

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT
LATE ADVENT: The Week of “O” Antiphons WEEK
(2023-2024)

.....

Sun. Gaudete Sunday (The Third Sunday of Advent) O Wisdom / “O Sapientia”
Dec. 17 **LEARNING TO GIVE VOICE TO THE ONE WORD**
A Reflection taken from a Sermon by St. Augustine

Mon. Late Advent Monday: “O Lord, Adonai”
18 **THE NEVER ENDING COMING OF CHRIST**
A reflection from The Advent of Salvation by Fr. Jean Danielou

Tues. Late Advent Tuesday: “O Root of Jesse”
19 **HOPING AGAINST HOPE**
A Reflection developed from a text by Carroll Stuhlmueller

Wed. Late Advent Wednesday: “O Key of David”
20 **A CHRISTIAN’S COMPASSION**
A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen

Thurs. Late Advent Thursday: “O Rising Dawn”
21 **MAGNIFY THE DAWN COMING FROM ON HIGH**
A Reflection developed from St. Bede’s commentary on Luke’s Gospel

MONASTIC DESERT DAY
Fri. Late Advent Friday, “O King of Nations”
22 **RUNNING TO MEET OUR KING**
A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Sat. Late Advent Saturday: “O Emmanuel”
23 **AWAITING THE BIRTH**
From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on 23 December 2013

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 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 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 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 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 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.

Tuesday

HOPING AGAINST HOPE

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

The expression “hoping against hope” means that one goes on hoping even though ordinary ways of deciding what can be hoped for reasonably tell us there is no hope; we hope contrary to ordinary human ways of hoping! Today’s O Antiphon reminds us that this is precisely what Elizabeth and Zachariah, and Joseph and Mary, had to do. Everyone knows that women who haven’t been able to conceive before menopause don’t become able to after menopause. But that is what is promised to Zechariah and Elizabeth. Everybody also knows that the Davidic line of kings wasn’t revived and didn’t actually regain rule over Israel, yet here is a pregnant virgin who believed she would have a son who would do just that. What outlandish hopes! Are you prepared to believe that something equally impossible, but wonderfully good, will happen to our world through God’s grace working in you?

The stump of the Davidic family—and that’s all that was left of it—was going to put out a shoot that would grow into a Kingdom which, in the words of the Book of Daniel, would fill all the world. That is your actual hope! What’s more, this isn’t going to happen because God will work an obvious miracle. God is going to bring this about through people who are as unable to accomplish this wonder by their own powers as a post-menopausal woman or virgins! We are faced with a situation in which the Church has lost credibility as a guide for people’s living and hoping, and yet through us and people like us God is going to change that—but not in any way human wisdom or planning could expect or bring about.

To celebrate Christmas is to hope for this sort of thing, against all ordinary reasons for hope. We are never asked to betray our human intelligence or throw away our ancestral store of wisdom or established ways of deciding what is and isn’t prudent. God probably isn’t going to do a miracle that will overwhelm all unbelief—as he told those of his own day who kept asking for just this. But God will do amazing things through us and people like us! The miracles God works are done through ordinary people of faith. God, so to speak, hides from sight by working in and through such people.

That’s what God did in and through Jesus. He always says that it is faith that does wonders and not Jesus alone. So, we are challenged to believe and hope, and see wonders done! At some moment God will call us to do something that calls for “heroic faith”. At that moment we must simply trust in God. That’s what Mary did. That’s what Joseph did. That’s what Elizabeth did, even when her husband wouldn’t believe. “Come, Lord Jesus, flower of Jesse’s stump, and bring life where it seems dead. Come, and revive my life and faith in your presence in me and my life. Make me a sign of how one can live trusting entirely for you.” Are we willing to hope for this, even against all normal standards of where there is and isn’t hope? Isn’t that the gift God wants to give you this Christmas?

Wednesday

A CHRISTIAN'S COMPASSION

A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen

The coming of Christ is the most compassionate deed this world will ever see. It is not, however, a single deed, nor one done at only a single moment or period of history. If my words can convince you of this—you servants and siblings and joint-heirs of Christ, then while we have the opportunity let's visit Christ, care for him, feed and clothe him, give him hospitality and cherish him. How can we do this? Christ has told us. What we do to any one of Christ's brethren we do to Christ, from the moment of his birth on.

Scripture says: *"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy"*. And another reads: *"Blessed is the one who cares for the poor"*. Yet another, *"The good are moved by pity to be generous; good people are ready to lend all day long"*. Let's lay hold of these great blessings and be known for understanding, kindness and compassion.

