

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

- Sun. The Second Sunday of Advent
Dec. 9 **THE CONSTANT COMING OF THE LORD**
2019 A reflection from Origen's Commentary on Luke
- Mon. Monday of the 2nd Week of Advent
10 **THE CALL TO WITNESS CHRIST**
 A reflection from Cardinal Danielou's comments on Luke
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11 **THE LOVE THAT LONGS TO SEE GOD**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus
- Wed. **FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE**
12 **OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE'S MESSAGE**
 A reflection by an anonymous author
- Thurs. Memorial of St. Lucy
13 **The Message of St. Lucy's Martyrdom**
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 Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Fri. **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
14 Memorial of St. John of the Cross
 LISTEN TO MY BELOVED SON
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15 **LET US DWELL IN THE LORD'S HOUSE FOREVER**
 A reflection from a sermon by Bl. Isaac of Stella

THE CONSTANT COMING OF THE LORD

A reflection from Origen's Commentary on Luke

The prophet Isaiah calls to us: *“A voice is crying out in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, build a straight highway”*. This is certainly not an ordinary call for highway construction. The Word of God doesn't need ordinary road in order to come to us. What we need to construct are inner paths by which the Lord can enter our minds and hearts. The human heart is capacious, but it isn't often focused just on one goal. In Biblical language, often it isn't “pure”.

Solomon claims: *“The Lord gave me knowledge of all that exists, taught me about the structure of the universe and the properties of the elements, the beginning and the ends of epochs and the periods between them, the variations in the seasons and the succession of the months, the revolution of the year and the positions of the stars, the nature of living things and the instincts of wild animals, the force of the winds and the thoughts of human beings, the various kinds of plants and the medicinal properties of roots”*. The human heart and mind aren't small if they can contain all this.

One shouldn't judge oneself simply in terms of physical properties and skills. We judge ourselves properly when we measure our ability to embrace vast amounts of knowledge and truth. Think of a large city you have visited. In your mind you have pictures of streets and buildings and all sorts of things like that. You know the special beauties of the city and how it is laid out and where one can go for quiet reflection or prayer. You have mental pictures of all these things, and of many events you witnessed during your visit and you remember what you especially liked or enjoyed. A mind and a heart containing all this isn't small!

A human mind and heart can contain the word of God only by God's gift. *“The word of God was directed to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness and he went through the entire Jordan valley”*. God sent the word and John preached turning to God. He was calling people to be baptized and to put aside the ways of sin. The word ‘Jordan’ means “going down” and that means we must humble ourselves by admitting our sins and then by turning our minds and hearts to God rather than to all the passing things that usually fill them. We have valued many things that have no permanent value but the good we needed they couldn't give. Only God can give lasting and genuine goods. We fill our hearts and minds with God when we turn our backs on seeming goods and fix them on the true goods.

Isaiah and John the Baptist call us to decide to change and then give real attention to doing what is good rather than what isn't. Begin to live for God, to live a good life. Cleanse your inward self from all desire for what isn't truly good and avoid every sin. As you cease to value the sins you committed, they are forgiven and you are freed from them. Your mind and heart aren't small but you prepare a way into yourself when you fix all your attention on God and God's Word. That creates a straight path by which the Wisdom of God can come to you and guard and guide you in good works. Let the Word of God move in you unhindered and give you joy in the hope of Christ's coming and of Christ's mysteries. This sets you free for real joy.

THE CALL TO WITNESS FOR CHRIST

A reflection from Cardinal Danielou's Commentary on Luke

“Jesus said to his disciples: There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars. On earth nations will be in agony, bewildered by the clamor of ocean and its waves.” These signs will witness to the proximate coming of Jesus in Glory to end time. But there are many other signs, perhaps ones that are even more important because they are human persons. John the Baptist was one of these signs. For example, he laid the groundwork for our Lord's ministry. He helped people open themselves to receive Christ and his message. Without preparation Christ's words would have been too much, even as they sometimes were for his disciples. A new orientation had to be given to people's previous concerns and customs and they had to realize that all had not been well.

John the Baptist's task was to awaken people ordinary unconcerned about their way of living related to God's will and word. They were complacent about their way of living even if it wasn't in accord with God's way. In this John was doing what many prophets had already begun to do. The rough ways had to be smoothed and the mountains of prejudice had to be laid low. But to do that one has to see what others don't see. This is possible only if one is completely caught up in an inward vision of the things of God.

