of a future savior was made to Abraham and his descendants.

The Lord's mother, together with John the Baptist's mother, bore eloquent witness to what is in store for us. All good things come to pass through their obedience, just as through disobedience all bad things came about. Now it is through a faith like Mary's that life comes to the world. Rejoice in the Lord Jesus, who has risen for us like the dawn of a new day and its new light! Receive this gift and become a lampstand to give light to all those you encounter. Show them the gift of praise and gratitude and humble serve you have receive and live in imitation of Mary and of her Son. Let the light of Christ shine through you to bring joy to the world.

PLACING YOURSELF IN GOD'S HANDS

A reflection taken from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmuelletr

Mary's "Magnificat" seems to have been carefully modelled on the prayer of Hannah as found in First Samuel. Both women were given a child in a way that had seemed impossible except by a special grace of God. Neither one, however, speaks about the fact they are bearing a child who was marked for greatness. Hannah bore the prophet Samuel, though whom God anointed David king and founded a dynasty that would come to symbolize God's unending and tender love. Mary bore Jesus, through whom a new kingship, one extending to the entire world, would be initiated. But the prayers of these two women remind us of the fierce and demanding moments that separate life from death. We don't choose to experience them, they simply come to us and make their demands. We must respond with care. That requires trust in God.

Experiences of this sort are the common lot of every human person. What is unique about Hannah and Mary are the ways in which they respond. For each of them God has brought new life out of death. Hannah speaks of having defeated those who despised her and Mary talks about the way God will cast down the mighty. Each speaks with exceptional modesty and yet with quiet composure.

For many reasons a strong and very real humility is required at traumatic moments involving the coming of death or of life. No struggle will stop the process once it has begun. The facts are unchangeable. Everything depends on the way we face the facts. And when it is clear that they happen by the will of God then that can change the way we see everything. We can begin to live, so to speak, in full view of eternity.

No one can explain why such events should happen, and no one can see what they mean for the future. One is experiencing what it means to "submit" to God's plan, even when we don't personally understand it. These two women submitted with all their strength and determination. Because they did, things have been very different for all those who live now. That too is part of God's plan and something we don't understand.

Each woman had a child and knew that, in God's plan, that child would grow and would die. Both had to accept this fact for their children, as they had to accept such a fact for themselves. As we recall the birth of Jesus we are led to recall that of Samuel, and to recall what these two did and how that has changed our world and ourselves. Are we ready to submit to our part in God's plan, and do it with all our strength and determination? Are we ready to live our lives from this time for in full view of eternity and of God's call to us to share with others the faith that is making us who we are, for ourselves and for others?

HOW WE PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

“Prepare a way for the Lord!” Reflect carefully that we prepare the way of the Lord as we are bidden to by walking along it. We can do this only by preparing it. However, far you have journeyed along it the way is always waiting to be prepared, so you must start afresh from the place you have reached and then advance. We are led to do this because at every stage we meet the Lord for whose coming we are preparing, and each time you see him in a completely new way, and as a much greater figure than we have met before. The psalm has it right when it leads us to pray: Set your way before me, Lord, make it my law and I will always go on seeking you.

What we seek is eternal life. Though we can study the route ahead and can determine just how far we can go, yet such is the nature of goodness that there is no real limit to how far we can go—if we go with the Lord. So when we, as wise and indefatigable travelers, reach a goal we have set for ourselves we forget what was behind and start over again! “Now I begin again!”, we say to ourselves.

Nothing should deter us from pursuing the way of God’s commandments. We can understand the beginning of this Way only after we have begun to walk it. It is a narrow way, just as the Lord describes, and woe to all that so few find it. So many go astray in the wilderness! They are the persons who are proud and think they can walk the way on their own.

We have to walk with the Lord. We have to fear God first of all. It is this fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. If the beginning of wisdom, certainly it is the beginning of the way that is goodness. It is that wisdom which counsels us: “I have considered my ways and turned my path to your decrees, Lord”. We begin with praise and by turning from our own paths to that of the Lord. Let us help one another begin each day by again turning to the Lord and the Lord’s Way.

If you are on the way then fear only one thing, that you might leave it. Never offend the Lord who leads you all the Way. You don’t want to be abandoned and left to wander in the ways of your own heart. If you feel that the way is too narrow then look to its end. If you could see how every goal is to be attained you would find yourself saying, “Broad indeed is your command, Lord”! If you can’t see that far, then believe Isaiah. Behold, he says, the redeemed shall walk by this way and the ransomed of the Lord shall turn and come to the Lord’s House singing. An everlasting joy shall be theirs and joy and gladness.

One who meditates adequately on this goal will, I think, not only find the Way easy but will grow wings so as no longer to walk but fly. Always, then, bear in mind the wonderful things that await you and run eagerly with all your might, along the way of God’s commandments. May that One who is the path of those who run, and the reward of those who reach the goal, lead and guide us along this Way. The way and the goal is Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever.