

# THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

---

- Sun.**        **The Second Sunday of Advent**  
**6**            **FACING THE FACT OF GOD'S PLAN**  
A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon.**        **Memorial of St. Ambrose**  
**7**            **THE NEED FOR REPENTANCE**  
A reflection from a letter by St. Ambrose
- Tues.**        **THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN**  
**8**            **MARY AND ADVENT**  
A reflection by Fr Christopher O Donnell, OCARM
- Wed.**        **Wednesday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent**  
**9**            **ADVENT IS A NEW JOURNEY**  
A Sunday Angelus blessing by Pope Francis
- Thurs.**       **Thursday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent**  
**10**          **ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADVENT (Part 2)**  
from a talk by Fr Vincent Ryan OSB
- Fri.**        **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
**11**          **Friday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Advent**  
**WHAT FRIGHTENS YOU ABOUT THE LORD'S CALL?**  
A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologos
- Sat.**        **OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE**  
**12**          **THE SIGNS OF SALVATION**  
A reflection developed from a text of Journeying with the Lord  
by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Sunday

## **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?

All of us would show ourselves wise if we took Jesus’ warning to heart. He should be our teacher, and if we let him teach us we won’t waste the 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 hopes of our conversion, for our turning to him! God doesn’t want anyone to be damned.

Are you concerned about the final end of our world? Properly, that is God’s concern. Faith is our concern right now! 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. We face all sorts of hazards. Think of how fragile a piece of beautiful glassware is. Yet if it is kept safe it can last indefinitely. The point is that it is exposed to the danger of accidents but it isn’t liable to old age or the suffering that comes with it, and we are!

In a sense we are more fragile than glass. We discover how fragile we are 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 of them will, but time is marching on. No matter how many misfortunes a person may avoid or escape no one escapes or avoids death. For you, the day of your death will be the end of the world.

If you escape every illness or misfortune—all dangers from without, you can’t escape those that come from within your very humanity. The danger of death comes from within even if not from without. Suddenly one is attacked by some weakness or malady that goes with old age. Even if one is spared, the weakness that will carry one off to God comes with the passing of the years. Nothing can delay it beyond what God’s Providence disposes.

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 already springing up within you. The Kingdom is within you! Allow it be your whole life and you will find life is a joy—even at the hour of your death when you stretch out your hands to God’s loving embrace.



*Monday*

## **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 your-self 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.

*Tuesday*

## **MARY AND ADVENT**

### **A refectio n by Fr Christopher O Donnell, OCARM**

In his exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, written by Pope St Paul VI in 1974, the Holy Father invites us to take Mary as model for our Advent spirituality. We do this not only by looking to the very many references to her in the liturgy, but also by seeking to adopt her attitude. She becomes our companion as we prepare to meet the Savior who is to come.

In Advent we meet Mary as our model in being listeners to the Word. Clearly, she was always dedicated to the Scriptures. But we can only surmise the joy with which she would have gone to the synagogue in the nine months after the Annunciation to hear the Law and the Prophets read. We try to enter into what must have been in mind as she heard the ancient texts and prayers which expressed the longings of her people for the Holy One of God. How eager she must have been to learn what might be said about her Son. Mary's Sabbath attitude, her thirst for the Word of God would have continued throughout her life. Indeed, she would have taught her son Jesus the traditions of his people, and later learned from him something of the mystery of God. This image of Mary as the Sabbath Virgin is one to guide us through the days of Advent. We too must hear the Word of God with eagerness to learn God's plan, to know her Son.

A very significant moment comes on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. We can see it, in fact, as a jewel of the Advent liturgy. Modern Mariology looks at the dogmas about Mary from a double focus: it sees in them Mary's relationship to her Son. In this way the Immaculate Conception is clearly the preparation of Mary to be Mother of God. But, by this gift, she is also the model of all the Church seeks to be. There are so many rich ideas to be found in the liturgy of the day: God's choice and election, the blessedness of Mary, our need to strive to be sinless, Mary as the chosen one and advocate.

And so, as we honor the Advent Mary, we are actually celebrating the mysteries of Christ. There is no authentic devotion to Mary that is not more profoundly the worship of her Son. Advent brings us into the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation and is also a time we honor her with special love. Thus, it can be said that the Advent season in preparation for the two comings of Jesus brings together the two mysteries of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. We look forward and we celebrate what Mary has already achieved during the Advent season.

Thus, Mary is our Advent model and with her dispositions we prepare for the coming of the Lord.



*Wednesday*

## **ADVENT IS A NEW JOURNEY**

### **A Sunday Angelus blessing by Pope Francis**

We begin a new liturgical as is usual with Advent. In Advent we celebrate the fact that the Lord visits humankind. The first visit we all know occurred with the Incarnation, Jesus' birth in the cave of Bethlehem; the second takes place in the present: The Lord visits us constantly, each day, walking alongside us and being a consoling presence; in the end, there will be the third, the last visit, which we proclaim every time we recite the creed: "He will come to judge the living and the dead". Today the Lord speaks to us about the final visit, which will take place at the end of time, and he tells us where we will arrive on our journey.

