

Daily TV Mass Advent Retreat

Come Lord Jesus



Cardinal Thomas Collins

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Monday: The Many Facets of Advent

Tuesday: The Coming of Christ During Our Earthly Journey

Wednesday: Advent of the Heart: Father Alfred Delp

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Sunday

1st of Advent

The Joyful Expectation of Advent

Summary

Advent begins with joyful anticipation as Catholics prepare to celebrate Christ's coming. This season mirrors the hope of the Old Testament people awaiting the Messiah and reminds us of the profound meaning behind Christmas, often obscured by modern materialism. Advent traditions like hymns and the Advent Wreath encourage faith and hope amidst life's struggles. It's a season of both joy and penance, inviting believers to reflect and prepare spiritually. Saint John Henry Newman described the Christian attitude of "watchful anticipation," urging believers to live in expectation of Christ's return. Advent reminds us to approach Christmas with joyful, hopeful readiness.

Reflection

Today we begin the season of Advent, in which, each year as a Catholic community, we prepare to celebrate worthily the great feast of Christmas. Advent is a time of joyful expectation of the coming of Christ, and that mood of anticipation mirrors the eagerness with which, for so many centuries, the people of God of the Old Testament awaited with joyful hope the coming of the Messiah, the anointed of the Lord, who would rescue them from their affliction and set them free.

It is even more essential that we be deeply aware of the great drama of salvation that is expressed in our liturgical celebrations of Advent and Christmas because, in our materialistic society, the real meaning of Christmas has been trivialised. Not many people caught up in the merchandising frenzy recall that Christmas means "Christ's Mass."

The season of Advent is rich in reminders of the true meaning of the coming of Christ. The ancient hymns of Advent, such as "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and "O Come, Divine Messiah," are some of the most beautiful that we have, and customs such as the lighting of the candles of the Advent Wreath are memorable expressions of our faith, and of the hope in the midst of struggle which allows us to

flourish joyfully as disciples of Jesus, whose coming we celebrate at Christmas and prepare for in Advent. This is not only a joyful but also a penitential season since, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we are not really ready to meet the Lord who comes.

The special characteristic of Advent is that it reveals the nature of our life as disciples of Jesus, on our way through this earthly valley of tears to the heavenly city Jerusalem, but not there yet. While it is fundamentally joyful, as is our life in Christ, it is also penitential. More intense joy is expressed at Christmas and Easter, and more intense penitence in Lent, but like our earthly life of discipleship, the bittersweet season of Advent is a mixture of both.

In Advent, we experience a fundamental Christian disposition, which we see throughout the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, and in the lives of the saints: to be a Christian is to be watching eagerly for the coming of the Master.

Saint John Henry Newman describes this basic Christian disposition in his *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, in the sermon called “Watching.” He says: “he watches for Christ who has a sensitive, eager, apprehensive mind; who is awake, alive, quick-sighted, zealous in seeking and honouring Him; who looks out for Him in all that happens, and who would not be surprised, who would not be over-agitated or overwhelmed, if he found that He is coming at once.” Newman describes what it means for the Christian to be watchful: it is “to be detached from what is present, and to live in what is unseen; to live in the thought of Christ as he came once, and as he will come again; to desire His second coming, from our affectionate and grateful remembrance of His first.”

This is the disposition which we need to have as disciples, and which we seek to enhance as we enter into Advent: watchful anticipation of the coming of the Lord.

During the Advent days ahead, we will be reflecting on the many ways in which we await the coming of Christ and the intensity of that experience, as revealed by a great martyr who wrote of Advent in prison during his last Advent, as he prepared to meet the Lord. We will look at the magnificent scriptural passages of both the Old and New Testaments, which speak to us of the coming of the Lord; they are divine words of joyful anticipation, and they also put before us the need to be purified so that we can make ready to welcome Emmanuel, God with us.

The first step, however, is to consider the many ways, beyond the liturgical season of Advent that begins today, in which we await in joyful hope for the coming of Our Lord.

Monday

1st Week of Advent

The Many Facets of Advent

Summary

Advent is a season rich with the theme of God's coming, shaping Christian life and hope. Beyond just preparing for Christmas, Advent reflects three dimensions: Liturgical Advent (yearly preparation for Christmas), Historical Advent (the birth of Christ at Bethlehem), and Cosmic Advent (Christ's future return in glory). These themes invite believers to live with joyful repentance and bold witness amid life's trials. Inspired by figures like St. Thomas More, who upheld faith against earthly pressures, Christians are called to a deeper awareness of the final judgment and to act courageously. This season is a reminder to live with hope, faith, and readiness.

Reflection

As we enter the season of Advent, it is spiritually fruitful to savour the full richness of the biblical theme of the coming of God into our world. Advent represents a basic dimension of the Christian life and is much more than a yearly preparation for Christmas. The spiritual theme of the coming of the Lord, so central to Scripture and to the living faith of the Church, is like a brilliant diamond that enriches and illuminates our life in Christ as we journey through this valley of tears, homeward bound to the heavenly city Jerusalem, where all our sorrows will be ended, and our hope fulfilled.

Let's look at several facets of Advent, each revealing a different way in which the expectation of the coming of the Lord shapes our Christian life.

First, of course, there is Liturgical Advent, the yearly season of joyful preparation for Christmas. Because we are conscious of not being ready to meet the Lord, Liturgical Advent is an appropriate time for repentance and for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation so that, by God's grace, we may be ready to meet the Lord at Christmas.

Then there is Historical Advent, the actual coming of Christ, the Messiah, the anointed of the Lord, at Bethlehem so many years ago, which the liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas celebrate. It is that historical coming of Christ which was foreshadowed by many scriptural texts of the Old Testament, which are cited in the liturgies of Advent. The prophecies, especially those of Isaiah, the great prophet of Advent, gave the people hope of the coming of the Lord, who would save them in their misery. As Christians look back over the Old Testament, we clearly see the signs of anticipation of the coming of the Lord in history, to become Emmanuel, God with us. Historical Advent is the foundation for Liturgical Advent.

But the coming of Christ into human history at Bethlehem, which was awaited with such expectation by God's people of the Old Testament and celebrated with such joy by God's people of the New Testament, is a preparation for something much more magnificent. As Christians, we look forward to the Cosmic Advent of the second coming of Christ at the end of time. Many books of the New Testament, especially the book of Apocalypse (Revelation), but also the Gospels and other New Testament writings, look forward to the time when the Lord Jesus will come, not simply in the lowliness of the little child in Bethlehem, but as the Lord of Majesty and Glory to judge the living and the dead. We see this particularly clearly in chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, in the account of the judgement of all peoples, with the separation of the sheep and the goats. Thinking of that scene of judgement should shake us out of our complacency and shatter our spiritual blindness.

So, as we enter into the Liturgical season of Advent in the present and, in so doing, look back to the Historical Advent of Christ in Bethlehem in the past, we also look forward to the future, to the majestic Cosmic Advent at the end of the ages.

It is so easy to be intimidated by the hostility of this world to the Lord and to the Gospel proclaimed by His disciples. But we are sent out into that hostile world to proclaim that Gospel with joyful boldness. Meditation upon the fact of the Cosmic Advent allows us, in the present, to have a detached attitude towards any earthly society, or kingdom, or power of any kind. All such human powers are passing away, and all will be under the judgement of God when Christ comes in majesty. That coming of the Lord of glory helps us to evaluate critically the world in which we live and has the most practical implications as we navigate the political and cultural environment into which Jesus sent us at Baptism and Confirmation to witness to Him.

Saint Thomas More, in the days of the wicked King Henry VIII, 500 years ago, had a keen sense of the divine perspective offered by the vision of the coming of Christ at the end of time. That perspective allowed him to be courageous in the face of an earthly tyrant and to die with Christian integrity, the king's good servant, no doubt, but God's first.

Like this great martyr, whose Christian integrity was fortified by his vision of the coming of the Lord in glory, we need to live in our own secularist environment, taking our direction not from it but from our sure awareness of the coming of the Lord to judge the living and the dead.

Tuesday

1st Week of Advent

The Coming of Christ During Our Earthly Journey

Summary

This reflection emphasizes the concept of “Personal Advent,” where each individual encounters Christ personally at death. Advent reminds us not only of Christ’s cosmic coming but of His presence throughout our earthly journey. Jesus arrives daily through others, especially in acts of compassion, in prayer, scripture, and the sacraments. Living with faith and integrity prepares us for this inevitable encounter with Him as our Savior and Judge. The Eucharist is central, providing a “Eucharistic Advent” each Mass, joining us to Jesus in His sacrifice. Our last communion, or Viaticum, becomes our spiritual nourishment for this final journey to meet the Lord.

Reflection

The Lord explicitly says that we do not know the day or the hour when He comes in cosmic glory, and it is foolish to try to predict the end of the world. But Jesus will surely come to each of us at the end of our own personal life, and that moment, though unpredictable, is not going to be all that long into the future. And so, during the season of Advent, we also are invited to think of the most intense experience we have of the coming of the Lord, the Personal Advent, when we encounter Jesus at our death. That is when He comes to us as both our loving Saviour and as our judge.

The New Testament and the spiritual tradition of the Church, both invite us to reflect upon this Personal Advent, this personal coming of Christ to each one of us at the end of our life. As the Cosmic Advent is the reference point for all our society and helps us to realise that the powers of this world are all temporary and contingent, not everlasting, and not our ultimate standard, so the inescapable fact of the Personal Advent which is death shapes our daily life.

The last line of the Hail Mary expresses this perfectly: we ask Our Lady to pray for us sinners “now, and at the hour of our death.” If I live each day confiding the

past to God's mercy and the future to His providence, and live in the present moment with Christian integrity, loving God and neighbour, I will be ready when He does indeed come at a day and an hour which I cannot predict.

But before that ultimate encounter occurs, there are other experiences of the Coming of Christ which prepare us for the day of judgement, and which we should also consider during the season of Advent.

Jesus comes to us day by day in our neighbour and may well be as unrecognised as He was at Bethlehem. He tells us that whatever we do to the least of our brethren, we do to Him. Wherever two or three are gathered, Christ is there in the midst of them. Such is the Advent of Christ the Neighbour, too often ignored.

Day by day, so that we might be ready to meet the Lord at the end of life, we are invited to experience His coming in prayer, and most especially in the prayerful meditation upon the Word of God; as the Word became flesh in Jesus in Bethlehem, the Word becomes flesh in language in the Bible. That Prayerful and Scriptural Advent should be part of the fabric of our daily life in Christ; as St. Jerome famously said, ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ.

