

**THE FIRST WEEK IN ADVENT
BEGINNING THE 2025 LITURGICAL YEAR
1-7 December 2024**

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Sunday

CHRIST'S COMING NOW

A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Bernard

It is certainly important that we celebrate our Lord's Coming with all our hearts. We should be filled with joy because of the marvelous consolation that Advent brings us. Aren't you amazed by the depth of Christ's self-abasement and the greatness of the love Christ shows us in this way? When we seriously reflect on that love, we must be stirred to new fervor.

Of course, we mustn't think only of Christ's first coming. That was when he came to seek and save all who were lost. We must keep constantly in mind Christ's Second Coming, especially because he will then take us to be forever with him. It is very important that we keep both of these comings in mind. They provide much to meditate on, turning over in our minds and hearts all Christ has done for us already and all that Christ promises to do for us at the Second Coming. But notice equally all that is happening within us now is yet another coming of our Lord.

Judgment has already begun. The Prince of this World, as Scripture tells us, has been cast out, but not only cast out of Heaven; he is being cast out of our hearts and minds. Judgment has begun for us too, for if we fail to obey the Gospel now, we pass judgment upon ourselves. What judgment will be reserved for those who can't stand firm in the judgment taking place at every moment? Don't you want to cast Satan out? Do you want yourself to be cast out with him? People can evade judgment now but no one can evade the final one when Christ comes at the end of this world.

If we constantly hold ourselves to account before the judgment of Christ's Gospel words, if we constantly accept our responsibility for loving Christ and one another. Then we are fully judged right now and may safely wait for the Savior's Second Coming. That will involve our Lord Jesus' changing our humble bodies so they are like his glorious body. Then we will shine forth with all the just and all, both the learned and the simple, will see what God has done in us. We will be forever in the Heavenly Father's Kingdom.

The Lord has called to us: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart". This humility is twofold. There is an intellectual humility and there is a humility of heart. By the first, we recognize that we are nothing, and we can learn this much from our own weakness. There is also humility that enables us to trample underfoot all the glory of this world in as much as it leads away from God. We learn this from the Son, who emptied himself and took on a servant's form and life. He even fled when people wanted him to be their king. Notice that he didn't flee the ignominy of the Cross. He sought nothing for himself, but only for us, and for all. What do we seek in our judgment? We seek to stand with Christ as he comes this very day. Then we will have only joyful anticipation as we hope for his final coming on the Last Day.

Monday

ESCHATOLOGY REALIZED IN US

A Reflection by St. Cyril of Alexandria

Listen to the prophet Isaiah: "In days to come, the mountain of the Lord and the House of the Lord will be higher than any mountain and lifted above all hills; all the nations shall come to it". In many ways, we have seen this prophecy being fulfilled. The Only Begotten Word of God has become visible, made flesh, and born of a woman, and by his word, he has already gathered many peoples and nations to God and to the Church. Even Jerusalem has become a place of pilgrimage for people from all parts of the world.

On the other hand, we know that the Church is to be presented to Christ and to God as a virgin, pure, and wise and without any stain of sin on her. She is to be a bride who is holy and immaculate. Scripture says this too. Listen again to Isaiah: "All the nations will stream to God's House and many peoples shall say, Let's go up the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, so that the Lord may teach us his ways and we may walk in God's paths". They need to learn God's ways.

There is no need to describe the coming of nations and peoples. The Church holds one faith and unites all human beings in that faith. This is the simple truth and we can witness it happening as much as we like. These people were called by God's grace. It brings all together into, as it were, one house. It enlightens them with the understanding of how to please God and fills them with a desire to please God and find salvation through Jesus Christ. Think of the fact that God called them from injustice and from people's struggles to take what others have for themselves. People resort to every sort of violence and all sorts of evil passions drive them. These evils have to be removed from them if they are to be one with the Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father.

All must learn the way of the Lord and renounce their past evil ways. Until a person has done this it is impossible to walk in the way of the Lord. This means that all must be brought to believe that there actually is a better way to live than in the greed and oppression and violence that fills the lives of those who don't know the Lord Jesus and haven't learned to love others as He loves them. How can we help others recognize God's truth as a better way? How can we help them know, by experience, the love that enables one to hold old ways in contempt and hurry to learn the new way that is the Lord's?

