

# THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

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- Sun. 8**      **The Second Sunday of Advent**  
**FACING THE FACT OF GOD'S PLAN**  
A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon. 9**      **THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN**  
**THE GIFT GOD GIVES US SHOWN IN THE VIRGIN MARY**  
A reflection taken from Mother of the Lord by Fr. Karl Rahner
- Tues. 10**      **Tuesday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent**  
**WHAT IS OUR TASK IN PREPARING FOR THE LORD?**  
A reflection from Fr. Alban Goodier's work on Jesus' ministry
- Wed. 11**      **Wednesday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent**  
**WHAT FRIGHTENS YOU ABOUT THE LORD'S CALL?**  
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**THE SIGNS OF SALVATION**  
A reflection developed from a text of Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Fri. 13**      **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
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**NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SEEKING GOD**  
A reflection taken from the St. Lucy web site
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A reflection from The Ascent of Mt. Carmel by St. John of the Cross

## **FACING THE FACT OF GOD'S PLAN**

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

The Lord Jesus began his preaching of the Gospel with the warning: "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!*" His forerunner, John the Baptist, began his preaching in the same way: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*". The warning today is the same, at least for those who have not been willing to repent. Perhaps they don't feel the urgency of the approach of the Kingdom of Heaven. Perhaps they don't experience its coming. But the Lord Jesus himself points out, "*You can't expect to see the Kingdom of Heaven coming; the Kingdom of Heaven*", he adds in another place in the Gospel, "*is within you*"!

The Lord rebuked people who wouldn't believe by pointing out that they were deliberately refusing to use a skill they already had. He reminded them that they were skillful enough at reading weather signs and could tell when good or bad weather was coming. Why were they unwilling to face the fact that God's Kingdom was coming? They had seen the signs that were John the Baptist and Jesus! What did they say?

Each of us would show one self wise if we took Jesus' warning to heart. He should be our teacher, and if we let him teach us we won't waste our present opportunity. The Savior offers us mercy right now. God continues to spare our race in spite of all the wrongs we do. Why does he spare us? He does it in hope of our conversion, our turning to him! God doesn't want anyone to be damned.

Are you concerned about the final end of our world? That is God's concern. Right now is the time for faith on our part! I don't know whether any of us will see the end of the world. Very likely none of us will. Yet the time is very near for all and each of us. Why do I say this? I say it because we are all mortal. There are all sorts of hazards. Think of how fragile a piece of beautiful glassware is. Yet it can be kept safe and if it is it can last indefinitely. It is exposed to the danger of accidents but it isn't liable to old age and the suffering that comes with it. We are going to suffer just that!

In a sense we are more fragile than glass, and besides this we are fragile, as we discover when we get sick. In our weakness we worry about all sorts of calamities that might come upon us. Maybe none has come and maybe none will come, but time marches on. However many misfortunes a person may escape or avoid they won't escape or avoid death. The day of your death will be the end of the world for you.

If you escape every illness or misfortune—if you escape all dangers from without, you can't escape those that come from your very humanity. The danger of death comes from within you even if it doesn't come from without. Suddenly we are attacked by some weakness or malady of old age. Even if we're spared, the weakness that will carry us off to God comes as the years pass. Nothing can delay it more than God's Providence has disposed.

Repent! Turn to God and let God be the center of your living and loving and hoping. The Lord Jesus has told us what we must do. We must love one another just as he has loved us. He doesn't call you to simply contemplate death's coming. He calls you to love, and to do it actively, and to find a way to make whatever you do a deed of love. That is the life of God's Kingdom and it is already springing up within you. The Kingdom is within you! Let it be your whole life and you will find life is a joy—even when you stretch out your hands to God's loving embrace at the hour of your death.

## **THE GIFT GOD GIVES SHOWN US IN THE VIRGIN MARY**

A reflection from Mother of the Lord by Fr. Karl Rahner

The Immaculate Conception means that Mary possessed grace from the very beginning. What does that fact signify? It is perhaps a question about what “sanctifying grace” is. This dry and technical term of theology makes it sound like grace is a thing. Yet having sanctifying grace doesn’t signify having a “thing”, not even a mysterious condition of soul lying beyond our world or personal experience and only believed in. Sanctifying grace means God’s very self, God’s gift of self to you and me. God is gift, first and last and always.

Grace, then, is light and love and one’s own receptive access to life as a spiritual person in the infinite reaches of the Godhead. Grace means freedom, it means strength and a promise of eternal life. It means that the influence of God’s Holy Spirit will predominate in the depths of our being, if we welcome this. It means being adopted as a child of God and given an eternal inheritance with Jesus of all that God is and has.