Our spiritual disposition should be that of young Samuel in the temple, when he heard God calling his name. He replied, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." That should be our prayer every time we prepare to meet the Lord who comes to us in the sacred scriptures. It is particularly important that we read the Holy Gospel, and I strongly suggest that each of us read one chapter of a Gospel every day, as well as portions of the rest of Holy Scripture.

Finally, we need to think of the coming of Christ that we experience every time we celebrate a sacrament. The Lord comes to us in all the sacraments, which He gave to us so that His disciples down through the ages might encounter Him, as the first disciples did in a more dramatic way after His resurrection.

Above all, until Jesus comes to us at the end of life, and most fully in glory at the end of time, He comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, in which we hear God speak to us in the scriptures, and in which Jesus joins us to His suffering, death, and resurrection. The beloved disciple cried out "It is the Lord!" when he and Peter and the other apostles encountered the Risen Lord, and we are invited to share that wondrous excitement as we encounter the Risen Lord in a sacramental way in the Eucharistic Advent which Jesus has made so freely available to us.

The last time we receive Holy Communion, before our intimate personal experience of the coming of the Lord at the moment of our death, is called Viaticum, which means food for the journey. But He comes to us throughout our journey, not just in its last moments; through the joys and sorrows of life, we encounter Christ in the Eucharistic Advent which we experience every time we participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Wednesday

1st Week of Advent

Advent of the Heart: Father Alfred Delp

Summary

Father Alfred Delp, a Jesuit priest, was executed by the Nazis in 1945 due to his opposition to Hitler. During his imprisonment, Delp wrote Advent reflections with profound authenticity, highlighting Advent as a time of preparation for an intense encounter with Christ. Delp's writings, smuggled from his prison cell, reveal four dimensions of Advent: awe at God's majesty, a call to integrity, faith proclamation, and reverence. For Delp, Advent encapsulates hope amid suffering and serves as a powerful reminder to live with faith and readiness. His reflections invite believers to embrace Advent with deep reverence, urgency, and hope.

Reflection

Father Alfred Delp was a young Jesuit priest who was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944 in Munich because of his opposition to Hitler. He was tortured, put in solitary confinement, and finally, after having been condemned with other faithful people by a corrupt Nazi judge, he was hanged, dying at the age of 37.

Father Delp was obviously a heroic Christian witness, but I refer to him because his spiritual life was very much focused on Advent. Even before he was arrested, he regularly preached about Advent and even wrote a little play about Advent for the students in the school where he taught.

I recommend that you read about this wonderful man in the book *Advent of the Heart: Seasonal Sermons and Prison Writings: 1941-1944*. It describes the life of Father Delp and provides us with the text of several of his Advent homilies and the meditations on Advent which he wrote in prison during Advent of 1944, as he awaited the coming of his Lord at his imminent death, which happened when he was hanged on February 2, 1945. It was the Feast of the Presentation, cherished as the feast of their vocation by consecrated religious like Father Delp.

Father Delp was a holy and courageous priest, and a very learned one, and his homilies and writings for that reason alone are helpful to all of us. But what gives special weight to his writings is that they were written in a time of great suffering, in the midst of war, under a brutal dictatorship in which the church and all faithful people were persecuted. His final writings were written in his prison cell, while his hands were manacled, on little slips of paper that he was able to smuggle out of prison.

A friendly guard, at the risk of his life, gave him a small amount of bread and wine, so that Father Delp was able to celebrate Mass from memory secretly in his cell, and so experience the sacramental advent that is the Eucharist, as he prepared to meet the Lord in his death, a short time after he wrote these Advent meditations. As he wrote, he knew that he would soon be killed. This gives an awesome authenticity to his meditations on what he called the Advent of the Heart.

I cannot in the few minutes available today give a suitable selection of his deep insights into the meaning of Advent, but one thing that was important to him was that he saw it above all as preparation for a life-changing encounter with Christ.

Father Delp was especially concerned that this encounter not be superficial. It really needs to shake us to the core of our being. Father Delp summarises four dimensions of the Advent of the Heart. First, we are shaken by our awareness of the majesty of the Lord who comes, then we are called to integrity and authenticity, then we confess and proclaim our faith, and finally, we respond to God with reverent awe.

In our situation of comfort, as year after year the liturgical season of Advent rolls by, we can treat it in a superficial way. But Father Delp was facing imminent death; his consciousness of the coming of Christ had an authenticity that we can hardly imagine.

Advent is especially important for all of us because it most perfectly reflects our state of life during our brief journey through this valley of tears, homeward bound to the heavenly city Jerusalem. Advent emphasises our situation of imperfection, suffering, and injustice. Out of that radically imperfect situation of our brief earthly lives, we, as Christians, with minds illuminated by faith, can see our life in the context of the provident hand of God. That is why we await the coming of Christ with joyful hope.

Advent is a season of hope, but we do not need hope when we are in heaven. We need hope in the expectation of the coming of our Saviour because our current situation is so radically imperfect. That is one reason why Advent is not only a season of joyful expectation, but also of penitence. We know that we are not yet ready to meet the Lord who is coming and coming soon. We urgently need to get ready to do so.

Father Delp was living in the immediate expectation of being hanged, after having suffered torture and being thrust into prison for his faith. I can imagine him writing his marvellous meditations on Advent with manacled hands and a stubby pencil on scraps of paper that were smuggled out of prison. This is so much more than what we are able to imagine as we think of Advent.

Father Delp stressed that the one we are meeting is our Lord and our God. If only we will realise that, personally, then the encounter with the Lord, whose coming we await in Advent, will shake us to the foundations of our being, and call us to repentance, and to a fullness of life, in the one who is coming, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Thursday

1st Week of Advent

The Old Testament: Foreshadowing the Messiah

Summary

The historical arrival of Christ in Bethlehem, celebrated at Christmas, forms the foundation of Advent. This awaited event was foretold by prophets like Isaiah, whose writings, along with other Old Testament texts, are prominent in Advent readings. These passages from Isaiah, Psalms, and other books reveal God's plan for salvation, which Christians interpret as foreshadowing Christ's coming. God, as the Divine Author, inspired Old Testament writers to express truths that were fully realized in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Advent invites believers to read these texts thoughtfully, grasping both their historical context and deeper significance in God's salvation plan.

Reflection

The historical coming of Christ at Bethlehem, which we celebrate at Christmas, provides the foundational context for Advent. It was preceded by centuries of anticipation, most fully reflected in the great prophets, such as Isaiah. I recommend that each Advent, we reread Isaiah. Along with the Psalms, Isaiah is the Old Testament book most quoted in the New Testament.

Passages from this great prophet feature prominently in many of the Advent Mass readings, as well as passages from other Old Testament prophets, including Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Baruch, Zechariah, Micah, and Malachi. Additionally, the Advent Mass readings include passages from Genesis, the Song of Songs, II Samuel, Judges, Sirach, and Baruch. In the New Testament and the spiritual tradition of the Church, these and other Old Testament readings are interpreted as foreshadowing the Coming of Christ. Every Mass includes not only a Gospel but also a Psalm, and Christians interpret these Psalms, particularly the Royal Psalms, as pointing to the coming of the true King, Christ the King.

It is a most fruitful spiritual exercise during Advent to read prayerfully from this marvellous treasury of Advent Mass readings.

When we read these passages from the Old Testament, such as those from Isaiah, we must keep in mind the complete perspective of divine revelation. God reveals His plan for our salvation not only through His actions in history but also through the inspired writings of both the Old and New Testaments. These writings have God as their ultimate author, even as He works through the individual inspired human authors of the sacred books. God, as the divine Author of Scripture, sees the entire plan unfolding throughout history and the deeper implications of the words of the inspired Old Testament writers in light of that plan.

The individual scriptural authors are used by God to help reveal this vision of history, leading up to the coming of Christ at Bethlehem, His formation of disciples into a community, His suffering, death, resurrection, His sending of the Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost, and ultimately, the life of the Church journeying through time until the second coming of Christ. All of this is in the mind of the Divine Author, though the deeper significance may not have been in the minds of the individual human authors whom He inspired.

It is highly valuable, as modern Scripture scholarship has shown, to study the immediate context in which the individual sacred texts were created, as we can learn much from that. However, there is also a deeper way of understanding divine revelation, demonstrated by the early Fathers of the Church and found within the New Testament itself. In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:26-40), Philip encounters an Ethiopian official reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah. Through the revelation he has received in his Christian faith, Philip understands the full perspective in which to situate that passage, and so is able to help the Ethiopian grasp its deeper significance in relation to the coming of Christ, to the point that the Ethiopian asks to be baptised.

Our Lord himself approaches the Old Testament Scriptures in this way, as foreshadowing His coming among us. On the road to Emmaus, He spoke to the two disciples and “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27). All of the New Testament writers help us to understand the significance of the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of the New. Thus, while we must keep in mind the original context of the human inspired author, above all, we should be aware of the fuller context revealed by the Divine Author.

During Advent, we read the ancient prophecies attentively and reflect on the events and people of the Old Testament. Then, with a deeper understanding of the Divine Author's will, as revealed in the whole plan of salvation through Jesus, we gain insight into the significance of the Lord's coming at Bethlehem.

Friday

1st Week of Advent

The Prophet Isaiah, Prophet of Advent

Summary

The prophet Isaiah is central to Advent, foreshadowing the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, during a time when Israel faced danger from the Assyrian Empire. Isaiah offered hope, reminding the people to trust in God's control over history, not earthly powers. His prophecies foretold the coming of Emmanuel—God with us—fulfilled in Jesus. Isaiah's words, including prophecies of a "Prince of Peace" and "Wonderful Counsellor," provided hope beyond earthly saviors. While he rebuked infidelity and idolatry, Isaiah's ultimate message is one of salvation. His prophecies resonate through Advent as Christians await Christ's final, glorious return.

Reflection

While there are other passages in the Old Testament that have been interpreted within the Christian spiritual tradition as foreshadowing the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, it is undoubtedly the prophet Isaiah who stands as the main prophet of Advent.

Every Advent, we should read the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived in the latter part of the eighth century BC, in the decades leading up to 700 BC, when Israel and Judah were being threatened by the great Assyrian Empire. It was a time of danger for God's people, and the king and leaders were fearful. God raised up the prophet Isaiah to give hope to the people and to remind them that it is God who controls history. This is why Isaiah is so important in Advent, for this season assumes that the people of God are facing numerous dangers and living in a hostile society, where they must place their hope not in earthly solutions, but in the Lord God who is surely coming to save them. This is our situation of danger and hope until Jesus ultimately comes in glory in the Cosmic Advent at the end of time.