The prophet Isaiah says: "To God of power and might, ruler and Lord, will judge among the nations". That means he will teach them justice and right judgment and will exercise justice and judgment upon them according to their response to his teachings. Then justice and right judgment from God can prevail. Under the rule of Christ, who is peace, all discord, and quarreling and war and greed cease. All injuries due to the former evil conduct will be healed and the "peace" (Shalom) of Christ will prevail. Recall the Lord's words: "My peace I give you, my peace I leave you". This has already begun. God is leading us toward fullness. Let us follow him by doing justice and showing mercy each day. Then we are preparing the way for Christ's final coming and for the everlasting joy that is God's Kingdom.

Tuesday

BECOMING LIKE ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

A Reflection from a Homily by St. Pope John XXIII

When we think of a missionary what sort of pictures fill our minds? We think of people who in effect give up the way of life they have been living, one which may have cost them a great deal of effort and many trials to create. They don't think first of what they give up, but of the opportunity, they are being given to testify to God's living love in Jesus Christ as shown to all in the Gospels. This is what makes a person holy and even a saint. Think of St. Francis Xavier, whom we celebrate and remember today. Think of his never-ending prayer for us who are struggling to live out our own call to be a witness to the Gospel love given us in Christ. Can we cease to care for all those who still haven't given God and Christ the gift of themselves and their life?

What we are called to do is to make ourselves a protector, a stronghold to which others can turn when overwhelmed, a shelter in all sorts of difficulties and dangers, support when another falters, one to pick up others when they fall! There is so much we can do to witness Gospel love concretely. How can we find the strength? We ourselves have to turn to Christ and find in him strength, consolation, comfort and whatever is needed to crown our own efforts with victory—whether we see it visibly or not. To follow Christ as a missionary is to let Christ work all these wonderful things in you.

When missionaries are sent out officially, they are usually given a crucifix. This is a symbol of the reality of the Cross that will be an ever more prominent part of their life. When we think of people like St. Francis Xavier we think of heroism. But that wasn't what he thought of. He thought only of denying himself anything that would get in the way of spreading the love and peace of Christ. That was the comfort that strengthened him in doing what seems to us heroic. The Cross is not just pain. It is comfort, guidance, light, and strength; it is all one needs in order to glorify God's name, wherever you happen to find yourself. You want the blessings of Christ to be available to all everywhere. That is why God has placed you where you are. You don't need a new mission.

How many in mission lands, even during their lifetimes, thought of Francis Xavier as one to whom they owed great thanks? He led them to the One Redeemer. He led them to a new hope and to the fulfillment of that hope. We like to think that we too have done good things for others and brought some small blessings into their lives. But we know that is true just to the extent that we have witnessed to God and to God's Christ and to his divine love become human love given to all who came to him. Now we are to go into the world we live in and share our lives and selves. The gift is one we too give—without us it wouldn't come to those we touch. That is a missionary's blessing. You are called to give and receive that blessing. The great missionaries of Christian history remind us of this, now and always. Accept the gift and its blessing.

Wednesday

MY HEART IS MOVED WITH PITY FOR THE CROWD (Mt15:32) **From the Message of Pope Benedict XVI in 2006**

(We are on) a pilgrimage in which Christ Himself accompanies us through the desert of our poverty, sustaining us on our way towards the intense joy of Easter. Even in the “valley of darkness” of which the Psalmist speaks (Ps 23:4), while the tempter prompts us to despair or to place a vain hope in the work of our own hands, God is there to guard us and sustain us. Yes, even today the Lord hears the cry of the multitudes longing for joy, peace, and love. As in every age, they feel abandoned. Yet, even in the desolation of misery, loneliness, violence and hunger that indiscriminately afflict children, adults, and the elderly, God does not allow darkness to prevail. In fact, in the words of my beloved Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, there is a “divine limit imposed upon evil”, namely, mercy (*Memory and Identity*, pp. 19ff.).

In this light, I would like to pause and reflect upon an issue much debated today: the question of development. Even now, the compassionate “gaze” of Christ continues to fall upon individuals and peoples. He watches them, knowing that the divine “plan” includes their call to salvation. Jesus knows the perils that put this plan at risk, and He is moved with pity for the crowds. He chooses to defend them from the wolves even at the cost of His own life. The gaze of Jesus embraces individuals and multitudes, and he brings them all before the Father, offering Himself as a sacrifice of expiation.