Mary doesn’t differ from the rest of us because she possessed these gifts. It is her possession of them right from the beginning of her existence, and her incomparable openness to them, that makes her different from us. As far as what is given is concerned, the nature and intrinsic meaning of the gift is the same. The Eternal Father couldn’t intend anything for the Mother of the Incarnate Son without intending it for us too, and giving it to us in Jesus Christ. It is given in the sacrament of justification.

For us too God eternally intended this saving grace from the beginning, from eternity. It was only actually given to us in our experience after we began our earthly life. This is to make it plain that nothing in our salvation is from us. God has eternally kept his love in readiness for us so that in the moment we call baptism he comes into the depths of our hearts. We too are redeemed, saved, marked with God’s indelible seal. We too have been made holy temples of God. In us too, the triune God dwells. We too are anointed, hallowed and filled with the light and life of God.

This means that we too have been sent by God, from the beginning, into a life that we too are to use to carry the light of faith and the flame of love into the world’s darkness. We are to carry it to the place where we belong, to the eternal radiance of God’s very self.

Are you so different from Mary who was conceived immaculately? God didn’t will the difference that exists because he loved us less. God did what he did so that through the difference between us and Mary the full richness of grace might be expressed. In Mary and her Immaculate Conception it is shown that eternal mercy envelopes all from the beginning. We are children of Adam & Eve, sinners, and God doesn’t leave us unaided. We seemed to come into existence graceless but now must proclaim the truth that we are beloved children of God not by anything we do or have or by our nature but only by the sheer grace of God. All this, all that God is and has, is given us without any merits of our own but simply because God loves us and always has. We will only understand this fully when we are with God. That is what Advent calls us to prepare for.

## **WHAT IS OUR TASK IN PREPARING FOR THE LORD?**

**A reflection taken from Fr. Alban Goodier's book on the ministry of Jesus**

**Have you ever tried to picture yourself as one of those who heard John the Baptist when he began his ministry? The world you lived in would have been dominated by an ancient tradition telling you that a great future lay before your people but gave you now good idea of what that hope would amount to. Most people, and probably you too, were dominated by the urgencies of their own daily affairs. So maybe you too were a bit self-centered, prone to angers, and living a religion that imposed many claims that didn't seem to help realize that great future, at least as far as you could tell. But no one felt authorized to lay aside the old because they couldn't separate it from the hope that all nourished in their hearts.**

**John the Baptist had come at a time when stood on the tip toes, so to speak, of expectation and were straining to see the way ahead. Many had despaired of anything really new. And here was John! He stood in the desert, by the Jordan river, at the gateway into the Promised Land, into Judea, and on the very spot tradition associated with the Prophet Elijah. It was not far from a very busy road along which the busy world had to pass in its concern for all sort of things other than God and God's Kingdom. John was a weird, uncouth, unkempt and terrible figure out of harmony with all that the road signified. He was of single mind, unflinching before social pressures, fearing no one but God and asking for nothing except total dedication to the Lord and the Lord's way of living.**

**His preaching showed that he knew his world through and through and came as its censor and perhaps terror. He was a warning. Yet he won many by his sincerity and simplicity. He told the plain truth about what is in people and he almost compelled them to admit that he was right in what he said. He had no pleasing inducements but only words that worked like a kind of lash. He threatened an end of the present order of things and a doom that awaited those who would not listen and obey God's Word as he proclaimed it. It was time to point out the difference between inward turning to God, and a turning that was really only conformity with religious and secular customs.**

**John called all, ourselves included, to become "true Israelites" in whom, to use Jesus' later words, there would be no guile or pretense. John's was a fearless voice, almost that of an angel rather than a human person. He fascinated even those who had no taste for his message. He wanted to make the Lord's path in our hearts wholly straight. The goal was to cleanse, then to baptize, then to point to a "true" way of life in the Lord. He told of one who was to come after his ministry was ended and who would lead them all the way into the Kingdom of God which was so close at hand.**

**We do not live in John's time nor can we go to the Jordan to hear his words. We have already heard the Good News of the one who came after him. He has called us to the same repentance but has presented a different picture of the Lord we seek. He doesn't call us to fear but to loving one another in the way Jesus shows us. We too have to step away from many customs and cultural usages in order to follow after the Son who comes to lead us to our God. Are you ready to accept this call and follow Jesus? What do you have to leave behind to answer that call? You have been baptized already. How are you called to walk in the newness of life that washing symbolizes? These things show you how the grace of God works in you, and in each and all of us, today. Let us walk in the way of the Lord today!**

## **WHAT FRIGHTENS YOU ABOUT THE LORD'S CALL?**

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologos

God sees that the peoples of the world are shaken by fear. God's constant effort has been to call everyone to pass through that fear and enter into love. He never ceases to invite us. His every invitation is itself a grace. Because of God's love these graces never cease. Why do we hesitate to open ourselves to this love and let our God bind us to himself, not in servitude but in friendship?