In chapter 6 of Isaiah, we see the calling of the prophet amid the majesty of the temple. It is a vision of glory, which places the dangers surrounding God's people in their proper context. So it always is: the suffering and danger of this present world must be viewed within the context of the glory of God. This is what we find in the calling of Isaiah, and in the season of Advent.

In our Christian faith, we understand that the Lord of glory came among us not in a dramatic way, nor as the earthly military rescuer from oppressive regimes that the people of the Old Testament awaited, but as a little baby at Bethlehem. He is Emmanuel, "God with us." He is Jesus, "The one who rescues us." He is the Christ, the Messiah, "The Anointed One," foreshadowed in the anointed kings and prophets of old.

The advent of the long-awaited Messiah, though an act of the Lord of glory, whom Isaiah experienced in the temple, occurs in a quiet way, so quiet that it can be missed, especially by those whose understanding is limited to the expectation of an earthly saviour. As Elijah discovered at the cave on Mount Horeb, God speaks not in fire and earthquakes, but in a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:9-18). The angels at Christmas sing of glory to God in the highest, but they do so to humble shepherds working in the fields near the little town of Bethlehem.

God used Isaiah to speak to His people in the perilous world of the 8th century BC, both to rebuke them for their infidelity and to give them hope in their struggles. The words of Isaiah have a deeper significance, missed by those who first heard them but recognised by those who understand that the fulfilment of hope was not to be found in an earthly saviour, but in the incarnation of the Word of God. The coming of God as the Messiah and rescuer of His people provides the true reason for hope, then and now.

A further sign of that hope is found in chapter 7, where Isaiah says to the king, "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name, Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), "God with us." That is the one whom we expect in Advent, the one who came among us at Bethlehem: Jesus, the Lord, God with us in the flesh. Although, in the original context of eighth-century Jerusalem, in the mind of the human author and of those who heard him, the immediate reference might well be to a royal child being born in the not-too-distant future to lead the nation

against its enemies, we, with the perspective of the Divine Author, can appreciate that this is a reference to Christ, the true Messiah.

Another of the great prophecies of the coming of the Messiah is found in chapter 9: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Isaiah speaks of the one who is to come: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Much of Isaiah’s prophecy rebukes the chosen people for their iniquity and rebukes the neighbouring nations for their false religion and hostility towards God’s people. But throughout the book, we find marvellous passages of surpassing beauty, which spoke to the original hearers of the coming of a good earthly king, for they had so few, and were unaware of the ultimate fulfilment of the divinely inspired prophet’s words. We, however, to whom the whole plan of God has been revealed, recognise that they speak of the coming of the Lord, of Christ the Lord, Emmanuel, God with us in Jesus, whose coming we await each Advent and celebrate each Christmas.

Saturday

1st Week of Advent

The Advent Collects

Summary

The Collect prayers at each Mass, especially during Advent, deepen our faith by encapsulating the season's themes. These prayers, especially on each Advent Sunday, invite reflection and readiness for Christ's coming. The First Sunday's Collect urges us to "run forth" to meet Christ, bringing righteous deeds as preparation for eternal life. The Second Sunday's Collect emphasizes freeing ourselves from earthly distractions, seeking wisdom to enter the Lord's company. Reflecting on these Collects throughout Advent encourages a spiritually active, penitent life focused on encountering Christ. This is a season to let go of burdens and prepare our hearts for Christmas.

Reflection

At every Mass, we have an opening prayer, an offertory prayer, and a closing prayer. We rarely think very much about what they say, but they are most valuable in helping us to grow in our faith, and that is especially true of the opening prayer of each Mass, known as the Collect because, in a sense, it collects the ideas which are the theme for that Mass or for the season in which we celebrate that Mass. They richly repay our close attention.

That is why a wonderful way to deepen our appreciation of the season of Advent is to meditate upon the Collects at each of the Masses during the season. Especially, the Collect of each Sunday speaks to us powerfully of what Advent means. These prayers are wonderfully written, and some of them go back far into Christian history. And so, early in this season of Advent, I think it is most spiritually fruitful to examine the Collects of Advent carefully and prayerfully.

I really urge everyone not to just let these sublime prayers go in one ear and out the other, as we all too often do with the prayers and readings at Mass, but rather to pause and to think about what they mean; the Collects of Advent are beautiful and spiritually most profound. In fact, one of them, one of the most magnificent, is

very famous. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we will hear these familiar words: “Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts that we, to whom the incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of his resurrection.”

The Collect of the Fourth Sunday of Advent is, of course, the prayer which concludes the Angelus, which speaks to us of the coming of the Lord at the initiative of God through the angel Gabriel, and of Our Lady’s obedient response, which leads to the Word of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us in Jesus. We should pray this profound prayer every day, morning, noon, and evening. If we will only respond daily to the divine initiative, the Word will continue in many ways to become flesh in our lives, as Jesus did most perfectly at Bethlehem.

It is good prayerfully to consider all the Collects of Advent and to think about what they say to us. Today we will reflect upon the Collects for the First and Second Sundays of Advent, and next Sunday upon the Collects for the Third and Fourth Sundays.

The First Sunday of Advent: “Grant your faithful, we pray, Almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.”

What a marvellous prayer this is. We see the enthusiasm with which we should begin this season of Advent as we run forth to meet the Lord who comes. We are not passive Christians. We are eager to encounter the Lord who comes to us at the celebration of Christmas certainly, but throughout our life, and especially at its earthly conclusion. And why do we run, and what do we bring to the Lord who comes? We run forth to meet Christ bringing righteous deeds at his coming so that, gathered at his right hand, we may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.

If you know where you are going, you are more likely to get there. We are people homeward bound to the heavenly kingdom, and what we bring with us as we run eagerly to meet the Lord are the righteous deeds of our life, the acts of charity and justice, which are really all that we bring with us at the end of our life.

For the Second Sunday of Advent, this is the Collect: “Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company.”

As with the Collect for the First Sunday of Advent, we are reminded to run eagerly with haste to meet the Lord, who is coming to us. There is nothing passive in our life in Christ as Christians, whose lives are focused on the coming of the Lord. But as we do so, we need to have heavenly wisdom so that we may gain admittance to the company of the Lord. This heavenly wisdom helps us to let go of those things of this earth which are not worthy of the Lord who is coming, and not worthy of us.

We pray that no earthly undertaking hinders us as we run to meet the Lord who comes. Too often, we are burdened by earthly undertakings, and it is in the season of Advent, with our eyes on the Lord who comes, that we are invited to let go of those things that drag us down. The joyful, penitential season of Advent is a time of spiritual freedom; we need to get rid of anything that weighs us down and binds us. This is one reason why it is a very good idea during Advent to get to Confession.

Daily TV Mass Advent Retreat
Cardinal Thomas Collins
2nd Week of Advent



Sunday: The Royal Psalms
Monday: The Advent Virtue
Tuesday: Elijah
Wednesday: John the Baptist
Thursday: Discipleship as Stewardship
Friday: The Day of the Lord
Saturday: Benedictus & Nunc Dimittis

Sunday

2nd Week of Advent

The Royal Psalms

Summary

The Royal Psalms in the Old Testament, used to honor Israel's kings, foreshadow the coming of Christ the King. While ancient kings often failed, the psalms present a vision of a true, righteous king—a role ultimately fulfilled by Jesus. Psalm 2, quoted in Hebrews, highlights this as God's decree to His Son. In Advent, we await Christ, whose kingship surpasses earthly rulers. Jesus declared, "My kingship is not of this world," reminding us of His divine lordship. From early martyrs to figures like Thomas More and Father Miguel Pro, Christians have proclaimed "Jesus is Lord," awaiting His return in glory.

Reflection

One of the clearest indicators in the Old Testament of the coming of the Messiah is found in the royal Psalms. After the time of Saul, God agreed to give the people, at their request, a king who would govern them. There was much dispute about whether this was a good or a bad thing. Certainly, there were glorious kings, like David and Solomon, and a few righteous kings like Josiah, but on the whole, the kings were not often worthy of their sacred mission. Each one was anointed of the Lord, and yet so many of them failed and turned away from God. Much of the Old Testament history books are devoted to a record of their failure and their rejection of God.

But in the book of Psalms, we find a series of Royal Psalms (Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, and 144) which were often used at the inauguration of the reign of those ancient rulers of Israel, and these psalms present us with a vision of justice, equity, and nobility in the king, the anointed one sent by God. They may indeed be a way of looking back at David himself, although he was not without many faults, but they have been taken in the Christian tradition, including in the New Testament, as a sign of the coming of the one who would, in fact, be a truly just king: Christ the King, Jesus our Lord.

Psalm 2 is one of the Royal Psalms that is referred to in the New Testament. In its Hebrew context, it speaks of God's blessing upon the king, who will conquer the earthly kings who rage against God and his anointed. "I will tell the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'" (Psalm 2:7) In the Letter to the Hebrews, Psalm 2, which originally referred to the Hebrew king as divinely approved, is quoted as a sign of the superiority of Christ, the true king: "For Jesus reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs. For to what angel did God ever say, 'Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee?'" (Hebrews 1:3-5)

When we read the Royal Psalms of the Old Testament, of course, we should first of all look, as the original author did, at the way in which these normative models of divinely instituted kingship rebuke the unworthy men who so often actually occupied the role of king and shepherd of God's people. And we can use them in our own day as a standard of righteous political leadership.

But we can see more deeply, as did the writers of the New Testament, and recognise in their portrayal of the righteous king a prophecy of Christ, the one who was to come, and whose coming we celebrate at Christmas, for which we wait in joyful expectation during the season of Advent. It is Christ who is our King: *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat*. Christ conquers, Christ reigns, and Christ is Lord.

When Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews, fearing that he claimed to be an earthly rival to Caesar, Jesus replies, "My kingship is not of this world." (John 18:36). He is indeed Christ the King, but infinitely exalted above earthly kingship.

That is the one who came at Bethlehem, not an earthly ruler who would rescue the people from their earthly oppressors, but Christ the King, Lord of the universe, who will come in glory at the end of time and all his angels with him. He is the one foreshadowed in the ancient Royal Psalms. He is the one the early martyrs proclaimed when their Roman persecutors demanded that they say: "Caesar is Lord." No: they proclaimed, "Jesus is Lord." That was the message of Saint Thomas More to the wicked earthly king, Henry VIII: "I die the king's good servant, but God's first." That was the message of the glorious martyred Mexican Catholics in the 1920s, persecuted by a vicious secularist dictatorship. As the firing

squad raised their rifles, the heroic Father Miguel Pro extended his arms in the form of a cross and shouted: “Long live Christ the King.”

