

# **THE FIRST WEEK IN ADVENT (2020)**

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- Sun.**        **THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT**  
**Dec. 1**     **THE COMING OF CHRIST IN US**  
                 A reflection by St. Cyril of Jerusalem
- Mon.**        **Monday of the First Week in Advent**  
**2**            **THE COMING OF CHRIST & THE ANTI-CHRIST**  
                 A reflection by Bishop Paschal Radbert
- Tues.**        **Memorial of St. Francis Xavier**  
**3**            **THE FRUITFULNESS OF THE GOSPEL**  
                 A reflection from a letter by St. Francis Xavier
- Wed.**        **Wednesday of the First Week in Advent**  
**4**            **LIVING THE GOSPEL IS BECOMING CHRIST**  
                 A reflection for The Advent of Salvation by Fr. Jean Danielou
- Thurs.**       **Thursday of the First Week in Advent**  
**5**            **CHRIST RECREATES & REDEEMS US**  
                 A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Fri.**        **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
**6**            **Friday of the First Week in Advent**  
                 **LONGING MIGHTILY FOR THE LORD**  
                 A reflection from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx
- Sat.**        **Memorial of St. Ambrose**  
**7**            **THE NEED FOR REPENTANCE**  
                 A reflection from a letter by St. Ambrose

## **THE COMING OF CHRIST IN US**

A reflection by St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Almost everything relating to our Lord Jesus Christ takes place in two ways. His begetting provides one example. He was begotten by the Heavenly Father before all ages, but he was also born of the Virgin Mary at the end of the ages. Again, when he comes down from heaven he first does it in obscurity but when he comes again it will be in the sight of all humankind. When he first came he was wrapped in swaddling clothes but when he comes the second time he will *“clothe himself in light as in a garment”*. First he endured the Cross and shame but soon he will come again attended by hosts of angels.

We must not let our hearts rest in Christ’s first coming. We must be full of longing for him to come again. *“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”* This is a cry appropriate for both comings. Therefore it is also a motto by which must live by passing from our faith in his first coming into exultation in his second.

When he first came Christ was judged and condemned. His second coming will bring true justice to those who were formerly his judges. *“These things you did to me and I was silent.”* That is what he will say to all when he comes again as judge. He will ask us to look at him and remember what he did among us and then he will ask us whether we have imitated him. As he loved us did we love one another?

Recall the words of the prophet Malachi: *“And suddenly the Lord whom you seek will enter his temple. Look, he is coming, the all-powerful Lord! Who can endure the day of his Coming? Who can remain standing when he appears? His coming will be that of the fire which refines ores or like the cleansing by the bleach of a fuller.”* But we need to listen to these words together with what we have heard from St. Paul: *“The grace of God, our Savior, has appeared to all humankind. It teaches us that we must not go on living without any thought of God but must renounce all evil desires and practice self-control. While we are in this world we should live devout and upright lives and wait for the fulfillment of our blessed hope of the coming of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!”*

The Creed we recite reminds us that Christ has ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Heavenly Father, and then that he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. He judges simply by asking us to compare our lives and conduct with his own and that of his apostles and holy ones. That means our task is to live so as to be prepared for his second coming. The more we think of the first coming at Bethlehem the more we must look forward to his coming again and the harder we must work to prepare ourselves for that second coming. It is an easy thing to do. Walk in Christ’s grace by loving one another, and all those in need, as Christ has loved and still loves you. This is how Christ comes in you so as to reveal himself to others. As you welcome him into your heart and soul you prepare, and help others prepare, for his coming in glory as judge.

# **THE COMING OF CHRIST & OF THE ANTI-CHRIST**

A reflection by Bishop Paschal Radbert

**“Watch, for you don’t know the day nor the hour!”** These words are directed to the entire human race, but Christ speaks them to us as to his special disciples. This is the case for many of the things we hear in Scripture. The sayings apply to all, because all will be judged on the Last Day, but we must prepare for that day personally. Think of how necessary it is that the day of our death find us in the state in which we want to present ourselves before Christ when he comes again to judge.

Everyone ought to prepare for that Day. This means that everyone ought to take great care not to be led astray. If that happens, we may forget our preparation for facing our judge and That Day may find us unprepared. Remember that the apostles weren’t misled into expecting the Lord to return in their own lifetime, and yet they took every sort of care not to be drawn away from the right path. They kept watch and they put into practice all the Master’s precepts, and they did this in such a way that they would be found ready when he comes again.

