

# **THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT**

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- Sun.**            **Gaudete Sunday (The Third Sunday of Advent)**  
**Dec. 13**        **LEARNING TO GIVE VOICE TO THE ONE WORD**  
                      **A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine**
- Mon.**            **Memorial of St. John of the Cross**  
**14**                **HOW FAITH LEADS TO PERFECTION**
- Tues.**            **Tuesday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent**  
**15**                **BUILDING ON CHRIST**  
                      **A reflection from a sermon by Origen of Alexandria**
- Wed.**            **Wednesday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Advent**  
**16**                **ADVENT AND THE UPSIDE- DOWN WORD OF GOD**  
                      **A reflection by Fr Laurence Freeman OSB**
- Thurs.**           **Thursday, O Wisdom / “O Sapientia”**  
**17**                **BE WATCHFUL**  
                      **From Living the Gospel by Deacon Charles Paolino**
- Fri.**              **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
**18**                **Friday, the “O Lord, Adonai”**  
                      **THE NEVER ENDING COMING OF CHRIST**  
                      **A reflection from The Advent of Salvation by Fr. Jean Danielou**
- Sat.**              **Saturday, O Root of Jesse / “O Radix Jesse”**  
**19**                **ADVENT, A TIME FOR HOPE IN SUFFERING**  
                      **A sermon by Rev. Fleming Rutledge at Grace Episcopal Church,**  
                      **New York City**



Sunday

## LEARNING TO GIVE VOICE TO THE ONE WORD

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

John the Baptist described himself as a voice crying out in a wilderness. He considered himself as nothing in comparison with the Word which he proclaimed. The Lord Jesus is the Word. In the beginning was the Word who is God's Son, the eternal Word. If you took that Word away from him what could the voice that was John's mean? Something like that is true for us as well. We are sent to help others understand the Word that is in Jesus. We want the voice we use to convey this Word to enter people's hearts and set them on fire.

Think of the actual work of quickening, setting fire to, others' hearts. What happens in the process? First, I have to have the Word in my mind and heart. Then I start to look for a way to place in an other's heart what is in mine. I want the sound of my voice, my speaking, to convey the Word to you. The sound of my speaking will die away but if the Word brought to you in my words has reached your heart then it has entered you even without leaving me.

When you think of speaking that Word doesn't the very idea mean: "*He must increase and I must decrease.*" That's part of being the voice for an eternal Word. When this Word lodges in an other's heart how do I feel? "*Now my joy is complete.*" That is what I experience. This means the Word continues to quicken, enliven and set my heart on fire even as it does yours.

What has become of John and his baptism? He ministered and went away to God. Now people flock to Christ and receive his baptism. All of you believe in Christ. That means that all of you hope in Christ for salvation. That was the message you heard when Christ entered your heart.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish a word from the voice that speaks it. John was at times though to be the Word, but he knew he was only a voice. He didn't want to get in the way of people hearing that Word because of what he was or did. He said clearly, "*I am not the Christ, nor Elijah nor The Prophet.*" When he was asked who he was, granted he was none of those people, he replied, "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord!*" He has been sent to break the silence, so to speak. He sought to make himself heard so that the Word might come into people's hearts. I want him to come into your heart, but he won't come unless you too prepare the way.

What does it mean to prepare the way for the Word? It means cultivating a humble heart. John was an example of humility. When he was mistaken for the Word, he stated humbly who he was and directed attention to the need to prepare the Lord's way. When people claim to be the Christ of God they are sometimes believed. Perhaps John would have been believed. But he wouldn't do that. Instead, he humbled himself.

You see clearly where salvation is to be found. It is not yours to give. You, like John, know you can serve as a guiding light. Are you afraid, as he was, of presenting yourself as more than you are? Do you find a bit of pride in you? Then cast it out. Humble yourself so that you may be prepared for Christ to come and enter your heart and dwell there. He alone is our salvation and to him alone we must point when others seek salvation. Now perhaps you see what humility truly is. Now you see how humility opens the door to salvation.