Human persons are busy about earthly affairs. They are so caught up in them as ordinarily to be heedless of God. This brings utter indifference to that to which God wants to lead us. We need prophets to us, the whole world, out of indifference. We need people who will see the “divine vision” of things and then shake others out of their ordinary inertia. This is witnessing for the truth!

A witness of this kind is someone to whom it is granted to see things as God does. A witness for the truth and for Christ has to have this vision inwardly and has to find a way that allows its being handed on to others. John the Baptist was a person of this sort. God had drawn him to understand the mystery of God's design for human salvation by showing him Christ. God had drawn him apart, into the desert, where he could learn by experience the joy reserved for those who are totally God's. All this enables one to be a witness for Christ!

What is more, God drew John to be a witness to those who had turned away from ordinary preoccupations and come to him to learn the way of God and how to witness to that way to others. He pointed them toward Christ as the fulfillment of all he had been given to teach them. Witnesses have to be able to point beyond themselves and all that is identified with them. John pointed to God and a way of living which has God as its center. Then he pointed beyond even that to Jesus. Jesus is the Way and the Truth and the Light.

Have you seen that light? Do you see the truth because you have opened yourself to that light? Are you walking in the way that leads people through truth to the way of giving self to God? Are you living in a way that lets God's joy shine out of what you do and who you are? Then you have answered the call to be a witness for Christ and so for God.

THE LOVE THAT LONGS TO SEE GOD

A reflection from a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus

God sees that our entire world is agitated by fear. God is preoccupied with calling all to a love that which make them capable of standing firm in trust. God does it by grace and constantly showing us love. God reaches out to offer us friendship, even though too many see that as impossible.

Think first of the many Scriptural stories that tell us of God's love. Take the story of Noah. The world is pictured as dominated by violence as seeking to ward off what is feared. But the destruction people fear comes; only one who stands firm in God's love, and in doing whatever that love calls for, can survive the destruction. God seeks to found a new community of mutual love and support in Noah's family.

Then there is the example of Abraham who went on a life-long journey at God's command. God accompanies him on the journey, gives him honor and riches, and promises him a son when that seems no longer even a real hope. All these blessings were given Abraham, along with the sweetness of God's love, so that we might learn to trust and love God rather than merely fear. We are called to worship in love and not simply in fear and trembling.

When Jacob had to flee, God met him and reassured him in a dream. He made him wealthy and led him back to his home in safety. On the very journey he met him at night and challenged him to a wrestler's embrace, but made himself weak that Jacob might prevail. He was to trust and not fear.

God did similar things for Joseph and later for Moses. He spoke to them as a loving Heavenly Father and called them to become deliverers of others from fears and anxieties. Through all such events and examples, we see the flame of divine love being kindled in human hearts. Doesn't God have the same love for us?

Notice how God first poured his love over the ways in which people perceived their world and selves and God. Human minds began to love and long for God and to long to gaze upon God face to face, even though that seemed impossible. How could limited human minds and hearts have the capacity to receive a vision of God when the universe itself can't contain God?

We know from observing and experiencing merely human and erotic love that one who is deeply in love loses all discretion and reasonableness and doesn't know how to limit desire. Told that something is impossible lovers go on anyway, determined to have the one they love. Such love gives rise to more and more powerful desires, grows more and more fervent, and reaches out even for what is forbidden—as we do when we sin.

From this we can learn that real love can't be content without the loved one. All the saints thought little of their own merits and excellences and sought only God, no matter what else they lacked. Moses could even cry out: *"If I have found favor in your sight, show me your face!"* We are called to love like this! What is supposed to be impossible doesn't matter, because *"all things are possible for God"*. Trust God and love with all your might.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE'S MESSAGE

When the Spanish came to Middle America, they encountered a people preoccupied with keeping life as they knew it going. People believed there is only so much life energy available and that it had to be constantly recycled if human life were to continue. They did this by sacrificing people at a rate of about 20,000 a year. All were called upon to be ready to give their lives to keep life going. Men dying in battle and women dying in child-birth were believed to act this out.

This is a different way of thinking about what many of us still try to do. That helps us understand Our Lady's message to St. Juan Diego. He had been an Eagle Knight, one who had killed and sacrificed an enemy for his people's survival. Our Lady spoke to him in Nahua, the Aztec language, and this is what she said, "*I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the True God, who has created life and keeps it in existence*". God is the one who keeps life going and sees to what is needed to do that. This is the "true God" whom Mary bore when she gave birth to Christ. Trust in God and stop trying to replace him by sacrificing one another!