We see now the reason why we must pay careful attention to the double nature of Christ’s coming. We think of his coming again as judge on the last day, and we think of his daily coming to each person’s conscience and life. Christ comes to us now in order that his future coming may find us prepared. What good would it do me to know about the Day of Judgment if I lived so as to burden my conscience with sin? There is no profit in knowing that the Lord will come, or when the Lord will come, unless the Lord comes to establish a dwelling place in my conscience and soul, and yours!

Christ lives and speaks in me and I live in him. This is already true. I have already died to the world and can say **“The world has been crucified to me and I to the world”**. If that is already true his final coming will only bring me the greatest of presents. *But* the Lord has also warned us: **“Many will come in my name”**, and obviously they won’t be me! Only the Anti-Christ and those who belong to him will do this. In the Gospels you never find the Lord declaring: **“I am the Christ!”** He came to reveal the Heavenly Father and to teach us to live as Our Father lives.

The Anti-Christ and his members never lead us to the Heavenly Father. They don’t have the words of wisdom or of Christ. They don’t have the word of truth nor do they live the truth. Those who do the works of the Heavenly Father speak “Christ” in a voice that is louder than a thousand ordinary tongues can speak. Christ’s miracles and teaching were enough to reveal him to his first disciples. Those who shout out teachings that are neither those of the Father nor of Christ belong to the Anti-Christ. Those who do the works of love proclaim Christ in an even more attention getting way.

Who is Christ? Christ is the Father’s love giving self for others and looking only to praise God in all things. Those who have neither God-glorifying deeds nor God-praising doctrine surely do not come from God. We show we belong to Christ when we do Christ-like deeds of love and comfort and so reveal divine love. That is how one prepares for Christ’s second coming. When you come to be judged before Christ will you be like a mirror of your judge? If not you will be revealed as an anti-Christ.

## **THE FRUITFULNESS OF THE GOSPEL**

A reflection from a letter by St. Francis Xavier

I and Francis Mancias are now living among the Christians of Comorin. They are very numerous and increase largely every day. When I first came I asked them if they knew anything about our Lord Jesus Christ. But when I came to speak of the articles of faith in detail and asked them what they thought of these and what more they now believed than they had before they became Christian they could only replay that they knew they were Christian. As they cannot speak Portugese they know little of the mysteries and precepts of our holy religion.

I picked out the most intelligent and well-read among them and then sought out with the greatest diligence persons who knew both Castilian and Malabar. We held meetings for several days and by our joint efforts and with infinite difficulty we translated the Catechism into Malabar. This I learned by heart and then I began to go through all the villages of the coast, calling around me by the sound of a bell as many as I could, children and adults. I assembled them twice a day and taught them the Christian doctrine. Thus, in the space of a month the children had it well by heart. And all that time I kept telling them to go on teaching in their turn whatever they had learned, especially to their parents, family and neighbors.

Every Sunday I collect them all, men and women and children, in the church. They come with great readiness and with a great desire for instruction. Then, in the hearing of all, I begin by calling on the name of the Most Holy Trinity—Father and Son Holy Spirit—and I recite aloud the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary and the Creed, all in the language of that country. They all follow me in the same words and delight in this. Then I repeat the Creed by myself, dwelling upon each article singly. Then I ask them about each article, whether they believed it unhesitatingly. All, with a loud voice and with their hands crossed over their breasts, profess aloud that they truly believe it. I take care to make them repeat the Creed oftener than the other prayers. I tell them that those who believe all that is contained in the creed are Christians.

After the Creed I go on to the commandments, teaching them that the Christian law is contained in these ten precepts and that everyone who observes them all faithfully is a good and true Christian and is certain of eternal salvation. I teach that, on the other hand, whoever neglects a single one of them is a bad Christian and will be cast into hell unless truly repentant of the sin committed.

Converts and unbelievers alike are astonished at all this in a way that shows them the holiness of the Christian law, its perfect consistency with itself, and its agreement with reason. Then I recite the principle prayers and go back to the Creed with a short hymn. As soon as I have recited the first article I sing in their language, "*Jesus, Son of the Living God, grant us the grace to believe firmly this first article of your faith, and grant that we may we obtain this faith from you as we offer you this prayer that you yourself have taught us.*"

Thus I accustom them to ask for these graces using the ordinary prayers of the Church. I tell them at the same time that if they obtain them they will have all the other things that they can wish for in greater abundance than they know how to ask for them. I make them all, particularly those who are to be baptized, repeat the form of general confession. Last of all, I admit them, thus prepared, to baptism.