Even nighttime shouldn't interrupt your works of mercy. We should never say, *"Come back later and I will give you something."* Good intentions are to be carried out right away. Kindness needs no second thoughts. *"Share your bread with the poor and open your door to the homeless"*; do this with goodwill. *"If you give charity give it cheerfully."* Willingness doubles the effect of good deeds.

So then, let's go about doing good in a joyful spirit, in a Christmas spirit, and not with a woeful expression. How else can one act out one's charity if one is not to be mean or suspicious? Should charity be filled with doubts or grumbling? Give as God has given to us. *"Then our light will break forth like the dawn and soon we shall grow healthy like those who are newly healed"*. Light and healing are what all long for and are gifts Christ brings. Using them is the only way to accept them!

We don't feed Christ with a single meal, as Pharisees sometimes did. We don't give him perfumes like Mary. We don't provide him with a new and unused tomb like Joseph of Arimathea. We don't give him burial spices like Nicodemus. Nor are we asked to produce the gold, incense and myrrh that the Eastern sages brought to Bethlehem. The Lord of nations asks for mercy rather than sacrifice.

Scripture tells us that pity is worth more than any holocaust of fattened lambs. We offer Christ our compassion by caring for him in the destitute and the marginalized. We don't cling to anything of this world; we look in hope to eternity and to being with the Lord, our Christ, forever. That is the fulfillment of the mercy that we celebrate as Christmas. Let's live being merciful as Christ is.

Thursday

MAGNIFY THE DAWN WHO COMES FROM ON HIGH

A Reflection developed from St. Bede's Commentary on Luke's Gospel

"My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior!" The Lord, Mary tells us, has honored her with a unique and sublime task. Even the love one bears for the Lord is of little help in understanding what is asked, of her and of us. We must, then, do what Mary did. We must continually praise and thank our God with all our heart, using all our powers of discernment in contemplating the greatness of the One who had come to us from on high, come bringing light to the entire world and beginning the new and final day of creation. Gladly will we join Mary in being God's servant. To us has been given a Savior, Jesus. He will be the fruit of our lives as he was the fruit of Mary's womb.

"The Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name." Only one for whom God has done great things can magnify God in a worthy way. That is why Mary invited us to join our praise to her praise. Here we see that one who knows who God is and has such esteem for God as to proclaim God's greatness to the very best of one's ability will enter the Kingdom of God. But such a one wants to enter the Kingdom as the least.

God has come to the help of Israel, his servant, and it is not any one of us who has brought that about. It is done by the Son, born for us in Jesus, the Christ. Who are we in comparison? Mary speaks of herself as the slave of the Lord, and says this happily and in gratitude. It is, after all, from the Lord that we receive our obedient and humble savior, and it is from him that we learn obedience and humility. If one has no regard for humility then one is quite beyond redemption. We couldn't say, with the prophet that God is my helper who upholds my life; I humble myself and become like a little child. One who says this in truth shall be the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In magnifying the Lord, Mary speaks most properly of her spiritual rather than of her physical descent from Abraham. All those can share in her praise and so give thanks—whether Abraham's physical descendants or not, have inherited the faith of Abraham. It was his faith that justifies and it is our faith that makes us Abraham's co-inheritors. This was why the promise of a future savior was made to Abraham and his descendants.

The Lord's mother, together with John the Baptist's mother, bore eloquent witness to what is in store for us. All good things come to pass through their obedience, just as through disobedience all bad things came about. Now it is through a faith like Mary's that life comes to the world. Rejoice in the Lord Jesus, who has risen for us like the dawn of a new day and its new light! Receive this gift and become a lampstand to give light to all those you encounter. Show them the gift of praise and gratitude and humble service you have received and live in imitation of Mary and of her Son. Let the light of Christ shine through you to bring joy to the world.

Friday

RUNNING TO MEET OUR KING

A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Our king and savior is coming! Let's run to meet him! Good news coming from a far country is like cold water to a thirsty person! One who announces the coming of our Savior and the reconciliation of the world, together with all the good things of the life to come, indeed brings good news. Such a messenger bears refreshment for all who thirst for God. We have joyfully been offered water from the springs of salvation. "Why is this granted to me, that my Lord should come to me?"