When the world had grown old in the corruption of violence God cleansed it in the waters of the Great Flood. Noah was called to be the parent of a new People living in a new age. Like a loving parent, God told Noah how to prepare to carry out his immediate task and assured him of his presence and love in the future he couldn't even imagine. He was to cooperate with God in preserving all living species. God did this by bringing them together in the one Ark. It was God's purpose that the love and care they found should dissipate the fear they felt for one another and should lead mankind to put aside the quest for subjugating all things by making their common preservation depend on a common care and even love.

Again, God called Abraham from among his own people to believe in him in a way that no others would and so become the father of believers. God went with him on a long journey and preserved him amid its dangers. God enriched him and honored him and finally made a covenant with him. Not only did he save Abraham from harm but graciously accepted the hospitality he offered as to strangers. God gave Abraham a son to carry on his work as a believer. And all these blessings of Divine Love were given Abraham so that he might learn to love God rather than simply fear and hold God in awe. He was to learn to worship in love and not only in fear and trembling.

So too, when Jacob was in flight God reassured him in a dream. He even wrestled with him and taught him a love that was beyond fear. He spoke to Moses in the loving tone of a parent and called him to become a deliverer of God's Chosen People. By means of all these deeds and signs God called into being a flame of love. He kindled this flame in human hearts, pouring out an overflowing Divine Love. Minds became enamored of God and began to desire to behold God.

But isn't it impossible to see God? Well, the law of love doesn't even consider the limits and duties and capabilities of human nature. This love is unacquainted with discretion and knows no measure and will never give us. Unless lovers achieve what they long for their love can end up destroying them. Love can't bear not to see what it longs to see. Hence it is that all the saints thought nothing of their lack of merits but simply longed to see God. Thus it is that this love, even if discretion cautions it, has a supreme zeal. What else emboldened Moses to declare: "If I have found favor in your sight, show me your face"! Don't we ourselves pray: "Show us your face!" This is what everyone has always wanted, even if they didn't realize it. Don't be afraid. God calls you to do the impossible, and will make it possible. Trust in God and never give up hope. That is our Advent task! Don't be afraid. The Lord is with you; simply trust in God! If God is with us who can succeed against us?

## **THE SIGNS OF SALVATION**

A reflection developed from a text of Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

God has given himself to the world through signs and wonders. *“In the beginning was the Word”*, “not human searching and not our efforts to go to Him worked salvation. The beginning is God who makes himself known through visible signs, accessible to a human mind and heart and searching. The fullness of self-awareness is a demand to know what God says. That means knowing what God manifests to me through the signs of divine Will.

Human persons are hearers of God’s word and find fulfillment by putting themselves and their lives totally in an attitude of listening to the word of God manifested in Jesus.

Jesus came to us through Mary and so through a person formed by Jewish cult and culture and history. But Jesus didn’t come for Jews alone and so he had to make God’s word known to Greco-Roman peoples too. If you read the opening chapters of the Gospel according to St. Luke you will see how the Jewish story of God’s incarnation was retold for a Greco-Roman audience. These people, after all, were called to share fully in God’s promise of salvation but couldn’t hear the promise if spoken only in Jewish cultural ways of speaking.

What God says to us through Mary by her role in the incarnation is so important that there have been what we call Marian apparitions all over the world. When we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe we recall one of these, and what God gave her to say to the Native American peoples. The words are in Native American language and “picture writing” and expressed using the forms of courtesy and piety of those peoples. Mary appears as one of them and builds a cultural bridge to Europe by giving St. Juan Diego, a Native American, Castilian roses for the Bishop of Mexico City. They weren’t being grown in Mexico but picked from a miraculous bush growing on Tepeyac hill. It was to persuade the bishop. Even more persuasive was the word written on Juan Diego’s tilma, the picture of Mary as a Native American.

What was asked was a church where God’s word given through Mary could be proclaimed (displayed) to Native American peoples. In many of their languages an unexpected opportunity is called “a flower of God” and in picture writing a word is painted as a flower. One doesn’t pick it but cultivates it so all may share the beauty. St. Juan Diego was chosen to cultivate the flower, God’s word saying “Mary” as the centerpiece of the small church the bishop let be built. Mary said to Juan Diego just what Jesus said to us on the cross—I am your mother, and added that she would show Native American people’s God’s love for them. She began by showing them the respect of speaking their language, wearing their clothes and using their form of writing. Mary really knew her Native American cultural anthropology!

Advent is a time dedicated to sharing the Gospel; i.e., to sharing God’s word as we have personally heard it. It is also a time for speaking of the signs and wonders God has worked for us and for our own people. We are to speak it in a language, perhaps a kind of sign language, which those with whom we share can understand in a way that penetrates to their hearts. St. Juan Diego—who had been the equivalent of a Knight in Aztec society and culture—spent the remainder of his life explaining God’s message, given through the sign of the Virgin who bears a child, to all the Native Americans who came to the little church to see God’s word and sign to them. They turned to God by the thousands. We have the same task, and who know what wonders God will work through us.

