

THE THIRD WEEK IN ADVENT (C)

GAUDETE SUNDAY

15-21 December 2024

- Sun. Gaudete Sunday (The Third Sunday in Advent)
Dec. 15 **LEARNING TO GIVE VOICE TO THE ONE WORD**
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- Mon. Monday of the Third Week in Advent
16 **ADVENT STRETCHES OUR HOPE**
A Reflection by a Carthusian
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17 **“O SAPIENTIA” / “O WISDOM”**
From the Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, Thursday, 17 December 2009
- Wed. Late Advent Weekday: “O Adonai” (O Lord)
18 **LETTING THE LORD BE OUR ONLY LORD**
A Reflection from “On Contemplation of God” by William of St. Thierry
- Thurs. Late Advent: “O Radix Jesse” (O Root of Jesse)
19 **HOPING AGAINST HOPE**
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- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. Late Advent Weekday: “O Clavis David” (O Key of David)
20 **THE KEY THAT OPENS OUR EYES TO SEE GOD**
A Reflection from “Against Heresies” by St. Irenaeus of Lyon
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21 **MAGNIFY THE DAWN COMING FROM ON HIGH**
A Reflection from St. Bede’s Commentary on Luke’s Gospel

Sunday

LEARNING TO GIVE VOICE TO THE ONE WORD

A Reflection 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 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 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

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, give 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, or 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 statue 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.

Tuesday

“O SAPIENTIA” / “O WISDOM”

From the Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, Thursday, 17 December 2009

Today, at Vespers, we will be singing the first of the "Greater Antiphons":

"O Wisdom from the mouth of the Most High,
you fill the whole world.

With strength and gentleness, you order all things:

come to teach us the way of prudence" (*Liturgy of the Hours, Vespers of 17 December*).

This wonderful invocation is addressed to "Wisdom", the central figure in the Books of Proverbs, Wisdom and Sirach. These are in fact called the "Sapiential" Books, and in them, the Christian tradition discerns a prefiguration of Christ. This invocation becomes truly stimulating and even provocative when we find ourselves before the Nativity scene that is, before the paradox of a Wisdom that "from the mouth of the Most High" comes to lie in swaddling cloths in a manger (cf. Luke 2: 7, 12, 16).

The One born in Bethlehem is the Wisdom of God. St Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, uses the phrase: "a hidden wisdom of God" (1 Cor 2: 7): in other words, a divine plan, which has long been kept hidden and that God himself has revealed in the history of salvation. In the fullness of time, this Wisdom took on a human Face, the Face of Jesus, who as recited in the Apostle's Creed "was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...". The Christian paradox consists precisely in the identification of divine Wisdom, that is the eternal *Logos*, with the man Jesus of Nazareth and with his story. A solution to this paradox cannot be found if not in the word "Love", which naturally, in this case, is written with a capital "L", in reference to a Love that infinitely exceeds human and historical dimensions. Therefore, the Wisdom that we invoke this evening is the Son of God, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. It is the Word who, as we read in John's prologue, "was in the beginning with God", or rather, "was God": who with the Father and the Holy Spirit created all things and who "became flesh" to reveal the God whom no one can ever see (cf. Jn 1: 2-3, 14, 18).

Without Wisdom not anything was made that was made (cf. Jn 1: 3) and therefore in every created reality one can see Wisdom reflected, clearly visible in different ways and degrees. Everything understood by human intelligence can be grasped because in some sense and to a certain extent it participates in creative Wisdom. Herein lies, in the last analysis, the very potential of study, of research, of scientific dialogue in every field of knowledge.

