

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

GAUDETE SUNDAY

- Sun **Gaudete Sunday (The Third Sunday of Advent)**
Dec. 11 **LEARNING TO GIVE VOICE TO THE ONE WORD**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon. **Our Lady of Guadalupe**
12 **THE MESSAGE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE**
- Tues. **Memorial of St. Lucy**
13 **THE MESSAGE OF ST. LUCY'S MARTYRDOM**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Wed. **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
- Thurs. **Thursday of the 3rd Week of Advent**
15 **THE NEVER ENDING COMING OF CHRIST**
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- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
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16 **SEEKING GOD IS BEING WITH GOD**
 A reflection from the Proslogion of St. Anselm of Canterbury
- Sat. **Saturday, Late Advent: O Wisdom**
17 **OUR CONTINUALLY SURPASSED EXPECTATIONS**
 A reflection developed from a text of Carroll Stuhlmueller

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 that 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 another'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 another'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 thought 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 yourself? 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 OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

When the Spanish came to Middle America they encountered a people preoccupied with keeping life as they knew it going. They believed there was only so much life energy in existence and that it had to be constantly recycled if there was to be new life, so they sacrificed human beings at a rate of about 20,000 a year to recycle their vital heat. All were called to give their lives to keep life going. Men dying in battle for the community and women dying in childbirth were martyrs to life.

This context helps one understand the message of Lady to Juan Diego, an Eagle Knight, one who had killed and sacrificed an enemy to preserve the life of the Aztec community. Translated from Nahuatl, the Aztec language, she said, "*I am the ever-virgin Mary, Mother of the True God, who has created life and keeps it in existence*". Notice these last words; the "true God" keeps life going without such sacrifices as had been offered. Aztec gods had sacrificed themselves but the True God has endless life and only Jesus' sacrifice is needed, that of the son of the Virgin Mary. All the people of Middle America shared the same beliefs so an entirely new era had begun for them all.

How many of us struggle and sacrifice our health and well-being trying to preserve the kind of life we have for ourselves and our children. That is success and we are taught to sacrifice ourselves for success—symbolized by playing a sport to win in spite of injuries. Our Lady of Guadalupe tells us to leave all such preoccupations in God's hands. God preserves life or takes it; our task is to help one another understand that God's love ensures that all will come to life much richer and better than anything we can create or even imagine.

She went on to tell Juan Diego, "*My dear little son, I love you and I want you to know who I am*" (as your mother who holds you close to her heart). She wants to bring us close to God's heart. The word 'heart' is most important because it symbolizes life. In human sacrifice, the still-beating heart was offered to the gods. We are to offer our hearts in another way by learning to care for others even as God cares for us. The True God shows us this through Mary's leading us to Jesus.

Juan Diego, who is now recognized as a saint, not only believed this message but dedicated his life to caring for the little church built where Mary had spoken to him and explained the meaning of the *tilma* on which she had imprinted a picture of herself as the mother of life. You see she appeared clothed in the garments proper to the personage the Aztecs thought of as the divine mother of all living beings. That was also the meaning of the flowers she gave Juan Diego to take to the bishop of Mexico City. In Aztec picture writing a flower symbolizes a word, a message. She, as the mother of the life we have in Christ, is God's message. The picture on the *tilma* spelled out the message for all the people of America. Hundreds of thousands of Native Americans were converted to Christ by this message. Are we too ready to put our lives and futures into God's hands? That is what Our Lady asks each of us.

Tuesday

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, and 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 newborn 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. Everything 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 newborn 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 so 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.

Wednesday

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 to 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 inquiry, "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, and 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.

Thursday

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 “through 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 with 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.

Friday

SEEKING GOD IS BEING WITH GOD

A reflection from the Proslogion of St. Anselm of Canterbury

Poor and needy creatures that we are, let's turn our back on our busyness for a little while and throw off the burden of our cares by placing ourselves in the presence of our God. Let's make time for God! Let's rest in God for a moment or two. It is a matter of entering into the hidden chamber that is your mind and leaving aside everyone and everything but God. Is there some way that can better help us find God than shutting the door on everything else and seeking to see God's face? Yes, you will be helped best by telling God you want to find him. Say to God, "*Lord, it is your face that I seek*". Say it with your whole heart.