Again, the Aztec believed one of their gods had sacrificed himself by giving his blood to form the Sun from which life comes. The True God sacrificed himself and has given us endless life; now no other sacrifice is needed. All the peoples of Middle America shared the same beliefs so all knew an entirely new era had begun for them and the old things weren't needed any more.

How many of us struggle and sacrifice our health and well-being trying to preserve the kind of life they have—for themselves and their children? That is what we are taught not to do. Our Lady of Guadalupe tells us to leave all this to God and stop trying to re-make the world God has already made. God preserves life or takes it and our task is to help one another trust that God's love ensures all will come to the richest and fullest life possible, and will have it forever.

Our Lady delivered this reassurance to Juan Diego. "*My dear little son, I love you and I want you to know who I am*". She is a mother who holds all close to her heart. She wants to bring us close to God's heart. The word 'heart' is most important because it symbolizes life. In human sacrifice the still beating heart was offered to the gods with its blood. We are to offer our hearts in another way by learning to care for others even as God cares for us. The True God shows us this through Mary and so leads us to Jesus.

Juan Diego not only believed the message but dedicated his life to caring for a little church built where Mary had spoken to him and explaining the meaning of the *tilma* on which she had imprinted a picture of herself. She appeared clothed in the garments proper to the personage the Aztec thought of as the divine mother of all living beings. That was also the meaning of the flowers she gave Juan Diego to take to the bishop of Mexico City. In Aztec picture writing a flower symbolizes a word and its message. Those who pass on this message are themselves flowers of God. We are to be word-flowers that show to others a path to a genuine fullness of life that never ends.

THE MESSAGE OF ST. LUCY'S MARTYRDOM

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

If a single phrase could capture what is happening among us then it would be one provided by St. John: "*a light is shining in the dark, a light that the darkness can't overpower*". Imagine a cave illuminated only by a tiny light, that is the place where Jesus is born. Darkness is everywhere in the world—confusion, lack of meaning and vain efforts at self-sufficiency. All efforts to build the life we want show how limited, desperate, bitter and resigned people are. It is dark within us and outside of us and there is almost no hope. People desperately try to cling to things like social position, wealth, pleasure. That is what drove the man whom Lucy had refused to marry to denounce her as a Christian. If she is going to ruin his life then he will take her to destruction with him.

From this perspective it isn't difficult to grasp the message of Lucy's life or why she has given it, given herself, entirely to Christ. She walks the way he traced out by his own refusal of the way of the world and of the contemporary arbiters of the social and religious rules that tell one how to be respectable and honored. There is, after all, a light shining in all the darkness and it gives a direction to life, an ability to walk toward something positive and a hope and a reason to love. That was what Lucy chose, and what led her to give away all the wealth that her suitor imagined he could have by marrying her.

When Mary looked upon the new-born Jesus, she saw the meaning of her life in a true and practical way that was realized for her only through Jesus. When Lucy met Christ, through her mother, she saw what her life could mean—not just for herself but for others—and it gave her a hope she hadn't expected. Everything was suddenly new. That is her message to us. All we have to do is believe and follow Jesus wherever his calls lead us. The light that was once a new born child now lives within each of us. It makes us lights for the world, for all those who hear the message of new life in Christ.

In a Christmas scene, such as we see in a creche, no one speaks. Something happens; an event speaks a Word which is a person and that person will live a life for others such as has never been lived before. In the Greek text of Luke, the shepherds say, "*Let's go to Bethlehem and see this word...*". And when they returned from encountering Jesus the text says, "*they related the word they had been told*". A bit later we hear that Mary treasured all "these words".

The event that is Christ is presented to us as a word spoken to us by God and which we are sent to proclaim in our turn to others and to treasure in our hearts so we can reflect and meditate on it. What is just as important, we are to interpret that word to others, and the interpretation is to be our life as it is shaped and reshaped by our encounter with the Heavenly Father's Word, the Only Begotten Son. This life is poured out that we might have life and have it in abundance. Our message is actually the same as St. Lucy's message and our witness is the same as hers—even though given in a way unique to us. We are unrepeatable and called to give an unrepeatable witness of God's love.