## **LIVING THE GOSPEL IS BECOMING CHRIST**

A reflection by Fr. Jean Danielou

We always live during Advent in a way that shows we are waiting for the Messiah to come. Christ has come but isn't yet fully manifested in each of us or in humankind as a whole. This means that, just as Christ was born according to the flesh in Bethlehem of Judea, so Christ must be born according to the Spirit in each of us.

The entire mystery of the spiritual life is that of Jesus being born into us forever. This means we have got to be always letting ourselves be transformed into Christ. We are to take on the dispositions of Christ's heart and the judgments of his mind. After all, the entire meaning of being a Christian is to become, little by little, transformed into Jesus Christ. This is how we truly become children of the Heavenly Father.

The only real children of this Father are those who have fully "put on" the Son. The mystery of the Christian life is that each person becomes Christ.

In the same sense, Christ hasn't yet come fully into humankind as a whole. He has come in certain Peoples but He has not come into others. There are whole stretches of humanity into whom Christ has yet to be born. The mystical Christ is not yet complete.

Christ is still incomplete, lacking members. The perfect missionary prayer is that Christ may come into the entirety of the world. We pray for Christ's Body to attain its full stature. And there you have the chief thing which must be kept in mind. Each of us must become a person whose love for God and others is expressed in disinterested zeal.

This means taking delight primarily in perfect fidelity to carrying out the mission given us in leading others to Christ. This is what Christ thirsted for.

There is a special grace of love given to us. We are servants of that love which expresses itself in doing whatever Christ would have us do. Our Lord wants his servants to be like that. Those Christ loves most, are the ones whom he can ask to do whatever he wishes.

We don't live Advent for ourselves or our own benefit. We live it for Christ and for the Heavenly Father, and for the benefit of those among whom we live. God's Providence has placed us where we are because God knows that there are people in this place who need this love, and whom our witness to that love will win. Blessed be God forever

## **CHRIST RECREATES AND REDEEMS US**

**A Reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard**

**We know that there is a triple coming of the Lord. There is his first coming and his second coming, but why do we think so little of his third coming? It is his coming between the first and the second. If you live in that intermediate coming then you will sleep in peace. The other two comings are outwardly visible but not this intermediate one. Through the first he was seen on earth and lived among ordinary people; many saw him, and as he bears witness, many hated him. In the final coming all flesh will see the salvation of our God and they shall look on him who they have pierced. But the intermediate coming is a hidden one in which souls are saved.**

**In the first coming Christ appeared among us in weakness. In the last coming Christ will appear in glory and majesty. In this intermediate one Christ doesn't appear but does come in spirit and in power. Christ opens to us a path by which we may travel from the first to the final coming. In this third coming he shows himself invisibly as our rest and consolation. That is why I have said that those who receive him now sleep in peace.**

**If anyone thinks that what we say about the intermediate coming is our own invention, let him listen to the Lord himself. He says, "*if anyone loves me that person will keep my words and my Father will love him and we shall come to him*". Now I have read in another place that "*if anyone fears God he should do good*", and that leads me to feel that there is yet more meaning to be found in the phrase about loving God and keeping God's word.**

**Where are God's words to be kept? Surely the answer is that they are to be kept in our hearts. Isaiah speaks of this. Listen: "*I treasure your words in my heart lest I sin against you*". That is where and how the word of God is kept, and "*blessed are those who keep it*". We want it to pierce the very depths of our souls and run through our affections and our conduct. Do not forget to eat your daily bread, and don't let your heart grow dry, but do come and be filled as with a banquet.**

**If you keep the word of God in this way, there can be no doubt that God, in turn, will have you in his keeping. The Son will come to you and with his Father. The Great Prophet will come who is to restore Jerusalem. He makes all things new. The effect of his coming, then, be that "*as we have born the image of the man created from dust so we shall bear the image of the man of heaven*".**

**As the sin of the Old Adam permeated the entire human race and his sin took possession of everyone, so Christ will gather to himself the whole of humankind. Those he recreates and redeems he will wholly glorify. That is the work which begins through the intermediate coming of Christ. You have sought God, but most importantly God has sought you. And God has found you. Let him permeate all you are and do and then you will be led along the way that leads to glory. Only trust in the Lord!**