It is the coming of Christ the King that we await in Advent, and that we celebrate at Christmas.

Monday

2nd Week of Advent

Hope: The Advent Virtue

Summary

The Advent season centers on hope, a virtue especially significant in a world marred by conflict and suffering. This hope transcends superficial optimism, recognizing our struggles but seeing them through the lens of faith. Advent reminds us that Jesus came to save us and will come again in glory. As we journey towards the heavenly city, we're called to live with patience, grounded in faith and love. St. Paul and St. Peter encourage Christians to maintain hope amid trials, always ready to share our faith. Rooted in divine providence, this hope fortifies us until we meet Christ eternally.

Reflection

“Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

This prayer, which the priest says just before Jesus comes to us in communion, in the Eucharistic Advent that prepares us for his coming at the end of our life on earth, speaks to us of hope, the virtue which above all is characteristic of the Season of Advent. The natural habitat of the virtue of hope, like Advent, is an environment of conflict, sin, and distress. That is the world that awaited the coming of Christ at Bethlehem, which we will soon celebrate at Christmas, and that is the world in which we live as disciples.

As we journey through this valley of tears, we see all around us and within us the effects of original sin; we are not yet home in the heavenly city of God to which Jesus invites us, and which he made possible for us to enter through his own suffering, death, and resurrection in this world, which he entered at that first Christmas. There is little room for optimism, and a great temptation to despair, as we consider the apparent triumph of evil, of the culture of death. We see that so starkly in our own country, as recently in the growing appetite for assisted suicide.

But we are people of joyful hope, which is the spirit of Advent, as we await the coming of the Lord. Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again. There is a realism in the Advent virtue of hope, which is not found in the illusions of optimism, for it recognises the fact of the struggles we face and the crosses we bear, but sees them all within the context revealed through faith by the coming of Christ, not only long ago at the first Christmas, but in the future at the hour of our death, and in the present moment as he comes to us in word and sacrament. That awareness through faith of the reality of the unseen world of divine providence is the foundation of our hope. And that hope, rooted in the vision of faith, bears fruit in love.

As St Paul says in his letter to the Romans: “we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved. For hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:23-25). Hope, solidly founded on the rock of faith, can withstand all tribulation. As St Paul says: “Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)

St Peter situates the hope that energises us for a life of apostolic love in an often-hostile environment and situates the basis of this sturdy virtue in the expectation of the coming of the Lord: “Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:13) In the famous advice that is the foundation for apologetics, our apostolic mission to the unbelievers among whom we live the joyful hope that should make evident our faith in Christ, he says “...in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence...” (1 Peter 3:15)

I have always felt that the final hymn at a funeral should be about Jerusalem, for at the end of this life we are heading (perhaps after a time in the vestibule of heaven that is purgatory) to the heavenly city described so majestically in the Book of Revelation. When we are there, we will no longer need hope, or faith for that matter, for our life will reach fulfilment in the presence of God. But we are not there yet; in Advent we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ into our world to save us through his suffering, death, and resurrection, to provide us with the direction and the spiritual nourishment of the scriptures, and the sacraments, and

the living faith of the Church; but we will only arrive at the heavenly haven at the end of our journey, at Christ's second coming, when he comes to us at death, and ultimately comes in glory at the end of time. Until then, we must navigate through a sea of imperfection, and he strengthens us through the Advent virtue of hope, rooted in faith, and bearing fruit in love.

Tuesday

2nd Week of Advent

Elijah

Summary

Elijah, a prophet of unwavering faith, stood boldly against King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, challenging their attempts to integrate pagan worship in Israel. His miracles, including the victory on Mount Carmel, underscored his fidelity to God. Elijah's life and eventual ascension to heaven cemented his role as a prophetic symbol of hope. Seen as a precursor to the Messiah, his spirit was recognized in John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Christ. Elijah's legacy endures as a model of integrity, inspiring believers during Advent to remain faithful in adversity, anticipating the Lord's coming and witnessing courageously in society.

Reflection

Elijah was the mighty prophet of integrity and absolute fidelity to the Lord God, who resisted the wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in the **9th century BC**. They tried to blend in with the powerful pagan nations that surrounded Israel and sought to gain political advantage by importing their worship of the pagan god Baal. They persecuted the prophets of the true God of Israel. In this project of assimilation, the king and queen ran into unyielding opposition from Elijah, whose very name means “My God is the Lord,” the Lord of Israel, who had made a covenant with his people and would not abandon them even as they were abandoning **him**.

Elijah performed many miracles, such as the multiplication of grain and oil to feed the widow of Zarephath and her son, and his healing of her son. The widow and her son were foreigners and lived outside of Israel. Jesus offers Elijah as an example of a prophet who is not accepted in his own country (Luke 4:24-26). Though Elijah fought against the worship of foreign pagan gods, he showed compassion for the foreign widow of Zarephath. Elijah prayed for rain, and through his prayers, a great drought was ended. He also rebuked King Ahab for taking the land of Naboth, after Jezebel had arranged for his murder.

Elijah's most dramatic victory against paganism came when he defeated the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, when God answered his prayers and sent down fire upon his sacrifice. This so angered Ahab and Jezebel that Elijah had to flee and finally was granted an experience of God on Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai, the Holy Mountain, where God had given Moses the Ten Commandments, and where God appeared to Elijah not in spectacular thunder and earthquake but in a small, still voice.

Elijah, this most austere prophet, who wore a garment of haircloth and a belt of leather (2 Kings 1:8), who performed many miracles, and boldly confronted the king, was finally carried up into heaven in a chariot of fire in a whirlwind, or as we would say, a tornado. He is praised in the Book of Sirach as the prophet who "arose like a fire, and his word burned like a torch." (Sirach 48:1) He is so important that at the Transfiguration, it is Elijah and Moses who appear with Jesus (Matthew 17:3).

The example of the great Elijah left a deep mark on the consciousness of the people of God. As the centuries went by, with the people so often abandoning their faith, and with the royal, priestly, and prophetic leadership of the nation so often falling far short of what God and the faithful people expected of them, the memory of the past heroism of Elijah led to an expectation of his future return.

It is easy to see how such a courageous figure would be a sign of hope for God's people of later generations in times of tribulation, and in Malachi 4:5 we hear: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6) The coming of Elijah will prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

The people were waiting for the coming of Elijah, and wondered if John the Baptist, or Jesus, was Elijah returning to once more save the people.

In John's Gospel, John the Baptist explicitly denies that he is Elijah, and of course, that is true. But he played the role of **Elijah** in preparing the way for the coming of Christ. When the disciples of Jesus ask him why the scribes say that first Elijah must come, Jesus replies: "Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:10-13).

In Luke's Gospel, when the angel Gabriel tells Zechariah in the temple that he will have a son, he says: "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." (Luke 1:16-17)

Jesus praises John the Baptist, saying, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come." (Matthew 11:13-14)

In Advent, it is fruitful to read the passages of the Bible that speak of the great Elijah, for he is the Old Testament prophet who not only edifies us by the example of his prophetic courage and his absolute fidelity to God in a time of tribulation but who also points the way to the Lord who came to us at that first Advent in Bethlehem. Whenever we think of the coming of the Lord, we recall the awesome and mysterious Elijah, who prepared the way for him, and who offered the model of prophetic courage which was personified in John the Baptist, the one who most explicitly prepared the way for Jesus, and who imitated the austere and righteous Elijah, not only by dressing like him but by his courageous rebuke of the wicked king—in his case, Herod and not Ahab. Such absolutely faithful witness to God in a wicked world is in itself an example for us, but it is also in our situation, in our own day, the way in which we can prepare the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus into our lives and into the society in which we live and witness to him.

Wednesday 2nd Week of Advent

John the Baptist

Summary

John the Baptist is a powerful Advent figure, preparing the way for Christ through his call for repentance. His message, echoed by Jesus, emphasizes clearing sin as the path to receive the Lord. Like the prophet Elijah, John rebuked leaders for sin, leading to his martyrdom under Herod. John's humility shines, as he points to Jesus as the Lamb of God, expressing, "He must increase, and I must decrease." This spirit of repentance and humility underscores Advent's dual themes of joyful expectation and penitence, encouraging believers to prepare their hearts for Christ's coming with the cleansing grace of Baptism and humility.

Reflection

If ever there is a patron saint of Advent, it would be John the Baptist. His call in Luke 3:1-6 is the Gospel of the Second Sunday of Advent: "the word of God came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah: A voice cries in the wilderness, prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight..." (Luke 3:3-4).

All the Gospels emphasise the role of John the Baptist as the one who prepared the way for the coming of Christ by preaching a message of repentance. This message of repentance is the initial message of both John the Baptist and Jesus. This is how the rough places are made smooth, and the mountains levelled to prepare a way for the coming of the Lord, because the great barrier that needs to be cleared away is sin. And so, that is what John does, dressed like Elijah, and, like him, courageously rebuking people for their sins, which were blocking their receptivity to the Kingdom of God made manifest in Jesus.

Elijah rebuked King Ahab but escaped with his life. His successor and embodiment, John the Baptist, was not so fortunate, for his rebuke of King Herod led to his martyrdom. Yet maybe John was more blessed in being called to the fulfilment of his courageous witness in the shedding of his blood, the ultimate sacrifice, in itself a preparation for the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

John's courageous integrity, in speaking truth to power, was imitated 1,500 years later by another Saint John – Saint John Fisher – who followed in the footsteps of Elijah and John the Baptist by rebuking the king of his day, Henry VIII, for his abandonment of his wife, and also of his faith, when, in order to get rid of his wife, he broke the unity of the Church by becoming his own pope.

To prepare the way for God to enter into our souls, especially in the coming of **Emmanuel** among us in Jesus, repentance is an essential step. Both John the Baptist and Jesus give the same message of repentance, the one who prepares the way and the one for whom the way is prepared. Mark's Gospel begins by quoting the prophecy of both Malachi and Isaiah, "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mark 1:2-3). John "appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4). The austere John the Baptist clears the way for the Messiah through the call to repentance, but Jesus himself begins his own mission with the same call: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

The message of Advent is clear, in the voice of John the Baptist, and in that of Jesus himself: if we are rightly to receive the Lord who comes, we need to repent. That is why Advent is not only a joyful season of expectation of the coming of the Lord but also a penitential season, for if we are honest, we will recognise that we are not ready to receive the Lord.