*Monday*

## **HOW FAITH LEADS TO PERFECTION**

### **A reflection from “The Dark Night of the Soul” by St. John of the Cross**

Sometimes, beginners in the spiritual life make little of their faults. At other times they become over-concerned with them. Such people are in danger of falling into themselves. On the other hand, one may think one is a saint already and become angry and impatient with one's imperfections. This is just another imperfection. One may beg God with great yearning to take away all imperfections and faults, but not do it for God's sake but so as not to be troubled by these things and not have to see oneself as one is. To do that is to want peace rather than God. If God did take away imperfections such people would likely become proud and even presumptuous.

There are persons dislike praising others, and love to be praised. They may even seek out such praise. Those on the path to perfection proceed very differently, and with a different spirit. They long to be taught by anyone who can lead them to better things. This gives them a real tranquility and humbleness. Those who seek praise prefer always to be teaching. If another seems to teach them, they take the words from that person's mouth, so to speak, as if they already knew what they are actually just learning.

Those who are going in the right direction have no desire to be anyone's master but are rather very ready to set out any road other than their own if told to do so. They never think they are right, so they rejoice when others are praised and grieve only for not serving God as those others do.

Persons on the path to perfection will give their hearts' blood to anyone who serves God and will help them serve God in as much as in them lies. The imperfections into which they see themselves fall are accepted with humility and meekness of spirit, and with a loving fear of God. Their hope is in God. Those who begin the journey to perfection with this spirit are unfortunately few. It would be wonderful if only a few fell into the contrary errors I have described. It is for such reasons that God leads us into the dark night where those God wishes are purified from all sorts of imperfections. God does this in order to bring them farther and farther down the road to Him.



*Tuesday*

## **BUILDING ON CHRIST**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by Origen of Alexandria**

The baptism which Jesus give us is in the Holy Spirit and fire. If we want to be among the Lord's holy ones, we must allow him to baptize us in the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes you will discover what sort of person you are. If you feel as though you are being plunged into fire then you have learned you are a sinner.

Baptism always looks the same from outside. But baptism has a two-fold effect. Those who humble themselves to be converted to God, and show it by living a holy life, are saved. Those who refuse this are condemned and experience a burning like hell-fire. It makes all the difference whether one is prepared for conversion. We hear that Christ holds a winnowing fan in his hand. It is a tool that separates wheat from chaff. We long to be wheat and not chaff. Christ's call to baptism begins the work of showing us who we really are.

Why does the Lord carry a winnowing fan and where does the wind it generates come from? Let's interpret the wind as an effect of temptation. When one fail in the face of a temptation it is clear that one is not yet pure wheat. Chaff is what is blown hither and thither by the wind from the fan. If temptation blows you about and you have no stability in living the way of the Lord then you have discovered you are partly chaff. The temptation doesn't make you chaff but reveals what you were already.

We see this among the members of a local church when a persecution breaks out. Some are overcome by the fear of what they will lose if they cling to Christ and his way of life. They were attached to the things they fear to lose, and were clinging to them more strongly than to Christ and his way of life. That is why they are shaken and blown about by persecution.

Temptation is like a voice that calls us to turn to God and open ourselves to the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. When you resist temptation bravely it isn't the temptation that makes you brave, which keeps you faith and helps you stand fast patiently. Temptations disclose the stuff we are made of, what we used for foundations in build the house we call our identity. That is the house we live in.

Scripture presents the Lord saying, "I have humbled you and let you feel hunger so as to test you and let you know what was in your heart". When some desire awakens and shakes us the Lord's winnowing fan is at work. As the Lord said in his parable, when a storm comes and shakes a house and it falls down, then one realizes what sort of foundations that house was resting on. If the identity you have constructed for yourself falls to pieces when you have danger or temptation then you know it was "built on sand", as the Lord says.

Before a storm comes, before waters undermine our construction project, we have already laid foundations. We are called to build on the foundation that is Jesus Christ. We are told to build on that foundation using the bricks we call God's precepts and commandments. If you deny that any of these commands bind you then you admit, in effect, that you haven't built well; you haven't become a person who clings to the love of others above all self-concern. You were commanded to love one another as Jesus loves you. Did he run away when condemned to be crucified? He showed you that genuine love clings to God first; that is what his love has taught us. Have we built our life and identity on love because we believe that Jesus is God's Son and has come to call us to be and live as God's children? Let us pray to God that we show ourselves to be firm in loving God and Jesus and one another.