Let us ask ourselves: who was present on Christmas night at the grotto in Bethlehem? Who welcomed Wisdom when he was born? Who hurried to see him, to recognize him and adore him? They were not doctors of law, scribes, or sages. There were Mary and Joseph, and then the shepherds. What does this mean? Jesus was one day to say: "Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Mt 11: 26); you revealed your mystery to the little ones (cf. Mt 11: 25). But then is there no use in studying? Or is it even harmful counterproductive in understanding the truth? The two-thousand-year-old history of Christianity excludes the latter hypothesis, and suggests to us the correct one: studying entails deepening one's knowledge while maintaining a spirit similar to the "little ones", an ever humble and simple spirit, like that of Mary, the "Seat of Wisdom". How often have we been afraid to draw near to the Grotto in Bethlehem for fear that doing so would be an obstacle to our critical sense and to our "modernity"! Rather, in that Grotto, each of us can discover the truth about God and about humanity, about ourselves. In that Child, born of the Virgin, the two came together: mankind's longing for eternal life softened the heart of God, who was not ashamed to assume the human condition.

Wednesday

LETTING THE LORD BE OUR ONLY LORD

A Reflection from “On Contemplation of 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 do 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.

Indeed, only in loving you could we find salvation in accord with justice. But we couldn’t love you until you made it possible by loving us. As your beloved Paul says and we repeat, God has first loved us! Indeed, you have to first love anyone who would turn to you in love. So it is that we love you, and by the very love you implanted in our hearts. How do we know this? By knowing you are our only Lord, and in you finding the fullness of pardon and love and joy. Grant we may never cease to thank and glorify you!

Thursday

HOPING AGAINST HOPE

A Reflection from a Text by 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 who don’t have sex are able to get pregnant! 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?

Friday

THE KEY THAT OPENS OUR EYES TO SEE GOD

A Reflection from “Against Heresies” by St. Irenaeus of Lyon

There is one God. This God, by a divine Word and divine Wisdom, made all things. This God set all things in order. The Word by which God did this is Our Lord, Jesus Christ. In these “last days” the Only Son became human, and one of us, with the goal of uniting the beginning, God, with the end, the last of God’s creations, humankind.

The prophets received the gift of speaking God’s word so that they could foretell the coming of that Word, and through him the union and communion of God and humankind. It was the Heavenly Father’s will to do this. From the beginning, it had been prophesied that human beings would “see” God. Not only would we see God but God would live with them on earth and talk with them.

God was to be with humankind for our salvation. Making himself known to us, we would find ourselves freed from the hands of all who hate us; i.e., from every evil spirit. We would become able to serve God in holiness and righteousness all our days. This would be brought about through the reception of God’s Spirit, who would bring us to the glory of the Heavenly Father.

The accomplishment of this divine design, as proclaimed by the prophets, would make it possible for mankind to see God. This promise is echoed by our Lord: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”. Yet hadn’t God said to Moses, “No one shall see God and live”? The Heavenly Father is inexpressible in glory and incomprehensible. In love and gentleness, God grants even this—to those who love him.

God can do all things! We are allowed to see God, even as the prophets had foretold. “For what is impossible for human beings is possible for God!” Of course, no human being can see God by merely human powers. But if it is God’s will that human beings see God then it is possible. Of course, it is accomplished as God wills and when God wills.

It begins when God reveals something of himself through prophecy. Then more is revealed through the Son. We are now “sons” by adoption, and so share what the Son promises us through the Heavenly Father’s will. The process is completed in the Kingdom of Heaven. There God will show us the divine being as it is and so show us our Heavenly Father. Eternal life comes to all in thus “seeing” God.

Just as those who see the light are within it, bathed in its brightness, so those who see God are within God and bathed in God’s glory. To share that glory is to “see” God. That makes seeing God the entrance into life. The Spirit prepares us for the Son and the Son leads us to the Heavenly Father. The Father frees us from all change and decay and thus leads us into the very divine being. But keep it clearly in mind that the key to receiving this gift is receiving the Son. That is why we welcome Our Lord Jesus Christ with such gratitude and joy!

Saturday

MAGNIFY THE DAWN WHO COMES FROM ON HIGH

A Reflection 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 come 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 serve 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.