It always strikes a chord, when we think of the hours which precede a great disaster: everything is calm, and people go about their usual business without realizing that their lives are going to be turned upside down.

Of course, the Gospels are not written to scare us, but to open up our horizons to another, greater dimension, one which, on the one hand puts into perspective everyday things, while at the same time making them precious, crucial. The relationship with the God-who-comes-to -visit-us gives every gesture, every move a different light, a substance, a symbolic value.

From this perspective Advent is a time for sobriety, to be not controlled by the things of the world, but rather to govern them. If, by contrast, we allow ourselves to be influenced and overpowered by these things, we cannot perceive that there is something very important: our final encounter with the Lord. And this is really important. This is encounter. And everyday matters must have this horizon, and must be directed to that horizon. It is the encounter with the Lord who comes to us. It is an invitation to be vigilant, because in not knowing when he will come, we need all the time to be ready to leave on the journey.

In this season of Advent, dear brothers and sisters, we are called to expand the horizons of our hearts, to be amazed by the life which presents itself each day with newness. In order to do this, we must learn to not depend on our own certainties, on our own established strategies, because the Advent Lord comes at a time we do not imagine. He comes to bring us into a more beautiful, and grand dimension. Let us allow ourselves to be visited by him, the awaited and welcome guest, even if it disturbs our plans. Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus

*Thursday*

## **ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADVENT (Part 2)** **from a talk by Fr Vincent Ryan OSB**

No doubt the best loved symbol of Advent and the one we are most familiar with, is the Advent wreath. Around this symbol, in church and at home, there has evolved an expressive prayer ritual. It originally began as a symbol of light, evolving from a pagan custom into a Christian practice. They took what may have been a cart wheel, wound it with greens and decorated it with lights, and offered it to God. Medieval people kept many of the symbols of fire and light as popular traditions with pagan or superstitious overtones. It was in the sixth century that the custom was Christianized, so to speak, and the Advent wreath made its appearance in homes and churches. The custom spread initially throughout Germany and was popular with Catholics and Lutherans alike. Today it is widespread throughout the world and in many Christian churches. It is the ritual of lighting an extra candle each week on the Advent wreath, that gives expression to the hope and longing of the people of the Old Covenant for a redeemer, and the gradual realization of the promises of God through the prophets and finally John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. The wreath itself, symbol of victory and glory, symbolizes the fulness of time, and the glory of his coming.

One of our modern problems is that Advent has become an extended shopping spree and we can become weary of a surfeit of Christmas carols. Let us be joyful in anticipation, certainly, but let us not pre-empt the Christmas festivity by untimely festivity. Even the best of our carols can be sung too early in the season. After all, we do not sing our Easter Alleluias on Ash Wednesday or Good Friday.

The renewal of the liturgy effected by the second Vatican Council, did not fundamentally alter the season of Advent. In what pertains to the four weeks of the season, the liturgical renewal has brought about a tremendous enrichment of the texts of the lectionary, missal and breviary. As for the spirit of Advent, we are now left in no doubt that this is a season of joyful hope, not a time of penance. For some time before the Council there was some ambiguity about this, and there was a tendency to impose a penitential discipline on the season, thus assimilating it into Lent. Some vestiges of the older observances do remain, such as the suppression of the Gloria at Sunday Mass and the wearing of purple vestments. But the Gloria is dropped in order to allow it to ring out with a new freshness at Christmas, and likewise the sobriety of color will make the white vestments appear all the more brilliant on Christmas Day. All these things help us to appreciate more the depth and beauty which is Advent.





*Friday*

## **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 merely 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, 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, all the saints thought nothing of their lack of merit 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?



*Saturday*

## **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”; it was not human searching or human effort to go to God that brought salvation. The beginning is God who through visible signs makes himself known to human minds and heart, and to those who search. The fullness of self-awareness is an awareness of the need to know what God says. That means knowing what God manifests 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 as manifested in Jesus.

Jesus came to us through Mary; i.e., 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 as well. 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 the message God gave to the Native American peoples through Mary. The words were in a Native American language and in their “picture writing” and were expressed using the forms of courtesy and piety of Native Americans. Mary appears as one of them and builds a cultural bridge between them and Europe by giving St. Juan Diego, a Native American, Castilian roses. A flower, in picture writing, is a word. The word was first for the Bishop of Mexico City because this kind of rose was native to Mexico. It was picked from a miraculous rosebush on Tepeyac hill to persuade the bishop to let a chapel be built on that hill. Even more persuasive to all was the word written on Juan Diego’s tilma, the picture of Mary as a Native American.

The chapel was a place to display that “word” to Native American peoples. In many of their languages an unexpected opportunity is called “a flower of God”. That is what Mary was for them. St. Juan Diego was chosen to cultivate the flower as the centerpiece of the chapel. Mary said to Juan Diego just what Jesus said to us all on the cross—Mary is your mother. She 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.