Enlightened by this Paschal truth, the Church knows that if we are to promote development in its fullness, our own “gaze” upon mankind has to be measured against that of Christ. In fact, it is quite impossible to separate the response to people’s material and social needs from the fulfillment of the profound desires of their hearts. This has to be emphasized all the more in today’s rapidly changing world, in which our responsibility towards the poor emerges with ever greater clarity and urgency. My venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, accurately described the scandal of underdevelopment as an outrage against humanity. In this sense, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, he denounced “the lack of material necessities for those who are without the minimum essential for life, the moral deficiencies of those who are mutilated by selfishness” and “oppressive social structures, whether due to the abuses of ownership or to the abuses of power, to the exploitation of workers or to unjust transactions” (*ibid.*, 21). As the antidote to such evil, Paul VI suggested not only “increased esteem for the dignity of others, the turning towards the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace”, but also “the acknowledgment by man of supreme values, and of God, their source and their finality” (*ibid.*). In this vein, the Pope went on to propose that, finally and above all, there is “faith, a gift of God accepted by the good will of man, and unity in the charity of Christ” (*ibid.*). Thus, the “gaze” of Christ upon the crowd impels us to affirm the true content of this “complete humanism” that, according to Paul VI, consists in the “fully-rounded development of the whole man and of all men” (*ibid.*, 42). For this reason, the primary contribution that the Church offers to the development of mankind and people does not consist merely in material means or technical solutions. Rather, it involves the proclamation of the truth of Christ, Who educates consciences and teaches the authentic dignity of the person and of work; it means the promotion of a culture that truly responds to all the questions of humanity.

Thursday

PUTTING ON CHRIST

A Reflection developed from a Homily by St. Gregory Nazianzen

The Word of God existed from all eternity as invisible, incomprehensible, incorporeal, the beginning from the Beginning, light from Light, and the source of all life and immortality. The Son is the impress of the Divine Archetype, the Permanent Seal and Perfect Image of the Heavenly Father. For us, the Son is the revelation of the Father, the very Word of God. What do you think, then, when you are told that the Son clothes himself in a human body with a human soul and does this for the sake of my body and soul? What do you think when you are told that the Son now wishes to cloth himself in your body and soul, with you?

God calls you to freely accept being another Christ. The Son became one of us in Jesus the Christ. He did this in order to cleanse us, just as he had purified the Virgin in advance of becoming her child. He who is God, comes forth with his humanity as a single being formed of two natures, bestowing divine nature and receiving a human nature. In yet another way God becomes one with us by giving us too the divine nature. It is not done in the same way as in Christ Jesus, but it is done truly and really. He who would enrich you endlessly becomes poor in you, and as poor and wretched as you are. He who is fullness empties himself of the fullness that you may share in his plenitude. How can we explain this wealth of divine goodness? Can we understand this mystery and preserve our participation in it?

Human kind is sanctified by the humanity taken by God. This overpowers all the strength of mankind's enemy and frees us. Freed, we are led back to God in a way endlessly richer than what we had by creation. The Son shows us obedience to God in all things and so shows us the way to complete union with God through his mediation. All of this happens as we walk, hour by hour and day by day, in Christ. How can this happen freely, as God wills it to happen, if we do not learn to think of ourselves as being Christ enfleshed in us?

When you do an act of love do you realize that Christ is doing it in and with and through you? When you think of yourself do you reflect that you are Christ, not simply for yourself but for others? Christ becomes you, leading you to share in his works of love; thus, God's salvation comes to those you meet and touch by your words and deeds of love

Humankind is sanctified by the humanity of God. This was ordained by the Heavenly Father. It is God's intention to overpower every foe by the force of this love and through the mediation of the Son, continue through the Son living in you. But this involves leading you, and all, back to the Heavenly Father, even as prodigals or as lost sheep. The Good Shepherd lays down his own life for the flock. Jesus seeks the straying, lifts them to his shoulders, the same ones that bore the wood of the Cross, and carries them all the way to heaven.

God decreed that He would become human and be put to death in order to give life to us all. We have been put to death with Christ in order to be purified. Since we have died and been raised with Him, we are also to have a share in the same Glory. What a wonderful gift we are given to live each day of our lives.

Friday

THE COMING OF CHRIST AND OF THE ANTI-CHRIST

A Reflection by Bishop Paschal Radbert

“Watch, for you don’t know the day nor the hour!” These words are directed to the entire human race, but Christ speaks them to us as to his special disciples. This is the case for many of the things we hear in Scripture. The sayings apply to all, because all will be judged on the Last Day, but we must prepare for that day personally. Think of how necessary it is that the day of our death find us in the state in which we want to present ourselves before Christ when he comes again to judge.