John offers a foreshadowing of the sacrament of Baptism – after all, he is John the Baptiser. That ritual cleansing, which has antecedents in Judaism, developed into the Christian sacrament which, among other things, is for the forgiveness of sins, as well as being the sacramental way in which we enter the community of the Church and experience the indwelling presence of God. Baptism is received only once, as we experience personally the advent of the Lord in our lives, but since we all struggle throughout life with temptations to sin, the forgiveness aspect of the sacrament of Baptism is extended over time through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

One thing that is necessary as well, if we are to be ready to receive the Lord when he comes, is a humble disposition, and all of the Gospels make it clear that John the Baptist was a humble man, something that could be difficult in such a charismatic and popular religious figure. He humbly rejects the assertion that he is the great Elijah. And he says, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong

of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8) The most sublime expression of John the Baptist’s humility is found in the Gospel of John, when he says that in his relationship to Jesus, he is not the bridegroom, but only the best man. “He must increase, and I must decrease.” (John 3:30) There is no jealousy in John, for he points out to his disciples that it is Jesus who is the Lamb of God, and many of them leave him to become disciples of Jesus.

John the Baptist shows us the Advent pathway to prepare the way of the Lord, and we need to follow that pathway throughout life: we must repent, to clear the way, and we must receive Jesus in humility. That keeps us in touch with reality and frees us from deadly illusion. It is the message of John the Baptist, and of the season of Advent.

Thursday

2nd Week of Advent

Discipleship as Stewardship

Summary

In Advent, Christians reflect on Christ's first coming and anticipate His return, both at the end of time and at the end of each personal life. This season emphasizes stewardship and accountability, reminding believers to use their time, talents, and resources wisely. The parables in Matthew 25, including the bridesmaids, talents, and judgment of nations, teach the importance of preparedness, faithful use of gifts, and compassionate action toward others. Advent calls for a responsible, purposeful life, holding ourselves accountable as stewards of God's gifts. This reflection forms the foundation for stewardship in our churches and lives, oriented toward serving God and others.

Reflection

In Advent, we think not only of the coming of the Messiah at Bethlehem so many years ago, but, as disciples of Jesus, as Advent Christians, we think of his second coming at the end of time, and more personally, at the end of our life. This shapes the way in which we behave. **We** are all preparing for the time when, as in Matthew chapter 25, the Son of Man comes in glory, and all the angels with him, and he sits on his glorious throne. (Matthew 25:31)

The Gospels are filled with many parables speaking of servants who await the coming of the master, as we await the coming of the master at the end of our life, as well as at the end of time. These parables of expectation emphasise the need for accountability, for when the master returns, he will hold the servant to account for the way in which he has made use of what has been given to him.

We Christians are stewards, that is, servants to whom the master entrusts his property which, in our case, means our whole life, and especially the time which is given to us during our brief journey through this valley of tears on our way home to the heavenly city of Jerusalem. We are entrusted with this time, and we need to use it well. It is especially our expectation of the coming of the master at the

moment of our death that leads us to seek to use wisely the gift of time which God has given **us**.

This accountability is the other side of trust. God trusts us, but he does hold us to account for the way in which we spend our life on earth. We do not simply drift along. With Advent expectation of the second coming of the Lord, we are encouraged as disciples of Jesus to live more responsibly, with greater accountability. This is why Advent is a time of penance, when we should receive the sacrament of reconciliation and think of how we are using the time which God has entrusted to us for our brief journey through this world. In chapters 24 and 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, we find spiritually fruitful references both to the effective use of our talents and to our accountability for that use on the day of judgement, when the Lord separates the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 25 is a very valuable spiritual lesson for each one of us as we await the coming of the Lord in a spirit of Advent discipleship. This chapter has three sections. The first relates to the 10 bridesmaids and emphasises how we have a choice in life to be wise or foolish in the way in which we await the coming of the Lord. The bridegroom in this parable comes at a time that the bridesmaids did not know, and so they must be ready to greet him. Five were ready because they prepared oil for their lamps; five had no extra oil, and when the lamps went out, they were not ready to greet the bridegroom. In our life of Advent expectation of the coming of the Lord, we need to be ready to meet him by living a life of justice, mercy, and compassion.

The next section of Matthew chapter 25 is the famous parable of the talents. Another version of it is found in the Gospel of Luke with the only difference being that in Luke each servant is trusted with the same amount of property, whereas in Matthew, the three servants are given different amounts according to their ability. But the point is the same: servants are entrusted with talents, which at that time meant blocks of silver, but which in our time has come to mean abilities and gifts which we are given by the Lord. He gives us the opportunity to make good use of these gifts, if we will do so. This is part of the joy of our life of discipleship. But the master will return and hold us to account for our use of what he has entrusted to us. In Matthew's Gospel, it is clear that it does not matter so much which gifts one receives. The main point is to make the best use of whatever one has been given.

That is how we should approach our life, as we await the Lord at the moment of our death. Each one of us has many gifts, and we need to use them fruitfully to the best of our ability. If we do so, we will not fear the coming of the Lord.

It is significant that right after the parable of the 10 bridesmaids and the parable of the talents, we have the judgement of the nations when the Lord comes in glory with all his angels with him and sits on his throne in judgement. It is here that we see what we are called to do during our brief life on earth, that is, what it means to use our talents fruitfully. In this scene of judgement, when the master separates the sheep and the goats, we realise that what is expected of us is that we care for those around us, and that we recognise the presence of Jesus in each of them, and act accordingly.

We must lead an intentional life, not simply drifting along from moment to moment, but aware that we are stewards of the time God has entrusted to us, and that we will be held accountable for it. This is important to us personally, but it also is a spiritual foundation for a pastoral movement called stewardship in which the members of each parish are encouraged to reflect upon how they make use of the gifts of time, talent, and treasure for the glory of God and the service of their neighbour.

We Christians live an Advent life, not a mindless one, but one which is **focused** on our expectation of the coming of the Lord, when he will hold us accountable for how we have creatively used the gifts that God has given to us, for the glory of God and the service of our neighbour.

Friday

2nd Week of Advent

The Day of the Lord

Summary

Advent encourages Christians to look beyond Christ's birth, focusing on His future second coming and His arrival at our life's end. This season's themes include joyful anticipation and accountability, urging us toward personal conversion. The "Day of the Lord," mentioned in both Old and New Testaments, emphasizes judgment and the need for readiness. Prophets like Amos and Zephaniah highlight it as a day of reckoning, a concept echoed by Jesus and Paul. Reflecting on accountability during Advent deepens our purpose, encouraging us to live responsibly. Advent is not just passive waiting but active preparation for an encounter with Christ.

Reflection

Each year, during Advent, we are invited to think beyond the coming of the Lord at Bethlehem, and certainly beyond the celebration of that coming in the liturgical feast of Christmas. We must cast our gaze towards the cosmic second coming of Christ at the end of time, and towards the intimate personal coming of Christ at the moment of death.

These two dimensions of Advent, the end of the world and the end of our personal earthly journey, are not only focused on a joyful encounter with the Lord, but also upon the accountability expected of us when he comes. That note of personal accountability and conversion, of course, is also prominent in the first coming of Christ, who opened his ministry proclaiming, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Modern Christians with a sugary, sentimental, and superficial idea of Jesus do not realise that the coming of Christ is a call to conversion. That is why I suggest that everyone read a chapter of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John every day, to encounter the actual Lord Jesus, not the fake one.

Without the prospect of future accountability, we simply drift in the present, which becomes meaningless. When we recognise that the Day of the Lord is when the

master returns to hold us to account for our behaviour, our present life is charged with vibrancy.

The idea of the Day of the Lord is one vital element of our Advent reflections. Already in the prophets of the Old Testament, we find references to a future Day of the Lord, which will be a day of victory, but also of judgment. As far back as the prophet Amos, around 750 BC, we hear him rebuke those who thought that God would simply come to make them victorious: “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him...” (Amos 5:18-19). About 100 years later, Zephaniah also spoke of the Day of the Lord as a time of accountability and judgment, in words which are the scriptural base for the magnificent hymn “Dies Irae”, “Day of Wrath,” so significant in our liturgical musical tradition: “A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish...” (Zephaniah 1:15). Malachi, the last prophet before the New Testament, in words made famous in Handel’s Messiah, prophesies, “Behold he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” (Malachi 3:1-2)

The New Testament continues this theme, with the day of judgment in Matthew 25, when the Lord comes to separate us as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The moral challenge of the prospect of this future day of judgment is for us to live each present moment, which is all that we control, recognising Jesus in those around us: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40) The past is beyond our influence, but the future prospect of the day of judgment shapes our present behaviour.

Of course, there are many references throughout the Gospels, and elsewhere in the New Testament, to the sudden coming of the Lord as a time of accountability. St Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “you yourselves know that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night... But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-5).

The prospect of the Day of the Lord, in the Old and New Testaments, and in our Christian life of discipleship, is an Advent theme that shapes our behaviour. We joyfully await the coming of Christ, but awareness of the accountability inherent in the Day of the Lord adds a penitential edge to our Advent reflections. Christians do not passively drift through life. They move with invigorating Christian purpose along the path of life in this valley of tears, with their eyes set on the New

Jerusalem, but also with a serious recognition of the accountability expected of them as stewards of the gift of life. We are all rapidly moving toward the Day of the Lord, certainly at the end of time, but most intensely at the particular judgment of our life that will occur on the Day of the Lord, which is the day of our death.

Saturday

2nd Week of Advent

Benedictus & Nunc Dimittis

Summary

Canticles, or songs of praise, enrich Christian prayer, especially through the Liturgy of the Hours, where key canticles highlight Advent's themes. Each morning, the Benedictus (Canticle of Zechariah) celebrates Christ's coming as the long-awaited Messiah, bringing freedom and hope. The evening Magnificat (Canticle of Mary) expresses praise for God's works, and at night, the Nunc Dimittis (Canticle of Simeon) reflects peace upon seeing the Messiah. These canticles, especially significant in Advent, inspire joyful anticipation, echoing the sentiments of God's people awaiting Christ's arrival. Praying these daily reinforces a life of worship, gratitude, and preparation for Christ's eventual return.

Reflection

Canticles, or songs of praise, are found throughout the Old and New Testaments. One hundred and fifty of these songs of praise are called psalms, and they are found in the Book of Psalms, or Psalter. Canticles are simply songs of praise not found in the Book of Psalms. These canticles and psalms were used in the worship of God in the liturgy, and also by individual believers in personal prayer, as they still are to this day among Christians.