Wednesday

## **ADVENT AND THE UPSIDE- DOWN WORD OF GOD**

### **A reflection by Fr Laurence Freeman OSB**

Here at Bonnevaux, in the Northern hemisphere, Advent takes place in the Fall. Christmas arrives in the dead and dark of winter when the sun, though imperceptibly, is reborn at the solstice. The wheel turns again. The end of the Christian year, and like all ends it is also a beginning, happens while most trees are silently losing their glory, shedding their leaves. They fall one by one, like shooting stars or dying souls. The magical palette of Autumn fades into the dark silhouettes of bare trees outlined against the sky: the art of nature at its most minimalist. On the ground the leaves are everywhere, blown around by the wind or slowly decomposing in what is left of the warmth of the sun. Our Abbey cats love curling up in them.

Into all this comes the prophet Isaiah. To the untrained ear he can sound negative, full of straying, hardened hearts, divine anger, rebellion and uncleanness. However, we don't need Scripture merely to be consoled; but to allow the razor of the Word of God to slice through our mental games and arrogance. And to diagnose us. The Word of God reads us even if we think in our pride that it is only we who are reading. If we can feel this, reading because we are read, knowing because we are known, what a relief! It makes us feel better just to get a proper diagnosis, one that we can trust and that makes sense of all the symptoms we are feeling.

If we can deeply interact with this Advent Word, we will read it more insightfully and be better enlightened by it. It is also easier to interpret, for example, to see God's anger symbolically. God cannot be angry. But the inevitable consequences of our own misdeeds can indeed feel that someone's anger directed at us personally. The ecological crisis, for example, is the result of collective selfishness and sin, an impersonal punishment for the greed and desecration of nature.

Reading Scripture in this way, sometimes means that we have to reverse the role-play described in the text: for example, when Isaiah says to God "you hid your face from us and gave us up to the power of our sins". This means that we hid OUR face from God. In seeing this, the sweet mercy of the Word brings us balm. We are the clay, He is the potter. Can you feel the sense of being restored to normality by these words?

So, in Advent we stay awake with the upside-down Word as our guide.





*Thursday*

## **BE WATCHFUL**

### **From Living the Gospel by Deacon Charles Paolino LEARNING LOVE'S**

In the summer of 2016, Pope Francis had an appointment with his dentist, whose offices are within the boundaries of the Vatican State, but-Francis being Francis- he made a detour on the way back. When the Pope was done at the dentist, he told the security officer who was driving him to go to the offices of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, which was nearby but in the city of Rome, outside the confines of the Vatican. The security officer told Francis that this would be complicated because no one has been informed that Francis was leaving the Vatican, and there was a procedure in place to prepare for such a Papal visit. Francis told him in effect “I am the Pope. Don’t worry about it”.

In a few minutes, Francis was ringing the doorbell at the commission’s office, and when a stunned employee opened the door, the Pope said “Good morning. May I come in?”.

I was reminded of this incident when I began to reflect on the meaning of the Advent season. Both the visit of Francis and the Gospels of Advent feature the abrupt appearance of an authority figure, but there is a difference between the tone of some of the Gospels and the tone of the visit from Pope Francis.

In the Gospels the servants are sleeping. These stories are different from Pope Francis in mood but they are two sides of the same coin. The stories that Jesus tell us that we have responsibilities, we can’t only do that when it suits us. That’s why Jesus tells us “Be watchful. Stay awake.”. This calls us to love God, to treat other people with love and dignity, to sustain and protect the environment.

This alertness has been a constant theme of Pope Francis, who sets a high standard of moral living, but who also conspicuously goes out of his way to embrace people regardless of their religious faith or their station in life.

It is in that spirit that Francis brushes aside security and protocol, asks his own employee, “May I come in?” and then stays for coffee. So, Advent is challenging “Be watchful. Stay awake”. It is not a time that is cold or remote but rather a time when we progress on our human journey. Advent is a time to begin the journey together. Be watchful. Stay awake. May I come in?



*Friday*

## **THE NEVER ENDING COMING OF CHRIST**

**A reflection from The Advent of Salvation by Fr. Jean Danielou**

Christ is forever “the One who is to come”. The entire history of the Church, from Christ’s Ascension to the Last Judgment, is the history of Christ’s Coming—we call it the Parousia. In between his first and second coming he comes hiddenly, within us.