Everyone ought to prepare for that Day. This means that everyone ought to take great care not to be led astray. If that happens, we may forget our preparation for facing our judge and That Day may find us unprepared. Remember that the apostles weren’t misled into expecting the Lord to return in their own lifetime, and yet they took every sort of care not to be drawn away from the right path. They kept watch and they put into practice all the Master’s precepts, and they did this in such a way that they would be found ready when he comes again.

We see now the reason why we must pay careful attention to the double nature of Christ’s coming. We think of his coming again as judge on the last day, and we think of his daily coming to each person’s conscience and life. Christ comes to us now in order that his future coming may find us prepared. What good would it do me to know about the Day of Judgment if I lived so as to burden my conscience with sin? There is no profit in knowing that the Lord will come, or when the Lord will come, unless the Lord comes to establish a dwelling place in my conscience and soul, and yours!

Christ lives and speaks in me and I live in him. This is already true. I have already died to the world and can say “The world has been crucified to me and I to the world”. If that is already true his final coming will only bring me the greatest of presents. But the Lord has also warned us: “Many will come in my name”, and obviously they won’t be me! Only the Anti-Christ and those who belong to him will do this. In the Gospels you never find the Lord declaring: “I am the Christ!” He came to reveal the Heavenly Father and to teach us to live as Our Father lives.

The Anti-Christ and his members never lead us to the Heavenly Father. They don’t have the words of wisdom or of Christ. They don’t have the word of truth nor do they live the truth. Those who do the works of the Heavenly Father speak “Christ” in a voice that is louder than a thousand ordinary tongues can speak. Christ’s miracles and teaching were enough to reveal him to his first disciples. Those who shout out teachings that are neither those of the Father nor of Christ belong to the Anti-Christ. Those who do the works of love proclaim Christ in an even more attention-getting way.

Who is Christ? Christ is the Father’s love giving self for others and looking only to praise God in all things. Those who have neither God-glorifying deeds nor God-praising doctrine surely do not come from God. We show we belong to Christ when we do Christ-like deeds of love and comfort and so reveal divine love. That is how one prepares for Christ’s second coming. When you come to be judged before Christ will you be like a mirror of your judge? If not, you will be revealed as an anti-Christ.

Saturday

ABIDING IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

A Reflection from “On Virginity” by St. Ambrose

You are one of God’s people. You belong to God’s family. God has chosen you to be his own. You are as close to Christ as one of your bodily members is for you yourself. God has given you grace and you are beautiful in God’s eyes. What should you do to rest in the love of Christ that drew you to give yourself to him in those early days of your love for your Lord and of your awareness of his love for you?

Let the light of your grace of body and spirit shine out. Let the splendor God has given you be seen by all. When you are in your room at night you think of Christ and you long for his coming at every moment. But this is not something you can only do when alone. Think of the person Christ has loved in loving you. Be that person fully and always. Let yourself be attentive to the Lord’s word. Follow carefully the path God’s providence has given you to walk. Do not be negligent or lukewarm in giving yourself to your Lord and lover in all you do.

The bride in the Song of Songs says, “I sought him, but I didn’t find him; I called him and he didn’t hear me!” Are you not in his presence because you have displeased him? No. He constantly allows our love for him to be tested. If it seems to you that he has left, then go seek him. Seek him with your love.

The Holy Church can teach us how to hold fast to Christ. You have already been taught all you need to know. If you want to hold fast to Christ you must be prepared to follow him wherever he goes. You can only do this if you hold on to Christ by the bonds of love, by spiritual bonds. Suppose you face suffering. You must be fearless in clinging to Christ in the very midst of suffering. It is often easier to find him amid such torments, whoever causes them.

In a brief moment, when you have escaped from the powers of this world without yielding to them, Christ will come to you. Christ will not allow you to be tested for long. Whoever seeks Christ in this way finds him. You will hold fast to him in the secret places of your heart.

What you seek is that your heart becomes his house, his abiding place. So what you have to do is keep this house spotless. Sweep out its secret recesses until it is wholly immaculate and beautiful. It is then a spiritual temple in which God’s holy, high priest offers spiritual sacrifice. Christ is the cornerstone, of his body the Church, and of the holy house that is the heart of each of his members. The Holy Spirit dwells in you, making all you are and do a gift for your lover Lord.

Whoever seeks Christ in these ways, whoever prays to Christ in these ways, is never abandoned by Christ. Quite the contrary, Christ comes to such a person again and again. He delights to visit your house more than that of Lazarus and Martha and Mary. Christ constantly raises you up to new life, a life you will have with him even beyond the end of the world. Never let go of the hope that he is.