There are three very important canticles which are used every day in the official daily Prayer of the Church, known as the Liturgy of the Hours. Bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated religious promise to pray this Liturgy of the Hours for those whom they serve, and many laypeople pray at least part of it as well. The full Liturgy of the Hours includes the Office of Readings, Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer. At Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, we have a hymn, two psalms, and an Old or New Testament canticle, a Scripture passage, prayers of intercession, the Lord's Prayer, and a closing prayer. At every Morning Prayer, after the Scripture passage, we pray the Benedictus, the Canticle of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. It is found in the Gospel of Luke,

chapter 1:68–79. At Evening Prayer each day, we pray the Magnificat, or Canticle of Mary, found in Luke 1:46-55. Finally, at the end of the day, in Night Prayer, we pray the Nunc Dimittis, or Canticle of Simeon, from Luke 2:29–32.

I highly recommend that people pray the Liturgy of the Hours, or at least some part of it. Sometimes people pray Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer. It does not take long, and it provides an excellent prayerful structure for our busy days. These prayers are found in a prayer book called the Breviary, but many people pray the Liturgy of the Hours using a convenient app, such as Universalis or iBreviary.

The three daily canticles from Saint Luke are very important to meditate upon, especially during Advent, because they speak to us powerfully of the meaning of the coming of the Lord.

The Benedictus or Canticle of Zechariah is a joyful song of praise proclaimed by the father of John the Baptist, as he celebrates his son’s coming into this world, and his role as the one who prepares the way for the coming of the Messiah. It begins, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he has come to his people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty saviour, born of the house of his servant David. Through his holy prophets he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us.” This is a perfect expression of the yearning for the coming of the Messiah, which gave hope to the people of ancient Israel, and which gives hope to each one of us as disciples of the Lord Jesus who celebrate the Lord, who has come to us at Bethlehem, and who will come again at the end of time and at the end of our own life.

Advent is a joyful season and a time of liberation. As Zechariah says, “he has come to his people and set them free.” He also looks back to the ancient hope of God’s people in the Old Testament, now fulfilled in the coming of Jesus: “He promised to show mercy to our fathers and remember his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.”

This freedom is at the heart of the promise of Advent, which gives us such joy. As we think of the coming of Christ at Bethlehem, we realise that the promise to Abraham has been fulfilled, and that we indeed are now free to worship God without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life. Zechariah then looks to his little child and recognises his role as the prophet who will go before

the Lord, and of course that was the mission of John the Baptist. Zechariah sums up the meaning of the coming of the Messiah for people of ancient times, and certainly for us. He ends his canticle with the words, “In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.” It is hard to find a better summary of the implications of the coming of Christ into this world and of the effect of his coming on our own lives every day. This is one reason why I would urge everyone to pray the Canticle of Zechariah every day by praying the Liturgy of the Hours.

At the end of the day, just before going to sleep, those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours pray Night Prayer, which includes the brief Canticle of Simeon, offered when Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus into the temple. Simeon realises that with the coming of the Messiah, whom he recognises in the baby Jesus, his mission is fulfilled. He had long awaited the coming of the Lord, and now he was in his presence. And so he utters these powerful words of serenity and trust which are prayed most fittingly every night before going to bed by those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours. He says, “Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.” This indeed is the meaning of Advent, and the source of consolation for each of us. We no longer wait for the coming of the Messiah at Bethlehem as Simeon did, but we await the coming of the Lord at the end of our life and at the end of time. And we are filled with consolation because the Messiah did indeed come 2,000 years ago, and the joy and consolation that filled the heart of Simeon fills our own hearts every day.

Daily TV Mass Advent Retreat
Cardinal Thomas Collins
3rd Week of Advent



Sunday: Advent Joy & Hope
Monday: Advent & the Gift of Time
Tuesday: The O Antiphons
Wednesday: Apocalyptic Vision of Advent
Thursday: Apocalyptic Urgency: Coming Soon
Friday: Death: the most Intimate Advent
Saturday: Advent in Word and Sacrament

Sunday

3rd Week of Advent

Advent Joy & Hope

Summary

On the Third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, we celebrate joy amidst Advent's penitential themes. This joy reflects true freedom found in God, as we prepare to welcome Christ. Unlike fleeting happiness, this joy flows from living faithfully, meeting Christ in sacraments like the Eucharist and Reconciliation. The Advent Collects emphasize this joy in anticipation, particularly the Collect of the Fourth Sunday, which also closes the Angelus prayer, reminding us of salvation's full story—from Christ's birth to his passion, resurrection, and final return. Engaging in daily Advent Mass or readings deepens our understanding, as does daily prayer of the Angelus.

Reflection

The Collect for the Third Sunday of Advent: “O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord’s Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.”

On the Third Sunday of Advent, we celebrate with joy the coming of the Lord. It is intriguing that the Church dedicates two Sundays each year to the theme of joy: Gaudete Sunday in Advent and Laetare Sunday in Lent. The Sundays of joy are in our two penitential seasons, for in being freed from our sins, we find true joy in life, not the shallow, temporary happiness that comes from self-indulgence and which ultimately, we come to regret bitterly. We are free when we are following the Lord and especially when we run with haste to meet him with joy. We should think of that not only in the season of Advent or in the season of Lent but throughout the whole of the year.

We are people who are baptised and confirmed. We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, the Blessed Trinity dwells within

us spiritually. We encounter Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, and when we turn away from the Lord, who comes to us in the sacramental Advent that is the Eucharist, we can experience him coming to us in mercy in the great Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament of mercy. There is no reason why we should not be filled with joy every day of the year, not because of some superficial illusions about everything being wonderful on this earth. After all, one of the Advent Sunday Collects tells us not to be hindered by those things which only give us a false happiness. But our joy comes from the freedom we receive when we meet the Lord, who comes to us liturgically in the remembrance of the first Christmas every year, and who comes to us in so many other ways throughout our life and ultimately at the end of our life when we see him face-to-face.

The Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent is the famous one which serves as the closing prayer of the Angelus: “Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the incarnation of Christ, your Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of his resurrection.” This is the Collect for the Sunday that is closest to Christmas, and it speaks of the promise of the coming of the Lord by the message of Gabriel. This is the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh, in Immanuel, God with us. This is what we celebrate each Christmas, and it is what the liturgical season of Advent prepares us for. The incarnation is what we celebrate specifically at Christmas, but in our whole life we are those “to whom the incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an angel.” We pray that we may “by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of his resurrection.” Advent and Christmas directly refer to the coming of Christ at Bethlehem, but reflecting on that coming of the Lord leads us to reflect on his suffering, death, and resurrection, upon his ascension into glory, and his coming at the end of time and personally at the end of each one of our lives. There is a wide scope in this final Collect of Advent, which allows us to see the whole picture of salvation in one magnificent prayer.

I recommend that during Advent, we go to Mass every day, if possible, or at least read the Scripture readings of the daily Advent Mass, and that we reflect also upon the Collects of the Masses of Advent. And, of course, I also highly recommend that each of us pray the Angelus every day of the year, three times a day, that great prayer which sums up the story of our salvation and is completed by the magnificent Collect of the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

Monday

3rd Week of Advent

Advent & the Gift of Time

Summary

Advent, deeply connected with time, calls us to reflect on Christ's past and anticipate his future coming, shaping how we live now. The season contrasts "chronos" (measured time) with "kairos" (significant, purposeful time), urging us to see each moment as part of God's divine plan. Advent teaches us to move beyond fragmented, moment-to-moment existence and instead live with purpose, recognizing time's limitations. By embracing this sacred view of time, we prepare not only for Christmas but for eternity, learning to live in harmony with God's will as citizens of the eternal City of God, passing through the temporal world.

Reflection

Advent is the liturgical season most attuned to the context of time. In Advent, we look back into the past to meditate on the prophecies foreshadowing the coming of the Messiah at the turning point of history, which we celebrate at Christmas, and for which we prepare through Advent. For Christians, however, the coming of Christ is not primarily a past event, which continues only in memory. The actions of Christ in the past—in his birth, teaching, miracles, suffering, death, and resurrection—shape our life in the present.

Advent is also oriented towards the future, towards the personal Advent of Christ at the moment of our death, which shapes how we live each present moment, and towards the cosmic Advent at the end of time, which allows us to relativise the pretensions of the empires, civilisations, and cultures of the current age, which shrink into insignificance in light of the coming of the Lord in glory. The City of God is eternal; the city of man is passing away. We are citizens of the New Jerusalem, temporarily passing through Babylon.

We are attentive to both past and future so that we might live rightly in the present. We live on the knife edge of the present moment, leaving the past behind, and racing into the future.

Time is a gift from God, a gift that we usually take for granted, especially if we are under the illusion that we have an unending supply of it on earth. The experience of the death of people whom we know can help us to realise the value and limits of time. Growing old can help us to treasure the gift of time, although this does not always happen. Memento mori, consciousness of the inevitability of our own death, is a powerful factor in leading us to cherish and to use well the limited time we have. The liturgy of Ash Wednesday gives each of us a salutary shock: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

We can see time as a succession of passing disconnected moments, as we see them on a digital clock. Those autonomous moments are disintegrated, not integrated into a consistent whole, and so can we be as well. But we can also think of time as an analog reality: this present moment gains its meaning and context because of its relationship to where I have been and to where I am going. This is a more humane way of experiencing time and leads to a more fruitful experience of life. The season of Advent helps us to have an integrated, analog experience of time, one with meaning, for we situate ourselves in relationship to the coming of the Lord, and do not simply advance mindlessly through endless disconnected moments. That integrated consciousness of time is essential for a life that has meaning and purpose. The regular pattern of the liturgical seasons highlights the action of God in human history, and in our personal histories, all seen as elements in the consistent whole of God’s plan; this allows us to be fully alive, and not simply to drift, until suddenly, time is up.

Chronos is simply quantitative time, which can be measured by a clock. Quantitative time is an inescapable fact: we have a limited supply of it, and sooner or later, and perhaps sooner than we think, and without warning, we will run out of it. Jesus tells us of the wealthy man who built bigger and bigger barns to store his grain and goods. He said: “I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you.” (Luke 12:16-21) The more we are conscious of the personal experience of the coming of the Lord that is death, the more fully and intentionally we will live. As the psalmist says, “Teach me the shortness of life, that I may gain wisdom of heart.” (Psalm 90:12). Or as Samuel Johnson bluntly put it, when a man knows that he will be hanged in a couple of weeks, it concentrates the mind wonderfully. So the simple fact of the limited quantity of time, if we will only realise that, can enrich our use of the time we do

have. Advent, with its emphasis on the shortness of time before the Lord comes, can help us to do that.