## **NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SEEKING GOD**

A reflection extracted from a St. Lucy web site

Lucy lived in Syracuse on the island of Sicily and was martyred at an unknown time during the early years of Christianity. She was one of the young women who wanted to give her entire self to God and chose the path of consecrated virginity. It was a difficult life because Christians were intermittently persecuted. And she had suitors. She wanted them to leave her alone and allow her to carry on a ministry of secretly helping Christians who had to go into hiding to escape death. One of the beautiful legends is that she dedicated herself especially to helping those who hid in the underground cemeteries called catacombs. To enable her to carry a larger load of food and other necessities she is said to have made a wreath for her head with candle holders attached. She appeared in the dark as one crowned with light when she brought help to the needy.

We are told that both Lucy and her mother had a special devotion to St. Agnes and when the mother became very ill the two of them went to spend the night at a shrine to Agnes. Sleeping over at a holy place was a common custom of the time when one had a special need for help. We are told that Agnes appeared to Lucy in her dreams and told her that her mother would be well and that she would become a martyr. What happened was that when her mother woke up and realized she had been healed she agreed to Lucy's long-standing request to give their property in order to aid the poor. This got them both denounced, seemingly by her most persistent suitor, who probably had influence with the local judge to get her released if she married him.

Since he had told Lucy her eyes were especially beautiful, Lucy willed them to him. Walking the way of a martyr to God was much more important than anything else in her eyes. She longed for "true sight" and has become patron of all those who seek to see. Because she stood so firm "in God" she was, we are told, unable to be moved from the hall of judgment to a place of execution. For this or some other reason she was killed by being tortured to death in the courtroom.

St. Lucy, who has been made the patron saint of the city of Syracuse, was a very brave person who considered her courage and firmness in love of the Lord to be God's gift and not her own achievement. Many legends about her emphasize various aspects of her trust in God. Nothing could shake that trust or the hope that was born of it. What she cared about was prayer and helping those in need. In other words, she lived out the love of God expressed in prayer by a life of charity and helping others. She considered that what happened to her and her body was of no importance in comparison with the importance of seeking God first and always. Every day of her life was dedicated to these tasks to the best of her ability. No one goes wrong following her example.

## **CHRIST IS THE WAY TO GOD**

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

Now that God has given us the Son; now that faith is firmly founded on Christ, it is not longer proper to seek special revelations or signs. In the Hebrew Scriptures we frequently find people seeking these, for example through prophets, and this was fitting and proper because at that time faith didn't have the firm foundation that it has in Christ. Nor had the law of the Gospel been revealed. It was needful for them to enquire of God and it was fitting that God should speak to them, whether by words or in visions and revelations of other sorts. They could be helped by figures and similitudes and in various other ways of impressing upon them God's meaning. All that God said to them pertained to our faith to come and to its mysteries.

What reason can there now be to enquire of God in the manner that was once so appropriate? What reason could there be for God to answer such enquiries? When God gave us the Son, God's very Word, God spoke everything to us at one time. God has no other Word than the Son. Once God has spoken this single Word there is no occasion for God to speak further.

Consider the passage in which St. Paul is trying to persuade his fellow Hebrews that they should abandon their earlier customs and ways of speaking with God. These are found in the Law of Moses and that law looks forward toward Christ. Listen: "In many and varied ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by the Son."

We are being told that God is now dumb, so to speak. God has no more to say. What was said formerly and partially to the prophets has now been spoken in its completeness in Christ. We have been given the All! This is the Son.

If a person now wanted to enquire of God, or seek a vision or revelation, that person would be acting foolishly. Such a person might even be committing an offense against God by not setting eyes and heart entirely on Christ. There is no new thing to seek besides Christ.

God might respond thus: If I have spoken all things to you in my Word, who is my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer can I make to your request now? What can I reveal to you that is greater than what I have revealed? Set your eyes and heart on Christ alone. In Christ I have spoken and revealed to you all things.

In Christ you will find yet more than you now ask and desire. I descended upon Christ with my Spirit on Mt. Tabor. I said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased! Listen to Him!" I have no more things to declare to you. If I spoke of old, it was to promise Christ. If they enquired of me their enquiries were about finding Christ. They spoke of the expectancy that they had for Christ's coming. It was in Christ that they were to find every good thing. This is now set forth in the teaching of the Evangelists and Apostles.

Do you seek to make your way to God easier? But that is a refusal to walk the way of Christ—the Way of the Cross. It is my great grace to you. Accept it and walk this way without complaining. The Cross will bring you to me!