

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT (C)

GAUDETE SUNDAY

- Sun. Gaudete Sunday (The Third Sunday of Advent)**
Dec. 12 **LEARNING TO GIVE VOICE TO THE ONE WORD**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon. Memorial of St. Lucy**
13 **THE MESSAGE OF ST. LUCY'S MARTYRDOM**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Tues. Memorial of St. John of the Cross**
14 **LISTEN TO MY BELOVED SON**
A reflection from Ascent of Mt. Carmel by St. John of the Cross
- Wed. Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent**
15 **ADVENT STRETCHES OUR HOPE**
A reflection by a Carthusian
- Thurs. Thursday of the Third Week of Advent**
16 **WHAT WE'RE WAITING FOR**
Commentary on Advent by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. Late Advent Weekday: "O Sapientia"**
17 **PREPARING THE WAY FOR CHRIST**
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Sat. Late Advent Weekday: "O Lord, Adonai"**
18 **THERE IS BUT ONE LORD AND SAVIOR**
A reflection from "On Contemplation of God" by William of St. Thierry

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

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. Every-thing 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.

Tuesday

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.

Wednesday

ADVENT STRETCHES OUR HOPE

A reflection by a Carthusian

Advent is a time for a hope totally intent upon the joy to come. We look towards the goal proposed to us by the Word of God through the grand visions of the prophets, and especially Isaiah, and Jesus. Recall when you were beginning your monastic life. You had to let yourself be taught by the Word of God about the magnificent dimensions of his promises because, of ourselves, we wouldn't dare to nurture such hopes. At the beginning of every work one must look to its end. Hope may seem insignificant next to faith and charity, and still "it is she who moves the other", as Peguy said so well. If we do not expect a great good, if we do not believe it possible, we are not capable of the effort—especially that of monastic life and its seeming ordinariness.

Confidence and joy in a hope rightly understood are very important. They give a tonality to the entire spiritual life, giving it a lightness and beauty and a radiant something that allows us to bear with everything that comes to us. This is especially important in bearing the demands and renunciations of a consecrated life, and doing so in a joyful way. St. Francis de Sales said that it is not enough to do good, one must do it cheerfully! God loves one who gives with joy. That joy is a refinement of love. This is why hope must stamp our spiritual life so it may be marked by confidence and audacity.

We believe that hope is a "supernatural virtue" whereby we confidently expect from God grace in this world and eternal glory in the world to come. What is eternal glory? It is God's self-giving and it gives to us all God is and has. God gives self as God. But God is simple. So each receives an infinite gift. This is our hope. We, minute creatures, molded from the clay of earth, bearers of a fragile breath of life, powerless, sinners—to us God, greater than the whole of creation, gives everything. What God is we cannot know. The gift must be an infinite surprise. So what am I to do? Look to Christ. The dimensions of our hope are the dimensions of Christ.

I do not hope for health, success, happiness in human terms, not even for human love. I do not even hope for a supernatural life to enjoy by myself, or even with those I love. I hope for all humankind, for all creation; I hope because of my confidence in the Word of God. I hope for a fullness of life and love which is measured only by the full stature of Jesus Christ, in whom is the whole of divinity. God is all in all and God is in Christ drawing us into the divine love.

When we recollect by plunging within ourselves, we imitate an astronomer who has to look into a telescope with eyes fixed on nothing earthly in order to gaze into the immensity of the universe. Within ourselves we find the ground of our being who is God and in finding God we open ourselves to everything! We rediscover ourselves and our brothers and sisters in the eternal love that is the ultimate truth and hope of us all. These are the dimensions of our hope, even in solitude. Listen to the words Jesus addressed to Mary and Joseph: Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I would be in my Father's House? He says the same words to us. He is always in the Father's love, and there we find Him when we love as God loves—always.

Thursday

WHAT WE'RE WAITING FOR

Commentary on Advent by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Advent is a time of waiting. What are we waiting for? Not for Christ's coming, which has already taken place, nor even for the end of the world. Rather the readings of the season tell us that Advent is a time of waiting for the "appearance of the reign of God".

We believe this dawned for us with the birth of Christ and that this dawning leads to a new world of grace. The reign of God is always unfolding before us. We are always waiting for a time of greater reconciliation and genuine peace, a time of mutual respect and cooperation. Advent is a time of waiting for this new world to appear in greater fullness. We long for such a new world because we can scarcely tolerate the one in which we live.

Ours is too often a world of violence and hatred, of dishonesty and greed where the most vulnerable are preyed upon. Isaiah invites us to cry out to God in complaint. We seldom use formal laments in public prayer, but the ancient Israelites did. They had no problem complaining to God. And why not? To whom else if not to God should we turn when there is oppression and people feel overburdened and hopeless?

Today's readings direct us to acknowledge the difficulties many find so crushing. Advent is a time to lament to God and ask God's help. The readings do not allow us to become fixated on these difficulties, however. We are invited to turn our gaze to the hope of a new future. God is pictured as a parent and an artisan, who has fashioned us in love as works of art. God is a shepherd attentive to the sheep and a vine-dresser working diligently for the health and productivity of the vines. These images are intended to assure us of our God's care and concern. Our waiting for a new world may be tedious and sometimes even discouraging, but we should not be disheartened. God is here for us!