Kairos is significant time, time filled with rich experience: qualitative time, time with a direction and purpose, time that is significant because of the way in which it is the field of divine and human activity and relationships. With this in mind, we often speak of Kairos as quality time, time during which we are attentive to the ones we love. Advent leads us to experience qualitative time, time with a purpose, as we contemplate the entry of God into time in the past and his coming in the future. We have so little time, and so often it is wasted; Advent helps us to experience time within a context that allows us to see its significance and to live accordingly. We find meaning and direction by situating the present moment in relationship to the coming of Christ in the past and to the coming of Christ in the future. In a disintegrated digital world of lonely autonomy, we are Advent Christians, living purposeful and fruitful lives situated within the context of the plan of God.

Tuesday

3rd Week of Advent

The O Antiphons

Summary

The "O Antiphons," dating back to the 8th century, are a series of ancient Advent prayers framing the Magnificat during Evening Prayer from December 17 to 23. Each antiphon, drawn from Old Testament titles, reflects a symbolic name for the Messiah, deepening our anticipation of Christ's coming. These antiphons—like "O Wisdom," "O Key of David," and "O Emmanuel"—express the long-standing yearning for salvation, inspiring reflection as we approach Christmas. Known to many through the Advent hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," these prayers invite us to meditate on Christ's role in fulfilling prophecies and bringing hope to humanity.

Reflection

O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation. [Proverbs 9; Sirach 24]

An antiphon is a brief phrase **that** is placed in front of a psalm or canticle and repeated at the end of it, to help the one who is praying appreciate the context of the psalm and its implications. The antiphon frames the psalm or canticle and helps us to see it from a particular perspective. It is a help in prayer. The psalms and canticles of the Liturgy of the Hours are all framed with antiphons.

The most famous and important antiphons in the liturgy of the **Church** are called the "O Antiphons." As far back as at least the **8th century**, these special antiphons have been used to introduce and conclude the Magnificat during Evening Prayer from December 17 to December 23.

In each of the O Antiphons, the Lord who is coming to us is addressed with a symbolic title drawn from the Old Testament. By meditating on each antiphon, we can deepen our appreciation of the long tradition of yearning for the Messiah.

As we prayerfully reflect upon each of these ancient titles of the Messiah over the last **seven** days of Advent, the days nearest to Christmas, we are able to understand more fully and appreciate more deeply the significance of the One who is coming.

We may feel that we have never heard of the O Antiphons, but that is not true. They have been combined to form a very famous Advent hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” a phrase which is taken from the O Antiphon of December 23.

As we draw closer to Christmas, it is a fruitful spiritual exercise to meditate upon the seven famous Advent Antiphons. Though some of the imagery may be unfamiliar and lead us to study the ancient prophecies, the meaning of the antiphons is not difficult to grasp. For example, the reference to Jesse, the father of King David, draws our thoughts to the ultimate king, Christ the King. So let us now simply reflect upon these beautiful prayers, the O Antiphons of Advent.

December 17: O Wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth.

December 18: O Adonai and leader of Israel. You appeared to Moses in a burning bush and you gave him the law on Sinai. O come and save us with your mighty power.

December 19: O stock of Jesse, you stand as a signal for the nations; kings fall silent before you when the peoples acclaim. O come to deliver us and do not delay.

December 20: O key of David and sceptre of Israel, what you open no one else can close again; what you close, no one can open. O come and lead the captive from prison; free those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 21: O Rising Sun, you are the splendour of eternal light and the Sun of Justice. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 22: O King whom all the peoples desire, you are the cornerstone, which makes all one. O come and save man, whom you made from clay.

December 23: O Emmanuel, you are our king and judge, the one whom the people awaits and their saviour. O come and save us, Lord our God.

Wednesday

3rd Week of Advent

Apocalyptic Vision of Advent

Summary

The Apocalypse, or Book of Revelation, was written around 95 AD to encourage persecuted Christians to stand firm in their faith, despite the seeming power of the Roman Empire. Through vivid imagery, it reveals the true majesty of Jesus Christ, the victorious Lamb who rules over history, in contrast to earthly rulers. The Apocalypse underscores the importance of loyalty to Christ over yielding to temptation or persecution. This prophetic vision culminates in the Bride of Christ calling, "Come, Lord Jesus!" The book's ultimate message remains timeless, urging Christians to repentance, faithfulness, and anticipation of God's coming glory.

Reflection

O sacred Lord of ancient Israel, who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, who gave him the holy law on Sinai Mountain: come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free. [Exodus 6:1-13]

If ever there was a book devoted to the coming of the Lord, it is the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, or as I prefer to call it, the Apocalypse.

It is essential to understand the context of this mysterious book, with its dragons, heavenly visions, and intense imagery, all leading to the glorious coming of the Lord in victory as the heavenly city, Jerusalem, descends among us, and all things are made new.

The point of the book (like that of other apocalyptic books, such as the Old Testament Book of Daniel) is to allow God's faithful people on earth, who are suffering persecution in seemingly omnipotent earthly empires, to see a vision of the glory of the Lord God. In memorable imagery, the inspired seer reveals the majesty of God, who is in control of history, despite the pretensions of the earthly

rulers persecuting them. The believers, perhaps terrified or overly impressed by the apparent power of the empire, are led to see beyond that power to the truly triumphant Lord of history, identified in the Apocalypse as Jesus Christ, the lamb who was slain and now rules the universe.

The Apocalypse was written around **95 AD**, when Emperor Domitian was ruling the Roman Empire. Though he did not persecute the Church as systematically as later emperors, Christians who refused to worship him faced death. The Apocalypse was written to reveal to Christians that Jesus is Lord, encouraging them to proclaim this truth, whether facing a Roman governor or living faithfully in daily life. Antipas, described as a "witness" (from the Greek *martus*, meaning "martyr"), was the first to die for Christ and is honoured as the first martyr.

We all face death, and the Christians of the Apocalypse could face it imminently if they declared Jesus as Lord. The "first death" is inevitable for all, but the Apocalypse offers a stark warning of the "second death," which is avoidable. This second death results from a conscious choice to be unfaithful to Christ—choosing Caesar over Christ, either under persecution or through a life of infidelity. In modern terms, the second death is mortal sin. At the coming of the Lord, those who have chosen the second death will be cast into the lake of fire.

The Apocalypse emerged in a time of great peril when Christians were persecuted and also tempted by the materialism of their society. Yielding to persecution or seduction could lead them to eternal separation from God when he returns. However, the Apocalypse invites them to marvel at God's glory and eagerly call for his coming. In the book's final passage, **Revelation 22:16-21**, Christians, as the Bride of Christ, are encouraged by the Spirit to call out to him:

"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Revelation 22:17).

At the very end of the Apocalypse, and indeed the Bible, it says: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen."

The Apocalypse must be understood in its context of persecution and its purpose of helping Christians see the glory of the Lord and the ultimate impotence of the supposedly omnipotent empire. The lessons of fidelity it taught—serving the Lamb of God over the Beast, being citizens of the New Jerusalem while living in

"Babylon the Great"—remain relevant for Christians in every age. God does not use the Apocalypse to predict current political events; its primary purpose is to call believers to purification and repentance so that they are ready to meet the Lord, who is coming.

Thursday
3rd Week of Advent
Apocalyptic Urgency: Coming Soon

Summary

The Advent season calls Christians to live in a state of readiness for the Lord's imminent return, as emphasized in Scripture and the Book of Revelation. This "holy urgency" reminds us not to be complacent but to embrace each day as a gift, turning from sin and living purposefully. Advent encourages us to be vigilant, abandoning distractions and worldly concerns. Inspired by saints like St. Paul and St. Augustine, we are urged to cast off darkness and live in the light, prepared to meet Christ at any moment, praying "Come, Lord Jesus," with hearts ready and awaiting his return.

Reflection

O Flower of Jesse's stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid. [Isaiah 11:10; Luke 3:32; Acts 13:22-25]

Throughout the New Testament, it is emphasised that the Master is coming soon, and at an hour that we do not expect. His coming will be sudden, like a thief in the night.

In the Gospel of Luke, the rich man says to himself: "I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Luke 12:18-20).

This night, his soul will be required of him. Time's up. The Lord comes at an hour he does not expect.

We need to live each day, ready to meet the Lord. Whenever he comes, he is coming soon. Each day is a gift, and we should not presume that we will have another one.

Advent is intended to make us sensitive to the coming of the Lord, for we so easily become complacent and forget that the Lord is coming soon. We would not want to tremble at the words: “You fool, this night your soul is required of you.”

This point is made throughout the Apocalypse. In the first of the beatitudes in the book, we hear: “Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.” (Apocalypse 1:3). And at the end of the book, we hear: “the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon.” (Apocalypse 22:6). And: “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay everyone for what he has done.” (Apocalypse 22:12). And finally, “He who testifies to these things, says, ‘Surely, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Apocalypse 22:20).

The sudden coming of the Lord, at a time he is not expected, is a theme frequently found throughout the New Testament.

This theme should shape our life in Christ. We need to be awake, ready at any moment for the coming of the Master. We do not want to be caught off guard.

Obviously, if the coming of the Lord is seen only as his coming at the end of the world, then 2,000 years have passed since he said he was coming soon, suggesting that overly focusing on the date of the end of the world is a futile exercise. In any case, God tells us that we do not know the day or the hour.

It is true, of course, that for some of those who first heard the proclamation of the Apocalypse during their hidden Eucharistic liturgies, with Roman soldiers patrolling outside, the coming of the Lord would indeed be soon—tomorrow afternoon in the arena if they said “Jesus is Lord” to the governor, as the faithful Christians were thrown to the lions. The detailed accounts of those early martyrdoms tell us of how eagerly those brave Christians went to meet the Lord.

A sense of Christian urgency is basic to our life in Christ. We must live each moment conscious that he is coming soon. As the Collect of the First Sunday of Advent reminds us, we run joyfully to meet him. And as the Collect of the Second Sunday tells us, we need to hasten towards him, not loaded down with our sins.

He is coming soon. We confide the past to God's mercy and the future to his providence, but we live each present moment ready to meet the Lord. It is fitting for a Christian to think: my bags are packed; I am ready to go.

We should treasure the spiritual wisdom of Jean Pierre de Caussade in his masterpiece *The Sacrament of the Present Moment: Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Live each moment to the full, trusting God's providence and surrendering to God's will, and then we will never regret the past or fear the future. We live as Advent Christians, ready to meet the Lord. And if we are not, then remember the first message of Jesus: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." The Christian urgency that is a basic theme of Advent is one reason why it is a penitential season.

As St Paul says in the Letter to the Romans, in the passage that God used to bring Saint Augustine to conversion: "you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light..." (Romans 13:11-14).