So let's arise with joy and run in spirit to meet our Savior. Hailing him from afar, let's worship him and say: "We have waited for you, Lord, be our stronghold, our salvation in time of trouble!" We must look forward to the day of Christ's birth. Scripture itself insists that joy must fill us as we strain forward for his coming, impatient of delay to see what the future holds in store. As we believe that our bodies will rise up rejoicing at his second coming so our hearts must run forward to greet his first.

Between these two comings, the Lord frequently visits us individually, in accordance with our desires and our merits. He forms us to the likeness of his first coming in the flesh and so prepares us for his return at the end of time. He comes to us now to make sure that we don't lose the fruits of his first coming nor incur wrath at his second. Christ's purpose now is to convert our pride into the humility that he showed when he first came. We are to let ourselves be refashioned in our lowliness into the likeness of the glory shown in his glorified body. This he will manifest when he comes again.

My brothers and sisters, though we haven't yet experienced the wonderful consolation of his comings we are encouraged by firm faith and a conscience made pure to wait patiently for the Lord to come again. With joy and confidence, we can say with St. Paul: "I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until That Day what has been entrusted to me". He will do this until "the appearing of the glory of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Saturday

AWAITING THE BIRTH

From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on 23 December 2013

In his homily at Holy Mass on 23 December, Pope Francis commented on the simple yet profound prayer found on the Church's lips in these days leading up to Christmas: "Come, Lord!". "In this final week before Christmas", the Pope said, "the Church repeats the prayer, 'Come, Lord!' and she calls out to the Lord with various and different names: O Wisdom, O Root of Jesse, O Dayspring, O King of the Nations, and today, O Emmanuel".

The Church calls out to the Lord in this way, the Pope explained, because "she is awaiting a birth". "This week the Church is like Mary: she is awaiting a birth". The Virgin, he said, "sensed within herself, in body and in soul", that the birth of her child was near. And he added: "Surely in her heart, she said to the baby she was carrying in her womb: 'Come, I want to see your face, for they have told me you will be great!'".

This Church lives this spiritually, Pope Francis continued, for "we accompany Our Lady in this journey of waiting" and "we too wish to hasten the Lord's birth". This, the Pontiff said, is the reason for the Church's prayer: "Come, O Key of David, O Dayspring, O Wisdom, O Emmanuel". This invocation, he said, recalls the final words in the Sacred Scripture; in the last lines of the Book of Revelation, the Church cries out: "Come, Lord Jesus", Maranatha, which "may indicate a desire or a certainty: the Lord is coming".

In fact, Pope Francis continued, "the Lord comes twice". His first coming is "what we are about to commemorate, his physical birth". Then, "he will come at the end of time, at the close of history". However, the Pontiff added, "St Bernard tells us that there is a third coming of the Lord: his coming to us each day: each day, the Lord visits his Church. He visits each one of us. And our soul also enters into this likeness: our soul comes to resemble the Church; our soul comes to resemble Mary". Here Pope Francis recalled that "the Desert Fathers say that Mary, the Church and the soul are all feminine". Hence what is said of one may analogously be said of the others.

Therefore, the Pope continued, "Our souls are waiting in anticipation for the coming of the Lord, open souls calling out: Come, Lord!". Over the course of these days, he said, the Holy Spirit moves in the heart of each one of us, forming this prayer within us: "Come, come!". Throughout the Advent Season, the Church keeps watch like Mary. And "watching is the virtue, the attitude, of pilgrims. We are pilgrims. Are we watching or are we closed? Are we vigilant or are we safe and secure in an inn, no longer wanting to continue on? Are we pilgrims or are we wandering?"

That is why the Church invites us to pray "come!" and to "open our souls in watchfulness". We are invited to perceive and understand "what is happening within us", to ask "if the Lord comes or does not come; if there is room for the Lord, or if there is room for celebration, for shopping, for making noise". This examination of conscience, he said, should lead us to ask ourselves: "Are our souls open, as the soul of Holy Mother Church is open, and as Mary's soul was open? Or have we closed our souls and put a highly erudite note on the door saying: please do not disturb?"

"The world does not end with us" and "we are not more important than the world". Therefore, "with Our Lady and the Church we would do well today to call out: O Wisdom, O Key of David, O King of the Nations, Come, Come!" and, he added, "we would do well to repeat it many times". It is a prayer, he said, that allows us to examine if our soul communicates to others that it does not wish to be disturbed, or if instead, it is "an open soul, a great soul ready to receive the Lord". A soul, the Pope concluded, "that already feels what the Church will tell us tomorrow in the Antiphon: Know that today the Lord comes and tomorrow you shall behold his glory".