LISTEN TO MY BELOVED SON

A reflection from Ascent of Mt. Carmel by St. John of the Cross

In Hebrew Scripture we constantly hear about people enquiring of God about this or that, most often about what they can hope for. Although the responses that came to them take many and various forms, they are all ways of talking about the one gift that God has now given to all peoples, the gift that is Jesus Christ.

Our faith in Christ is the foundation of our lives and our hopes. Our faith is founded in Christ. In our era, an evangelical law has been given us and there is no reason to enquire of God the way our Hebrew ancestors did. God has given us his Son, who is God's Word. There is no other Word and having spoken that one Word there is no need for any others. All we need do is understand the One Word already spoken.

Jesus Christ has spoken to us all, and to all of us as gathered together in his Church. Once and for all the Heavenly Father has spoken. It is a single Word and it contains all that we need to know for salvation and to please God. This is the heart of what St. Paul is doing when he seeks to persuade his Hebrew brethren to let go of the old laws that had formed them and brought them to God. The Law of Moses is no longer the prime path of salvation. That is Christ.

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son.” What was spoken formerly, in part, to the prophets, God has now spoken to us altogether in Christ, giving us All. That all is God's Son. So, if you want to enquire of God, if you want to seek a vision or revelation, you are acting foolishly and even wrongly. That is because if this is what you seek you are not setting your eyes and hearts solely upon Christ and don't see the gift given in Him.

We have been given Christ; why would anyone want anything further? Is there something to be given that was not given in Christ? God might respond to such an enquiry, “If I have spoken all things to you in my Word, which is my Son, and I have no other word, what answer can I now make to you, or what can I reveal to you which is greater than what I have revealed?”

Set your eyes and minds and hearts upon Christ alone. In Christ God has spoken and revealed to us all things. In Christ we shall find even more than anyone could ask or even long for. But perhaps we don't realize this. On Mt. Tabor God descended upon Jesus in God's Spirit. God said *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!”*

Listen to Jesus, God says, because in Jesus I have revealed all my love. There is nothing more to reveal! I have no more matters of faith to reveal, neither do I have any more teachings to declare. When I spoke formerly it was to promise Christ. If people enquired of me their petitions were directed to Christ and they were asking for Christ. There is nothing to expect except Christ. In Christ you find every good thing. All that needs to be known is set forth in the teachings of the Evangelists and Apostles. All that remains is to do as Christ does. That is, it only remains to love.

LET US DWELL IN THE LORD'S HOUSE FOREVER

A reflection from a sermon by Bl. Isaac of Stella

The Son of God is the first born among many brothers and sisters. Though by nature the Son was one and only-begotten, by grace the Son has reconciled many to himself, and so to God. He did this in order that all might become one with Him. To all who receive Him he gave power to become children of God.

So it is, that when the Son of God was made a Son of Man, he made many into children of God. In doing this he reconciled many to himself; he made them one in his power and his love. Though by our physical birth we are many in ourselves, yet by our divine re-birth we are one in Him. Christ is one, wholly and solely, head and body. Christ is one, of one Heavenly Father, and of one mother on earth. Christ is both one Son and many sons. Just as Christ is both head and members, one Son and many sons, so Mary and the Church are one mother and many, one virgin and many.

Both are mothers, both are virgins, both were conceived through the same Spirit without any bodily desire or lust. God the Father made both his own offspring without sin, of body or spirit. Mary gave birth to the head of the body without sin in the body. The Church gave life to Christ's Body, which is the Church, and did it for the remission of the sins of all. It did this through the Head of the Body. Both are the mother of Christ; neither bears the whole Christ without the other.

In the divinely inspired Scriptures we rightly apply universally what is said of the Virgin Mary; and what we apply in particular to the Virgin Mother Mary, we apply in general to the Virgin mother the Church. The meaning applies to each without differentiation. Each is interpreted by turns as the faithful soul, the spouse of the Word of God, the mother of Christ, daughter and sister, virginal and fruitful.

What is said in general of the Church and in particular of Mary, is also said individually of each of us. By the wisdom of God, that is by the Word of the Heavenly Father, we hear the words: "*I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever*". In a general sense this refers to the Church, in a particular way it means Mary, and individually it refers to each of us who believe. Christ dwells in the Church's faith until the end of time. Christ will dwell in the knowledge and love and delight of each faithful soul for ever and ever. Christ will dwell in the tabernacle that is our love.