O Lord, my God, come and teach my heart where and how to search for you. More, teach me where and how to find you. Yet, if you were absent and not with me how could I know where to look? But if you are present everywhere why is it that I don't see you? Of course, Scripture says you dwell in light inaccessible but that only makes us what to know where that light is and how one can draw near to it. You command us to seek you and draw near to you but then you tell us this isn't possible. You command us to seek to see you and then tell us we can't see you.

We are to seek to see your face but there are no visible signs by which we could know you if we found you. I have never seen you, Lord, and I don't know what you look like. How can I know what I seek? What am I to do. I feel like an exile in some strange land, as though I had been banished from your presence. But you call me to love you and be your servant and I am not sure what this means or involves. With burning desire I strive to see you and yet your face is so far from me. I long to come to you and am told you are inaccessible.

O Lord, you are my Lord and my God and I have never seen you so that I can know what I long for. You have made me and have remade me, and have gifted me with all the good I possess. But still, I somehow don't know you. I was created to see you, I have been taught, and I haven't yet done what I was created to do.

O Lord, how long will it be? How long, Lord, will you seem to forget me and all of us? How long will it seem that you have averted your face from us? Will you remember us and hear us? Will you give light to our eyes and show us your face and give yourself to us? Look upon us, Lord, listen to us, enlighten us and show yourself to us. Give yourself to us so that all may indeed be well with us.

Without you, nothing is well with us. Look with kind concern upon our labors and our strivings to come to you. Apart from you, we can do nothing. So we have to count on you to come to know you. You teach us to seek you and you say that you will reveal yourself to those who seek you. It seems that we can't seek you even unless you somehow reveal yourself to us. Yet indeed you inspire desire in our hearts and set us searching. You strengthen that desire and so strengthen our searching.

You inspire love in our hearts and let that love lead us toward you. Indeed, how should anyone seek you if they didn't know you at all? Indeed, the fact that we love you so much shows us that we have found you. When we love, the one we love is actually with us in that love. So you have helped us to find you! More, you have done it by filling our hearts with love for you. Our very desire crowns our love for you with your presence. Blessed be Our God forever.

Saturday

OUR CONTINUALLY SURPASSED EXPECTATIONS

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

For a long time, the Church has provided special liturgical guidance as we prepare for Christ's renewed and deepened coming into our lives. The symbol of this is what we call an "O Antiphon". Today's is the first. At Vespers Mary's song, the Magnificat, will be introduced by the words "O wisdom...". Oh, how marvelous is the wisdom of our God, because the gifts given us always surpass our expectations! In Christ, God's promise to care for us, and all God's chosen ones, is fulfilled, but it isn't exhausted! That means our expectations are always too limited to encompass God's plan of salvation.

Israel, for instance, after it passed through the political crisis which led to the creation of kingship under David and his descendants, tended to think that all there was to God's promise of salvation was economic prosperity and political-social independence under a Davidic king. Christ is a Davidic king, but not at all in the way people expected. We have accepted that, but we still can't imagine what God actually has in store for us.

Suppose we have to face a crisis like Israel's Babylonian exile; i.e., suppose the way of life we think of as leading us to God becomes impossible. What new form of life will God lead us to? We don't know; and God doesn't tell us. We have to wait upon the working of God's Providence. Our understanding of Scriptures, and of God's promises contained in them, may be correct but it is never exhaustive—we never see the whole plan of God or how it will be fulfilled.

When we prepare for the coming of Christ, we are opening our hearts wide enough to accept whatever may be in store for us. We find a reminder of what this means in the genealogies of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They contain individuals who didn't belong to the Chosen People, who were polytheists, prostitutes, blood-stained oppressors of their own people and so on and on. This is a warning that we will come into possession of the entirety of God's promises by receiving strangers and foreigners, even people with no good reputation. We will have to open our lives, and even our homes, to people we fear or distrust. If we act selfishly or treat others with indifference, fear, or by putting distance between us and them, we will lose even what we try desperately to preserve and even be driven away from what we thought were fulfillments of God's promises.

Crises like these demand that we step out of what is comfortable and into something new and even scary that comes unannounced into our lives. We are being prepared to recognize in such things God's loving hand and God's face in the people who may seem just the opposite of Jesus. But God is in all these, even as he was in and with all those generations of events and people we hear about in the Scriptural genealogies. Are you willing to let such things happen and even see them as God's will leading us to love and joy? This is what it means to welcome God's wisdom.