When will the revelation of Jesus Christ take place? When will this new world arrive? When will the Day of the Lord dawn? We do not know for sure, and so we must wait patiently, but with expectation. We are to wait in joyful hope that it will come soon. What should we do while we wait? In the Gospel story the servants do not wait idly. They assume responsibility for the work of the household. Today we are responsible for the natural world, for society, seemingly overwhelming tasks.

Paul reminds us that we have all of the gifts and talents that we need to live faithfully in this world: "You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." Pregnant with expectation, we are admonished to prepare for the day of fulfillment. We wait for that day in partnership with others. In our waiting, we are vigilant for justice, compassionate toward those who lament, and, yes, forgiving of those who wrong us. We believe that we have a future worth waiting for, worth working toward. Relying on God's promises to us, we firmly believe that there is indeed a new world coming, and the one in which we now live is coming to an end. It might be right around the bend!

Friday

PREPARING THE WAY FOR CHRIST

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine

“There was a man named John, sent by God; he came as a witness to testify to the Light so that through him all might believe.” John was a voice and the Lord Jesus was the Word! John was a voice proclaiming that Word, but only for a little while. Christ is the Eternal Word. Take this word away and what becomes of the voice? A wordless voice strikes the ear, but it can't set the heart aflame; one hears a word without understanding it and that makes it empty noise.

This Word is given to us to bring our hearts alive. Suppose I am thinking of what to say to you. When I do that I have a word already in my mind and heart and what I am doing is looking for a way to speak so what is in my heart will be in yours too. I am searching for a way to convey to you what is in my heart so that my voice will communicate the meaning of the word that I have in my heart.

What I want to communicate to your heart is this: *“Jesus must increase and we must decrease!”* These words were spoken by John the Baptist, the voice sent by God to speak them for our sake. John's words point to Jesus and then his voice dies away and only Jesus is left. Thinking about this, John told his disciples, “Now my joy is complete”. When we have the Word that is Jesus in our hearts, then joy is complete. That is what we hope will happen when we speak to anyone about Jesus. If Jesus enters that person's heart our joy will be complete.

What became of John's baptism? He ministered and went away. Today, people flock to the baptism of Christ. We all now believe in Christ. We all hope to be saved in Christ. This is the message of the Word, salvation, and it was the message that the voice sought to communicate to all who heard it. His mission was to be *“a voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord!”*” What does that mean? It means living with a humble heart. As an example of humility take John. He was seemingly mistaken for Christ, but he didn't try to take advantage of this to gain some kind of glory for himself. *“I am not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor The Prophet”*. John didn't claim anything except being a voice that prepared the way for Christ.

John saw clearly where salvation is found. He knew himself as a guiding light, showing the way to salvation. He knew the fire of Spirit came from Christ and he feared lest any breath of pride from him might blow it out in someone's heart. We too share this mission, though we perhaps understand the message we proclaim more clearly than John did. But do we live with humility as great as his?

Do we speak only words, as so many do, or do our words show the way to salvation? Do we show the way to Jesus Christ, to imitating his love for God and for all people? That is how one best prepares the way! God's word to us is a call as it was to John. We are to cry out: Prepare Christ's Way! Seeing this happen can fill us with joy. Then we can share the joy God has given you!

Saturday

LETTING THE LORD BE OUR ONLY LORD

A reflection developed from "Contemplating God" by William of St. Thierry

O Lord, you alone are Lord! Since to serve you is the same as to have you save us, you are our Savior. From you come all blessings for you are the author and maker of all. Where, then, can salvation lie except in the grace you give us to enable us to love you? Surely, it was this love that caused you to send us Jesus. He is Savior, for Scripture tells us that "*he will save his people from their sins*" and adds "*there is no other name by which we may be saved*". But remember, he taught us to love by first loving us. He even embraced the cross and death upon the cross out of love for us. By loving us so completely, God arouses in us a love for the One who loved us first, and to the very end.

This is the measure of all I can say. You, Lord, loved us first so that we could be brought to love you in return. You stood in no need of our love, but you did all this simply because we would be unable to reach that perfection for which you had designed us in any other way than by loving you. O God, you spoke once through your prophets, but now have spoken to us through your Son, and through him come all the strength and order there is in the universe.

O God, to such a length and with such intensity have you loved us that you refused to spare even your only Son and delivered him up for the sake of us all. He too has loved us even to the extent of delivering himself up for our sake. This Lord, is how you and your Word, your omnipotent word, deal with us. How are we called upon to deal with you?

While all things were wrapped in silence, you plunged into our depths, which were filled with error and sin. You came down from your royal throne to make our lot easier, for we were trapped in the harsh life caused by our sin. You came to plead with us for tenderness and love toward one another. Whatever Jesus said or did during his time on earth—however much he was insulted, struck or spat upon—he remained your Word and offered us your love while stirring up within us a response of love for you.

You are our maker. How well you know that no one can be forced to love but must be drawn in freedom. Where there is constraint, freedom can find no place. Wherever freedom is excluded so too is justice. What all are "due" is love, but none can give it apart from freedom. You, Lord, are supremely just and you intended to save us, but you can't save unjustly. So you will, that we come to love you freely and so come freely to salvation.