This means, for instance, that John the Baptist is forever going before Christ. That is because the pattern of things we behold in Christ’s incarnation is the pattern for everything that happens in the Body of Christ, Christ’s Mystical Body.

And every grace comes to us “though Mary”, because she can’t be the Mother of Christ without simultaneously being the mother of all Christ’s members! In every conversion to Christ a way has to be prepared, just as it was once prepared by John the Baptist for the apostles. This is not new. It is the teaching of the Fathers.

Origen says it nicely: “I think that the mystery of John the Baptist is still being carried out in the world. If a person is to believe in Jesus Christ the spirit and power of John must first come to that person. This is how a “perfect people” is prepared for the Lord and how the rough ways in hearts are made smooth and the crooked ways straight. Even now the spirit and power of John precede the coming of our Lord and Savior to those he chooses.”

The coming of Christ goes on without end. Christ is always the one who is to come into the world, and the Church. There is always an Advent going on. This Advent is always filled by the spirit of John the Baptist. It is John’s particular grace that he prepares the way for what is about to happen.

That is why it belongs especially to this spirit to be present in the final preparation before every spiritual unfolding. This is clear in missionary developments and in all missionary awakenings among the faithful. This is the grace that filled John the Baptist still at work.

It is not only a matter of sending out resounding calls to repentance and to conversion. There needs to be a power that the Spirit gives to this call to make people ready to actually accept Christ. Christ is coming to them, individually. It seems that one ought to feel this call in a special and pressing way.

How many people, how many places, are filled with miseries and evils that only God’s coming can end and heal! Isn’t the coming of Christ as urgent today as it was so long ago? The spirit that filled John wants to fill us. Whoever longs to see God’s face, to experience the love that reveals that face, needs to hear God’s voice calling through our voice. This is part of what it means to love one another as Christ has loved us.



*Saturday*

## **ADVENT, A TIME FOR HOPE IN SUFFERING**

**A sermon by Rev. Fleming Rutledge at Grace Episcopal Church, New York City**

Advent invites us to reflect on the anguish, pain and hopelessness that are all around us. Sometimes it almost seems as though there is more bad news going around during Advent than at any other time of the year. Because of mass media, we are more aware of the suffering of the world than at any time in history. The Advent season is designed to lead us into an ever-deeper awareness of the solidarity of all human beings in pain and darkness. No one can count themselves exempt from the distress of others. The religious community cannot stand aside in a protected spot.

As my husband was brooding over a recent horror story in the newspaper, he suddenly observed, as if out of the blue “No wonder God had to send his Son into the world”. Yes. Ultimately that is the only hope we have. But where do we see Christ in the world? Where do we discover hope that is a preeminent Advent theme? Is there any real basis for hope? We could do well to reflect on these important questions during this Advent season.

Advent is the right time for asking hard questions. Advent comes to a climax, not only on Christmas Day but also in the other feasts which immediately follow. Think in a particular way of the massacre of the Holy Innocents celebrated by the Episcopal Church only two days after the Nativity, on December 27. It is remarkable that in our liturgy we remember this sad event in the same days as we celebrate and rejoice in the birth of Christ. The great theme of Advent is hope, but it is not possible to speak of hope unless we are willing to look squarely at the overwhelming presence of evil in the world.

Advent is preeminently the season of the second coming of Christ. As long as there is pain and suffering in the world, we cannot be content with Jesus in the private heart alone. The victory of God over evil and barbarity will not be complete until the final day. We continue to look forward to the promised day when Jesus will come, not incognito as he did the first time, but in glory as the Nicene Creed puts it. Then and only then will the work of God truly be done.

It is God not human beings, who will have the last word. The tabloids with their shrieking headlines, remind us of the pain of the world in which we live. The way of the Christian community, during Advent, and indeed through every season, is not to retreat from horror into the solace of personal religion, but to proclaim Christ’s hope by involving ourselves in what one of my fellow Episcopal priests calls “strategies of Hope”, a practical ministry of service being carried out to those who feel lost and hopeless. Our Advent hope must be real and concrete.