## **LONGING MIGHTILY FOR THE LORD**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

**It is a beautiful thing that during Advent the Church provides an opportunity for us to hear the words of those who lived before the Lord's first coming. When we do this we recall their longing and not just their words. Nor do we celebrate this longing for only a day. We do it for quite a long time. Whenever a person is kept waiting a while to receive something greatly longed for, it seems all the more wonderful when it comes, and just because we had to wait so long. That means it is up to us to follow the example of those who have gone before us, setting our minds on fire with longing love.**

**This is one reason why the observance of the season of Advent is enjoined upon us. We are invited to consider the longing which our predecessors had for the first coming of the Lord. By their example we are to learn to long greatly for his Second Coming. We are to reflect on all the good things our Lord has done for us by his First Coming and then of the greater things he will do for us by his Second. We should love that First Coming very much but love the Second even more.**

**But what if you don't have a good enough conscience to dare to long for that Second Coming? Then you should at least fear his coming and by that fear be led to correct your faults. Even though we may not be able not to fear him now, by correcting our faults we shall at least not fear him when he comes but be confident. It is true without doubt that those who fear the day of judgment before it comes have no fear when it does come.**

**Who can not fear that day on which all are obliged to receive what we will have for all eternity? It is good to think about these things, especially when temptations arise. Everyone who chooses a life more perfect than the ordinary should try, by means of the goodness of that life, to attain a good conscience. Rather than fearing punishment such a one will long for the glory and the joy the just will have.**

**The Lord came the first time to free us from our sins. At the Second Coming the Lord will heal us of all infirmities. Indeed, by his First Coming he eradicated our sins but we still suffer great infirmities. Who can count all of them? They are of the body and of the soul.**

**We serve God with both body and soul. At his Second Coming the Lord will endow us, over and above healing, with the capacity to see God. We shall see the excellence and beauty which angels see now. If we love God now and long for God and scorn all merely worldly pleasures and honors, then we shall see him confidently. And we shall have the happiness of seeing him in that way in which he shows himself only to the good. He will take with him from judgment into the Kingdom.**

**If we want to enjoy that goodness and confidence, then let us strive to love our Lord greatly and mightily. Whom should we love so much as our Creator and Redeemer? Let us love him so much now that when we see him coming from Heaven with the angels we may have no fear but many immediately, with great longing, run to him as to our most cherished friend. Now is the time to strengthen that longing!**

## **THE NEED FOR REPENTANCE**

**A letter from St. Ambrose to Emperor Theodosius**

**The unprecedented massacre which took place in Thessalonica, something I could not prevent from taking place though I had declared that it would be most atrocious when I entered pleas against it and did this so many times. You yourself knew it was a very serious matter because you ordered it not to be done more than once. It is something that can't be overlooked. You have sinned and need to be reconciled with God!**

**Are you ashamed, O Emperor, to do what King David did, the forefather of the family of Christ according to the flesh? I don't write this to disconcert you but to use the example of kings of old to call you to remove the sin by humbling yourself before God. You are human and you have encountered temptation—so conquer it. Sin isn't removed except by tears and penance. It is God alone who can say "I am with you" if we have sinned. God doesn't forgive unless we do penance.**

**I urge you, I ask you, I beg you, I warn you—for my grief is that you who were a model of pious conduct and had reached the apex of clemency won't allow the piety to be imperiled by your guilt. You even now mourn the many guiltless people who perished. The greatest of your deeds was always your piety. The Devil envied you this, your most precious possession. Conquer him now, while you still have the means to do so by repentance. Don't add another sin to your first sin, nor continue a line of behavior which has injured so many.**

**I, among many others, am a debtor to your piety. I cannot be ungrateful. I make no charge of arrogance against you but I do have one, fear. I dare not offer the Holy Sacrifice if you intend to be present. Can that which isn't permitted when the blood of only one individual is shed, be permitted when so many persons' blood has been shed?**

**I am writing with my own hand what you alone are to read. May the Lord free me from all my anxieties on your behalf. I have learned very definitely what I may not do. I learned it not from a human source nor through such a source. In my anxiety, on the very night that I was preparing to act, you appeared in my dreams and seemed to be coming to the church, but I wasn't allowed to offer the sacrifice if you were present. I say nothing of other things I could have avoided but accepted for love of you.**

**May the Lord make all go forward tranquilly. Our God admonishes us in many ways, by heavenly signs and by the warning words of prophets. He wills that we come to understand our guilt even through the visions of sinners. So we ask Him to remove all such disturbances and to preserve the peace. You are our ruler so let the faith and the peace proper to the Church continue. It avails much if our emperors are pious Christians. We must all be examples for one another.**