This is the spirit of an Advent Christian, always ready in a spirit of holy urgency to greet the Lord as he comes. Come, Lord Jesus.

Friday

3rd Week of Advent

Death: the most Intimate Advent

Summary

This reflection reminds us of life’s brevity and our inevitable encounter with Christ at death, the ultimate Advent moment. Inspired by martyrs like Alfred Delp and John Fisher, we are called to live for Christ with readiness, knowing that worldly gains will not matter at life’s end—only love and faithfulness. Advent invites us to contemplate the “four last things”: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. These truths guide us to prioritize what truly matters, abandoning distractions for a life of integrity and spiritual focus. We ask Mary to pray for us now and at our death, embracing each moment with purpose.

Reflection

O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel controlling at your will the gate of heaven: come, break down the prison walls of death for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; and lead your captive people into freedom.
[Apocalypse 3:7-13; 9:1, 20:1; Isaiah 22:22]

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

The most intensely personal experience of the coming of Christ that each of us will have is the moment of our death. We cannot predict the date of the end of the world, and generally, we cannot predict the date of the end of our personal world on earth, but we know that it will be relatively soon.

We are on a journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem, our eternal home, and our life on earth is only the runway. It is essential to get launched on the journey, but whether it is relatively long or short, or rough or smooth, it is a brief part of the journey. As an old monk said to an ancient king, as he stood before him in his great banquet hall, a little bird flew in from one open window, sped across the room, and then flew out the other window into the cold night outside: that is our life—a brief passage through this world, which seems so important to us.

As the psalmist says, "Lord, teach me the shortness of life, that I may gain wisdom of heart." (Psalm 90)

The life so short, the craft so long to learn.

A wise old Roman observed that no matter how old we are, we always expect to live one more year. But a wiser American, Benjamin Franklin, observed that the only two things we can be sure of are death and taxes.

Death, whenever it comes, is our most intense experience of the advent of the Lord, as at that moment we stand before him in the particular judgment of the fruitfulness of our brief passage through this world. It is indeed good that we ask Our Lady to pray for us now, and at the hour of our death. On that day, whenever it may come, all the wealth we have accumulated, our earthly success, popularity, strength, and accomplishments—all these will be irrelevant. All that we will have on that day will be the love we have given away.

We should think about this daily, and perhaps especially during the season of Advent when our minds are turned to the prospect of the coming of the Lord. How intense the Advent of 1944 was for the young priest, Father Alfred Delp, in a Gestapo dungeon, scribbling reflections on the meaning of Advent as he prepared for his imminent death, joyfully ready for the coming of the Lord, which happened on February 2, 1945, when the Nazis hanged him because of his fidelity to Christ.

Four hundred years earlier, the evil King Henry VIII could neither bribe nor frighten Bishop John Fisher, who kept a skull on his desk to remind himself of the brevity of life. When the King's servants woke him in his cell in the Tower of London early in the morning of June 22, 1535, and told him that the king had ordered he be beheaded that day, he asked them when it was to be and what time it was now. When they replied that it would be in several hours, he asked them to wake him up in time and then rolled over and went back to sleep. Here was a man serenely ready for the coming of the Lord. And so should we be. A lifetime of prayer, sacramental union with Christ, and immersion in the Holy Word of God gave John Fisher the depth of awareness of the inevitable coming of Christ to hold him accountable for how he used his brief moments on earth. This gave him the courage to remain faithful in a wicked world and, like his friend Thomas More, go joyfully to meet the Lord. Our world is just as wicked, and we need to be like these great martyrs and the countless martyrs of our own day. We may not be asked, like them, to die for Christ, but we should live for Christ, ever conscious of his coming at the hour of our death.

Like our predecessors in faith through the centuries, we should ponder the four last things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Nothing else is important. These four last things focus our lives, helping us abandon useless concerns that waste our precious time. Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. If we use these four standards to measure our priorities, we will act rightly and live with the integrity and courage of Alfred Delp and John Fisher, finding their serenity at the coming of the Lord at the hour of death.

“Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

Saturday
3rd Week of Advent
Advent in Word and Sacrament

Summary

This reflection on “O Radiant Dawn” emphasizes Christ’s constant coming to us through Scripture and the sacraments, preparing us for our final encounter with Him. The Bible is not only God’s word but a personal way to know Him deeply. Through prayerful reading, we encounter the living Jesus, much like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Eucharist, where Christ becomes present, is the culmination of God’s coming to us, an intimate Advent each day. As Advent leads to Christmas, each Mass reaffirms Christ’s presence in our lives, illuminating our path like the radiant dawn dispelling darkness.

Reflection

O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. [Isaiah 58:8; Isaiah 60:1-5; Luke 1:7-8]

Jesus prepares us for his ultimate coming at the definitive moment of our death—the moment of the four last things: death, judgement, heaven, and hell.

He does not want us to cram for that final exam.

And so, he prepares the way so that he will be no stranger when we encounter him at the moment of our death.

The Lord comes to us through his inspired word. The Bible is not a merely human text to be mastered. It is the revelation of the will of God and his plan for humanity and for each of us. More than that, it cuts like a two-edged sword, afflicting the comfortable as well as comforting the afflicted. If we only approach it in the spirit of young Samuel in the temple, who prayed, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening,” the Word of God will be a lamp for our path in life. It allows us to see God, to see ourselves truly, and to see others as children of God to be revered. This is one reason why praying the psalms every day is so spiritually fruitful—I

recommend that everyone prays at least some part of the Liturgy of the Hours, which is mostly made up of the psalms.

The written Word of God is, above all, a way in which we can personally encounter God, and specifically encounter the Word become Flesh, God with us, our Lord Jesus. Think of how the disciples on the road to Emmaus recalled, after they had recognised Jesus in the breaking of the Bread, how their hearts had burned within them when he explained the holy scriptures to them, showing them how all of scripture leads to him. This is the importance of *Lectio Divina*, Divine Reading of a small portion of the Bible—not simply to study it or to understand it, but through prayerful attentiveness to encounter Jesus as we read the sacred text, slowly and repeatedly and preferably aloud.

Many years ago, in 1997, when I was ordained a bishop, I chose as my crest: Alpha and Omega, Bible and chalice: Jesus Christ in word and sacrament. And that is how the risen Lord continues to come to us, in word and sacrament.

I strongly urge everyone to read prayerfully a chapter of a Gospel every day, and some portion of the rest of the Bible.

God comes to us in all the Sacraments. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we encounter Jesus as sinners did on the roads of Galilee, and he frees us from our sins.

But until he comes definitively at the hour of our death, and even more dramatically when he comes in glory at the end of the world, Jesus comes to us in the Holy Eucharist.

Of course, the first part of the Eucharist involves the experience of God coming to us in Sacred Scripture.

Above all, however, God comes to us in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, as through Christ, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, we offer all glory and honour to the heavenly Father. With the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the words of Institution, the bread and wine are transformed into the sacramental real presence of our Lord Jesus. As the beloved disciple said of the Risen Jesus by the shores of Galilee: “It is the Lord!” A little custom that I have followed over the years is to pray silently at the elevation of the Host and the Precious Blood, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,” and then at the genuflection, “My Lord and my God.”

When we meet the Lord in the ultimate advent that is the hour of our death, he will be no stranger, for we have the privilege of meeting him in word and sacrament every day, especially in the sacramental advent that is the Holy Eucharist. How fitting that Advent leads up to Christ's Mass, or Christmas. Every Mass is Christ's Mass, and the Lord who came to us as that little babe at Bethlehem, looking so small and humanly insignificant, so different from what was expected in the Messiah, comes to us under the humanly flimsy appearances of bread and wine—and yet that little babe was Immanuel, God with us. And so is the Lord whom we receive in Holy Communion. It is the coming of the Lord, throughout our life, whenever we wish: My Lord and my God.

O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

Daily TV Mass Advent Retreat
Cardinal Thomas Collins
4th Week of Advent



Sunday: The Angelus
Monday: The Magnificat
Tuesday: Emmanuel: Intimate Majesty

Sunday

4th Week of Advent

The Angelus

Summary

“O King of all nations,” this prayer reflects our longing for Christ, the true joy of every heart. The Angelus prayer, traditionally prayed three times daily, recalls God’s initiative at the Annunciation, Mary’s obedience, and the Incarnation. This prayer emphasizes Mary’s essential role in leading us to Christ, as seen in her instruction at Cana: “Do whatever he tells you.” Each Hail Mary within the Angelus reinforces our response to God’s call, asking Mary’s intercession “now and at the hour of our death.” This daily practice orients us toward salvation, keeping Christ at the center of our journey.

Reflection

O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; O keystone of the mighty arch of man, come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust. [Psalm 2; Haggai 2:1-9]

The Angelus is a prayer traditionally offered three times a day: at six in the morning, at noon, and at six in the evening. The bells of the church ring out to encourage people to pray it, though for various practical reasons, that sometimes does not happen. A great painting shows a man and a woman alone in a field praying, with the church tower ringing out with its bells in the distance. It is the Angelus.

The Angelus begins, as does the Hail Mary (which is included within it three times), with the initiative of God: "The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Spirit." The incarnation is an act of God, as is everything in our life. It is a divine initiative to which we simply respond, as Mary does when she replies, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." This is always the proper response to the divine initiative. Mary exemplifies this obedient response to God’s will, as she does at the Wedding

Feast of Cana (John 2:1-12) when she tells Jesus that they have no wine, and then says to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

There could be no more perfect expression of Our Lady’s mission; she always leads us to obedience to Jesus. When human obedience responds to divine initiative, then “The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.” This certainly happened in Mary's response to Gabriel at the turning point of history, but it happens in lesser ways in our own lives whenever we respond as Mary did to the initiative of God. As in the Hail Mary, we ask for her intercession: “Pray for us, O holy mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.” Once more, everything leads to Jesus.

The Angelus ends with the prayer that is the Collect (the opening prayer) of the Fourth Sunday of Advent: “Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ thy Son was made known by the message of an angel may, by his passion and cross, be brought to the glory of his resurrection, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.”

This is the heart of our life in Christ and the reason for Christmas, or Christ's Mass. It was the reason for the first Christmas, and it is the reason for every divine encounter through word and sacrament during our journey on earth on our way to meet the Lord, who comes to us to bring us home to the heavenly city of Jerusalem.

The Hail Mary, prayed after each of the three movements of the Angelus—the divine initiative through the Angel, the human response of obedience by Mary, leading to the Incarnation of Christ—summarises the saving dynamic of the Christian life.

First, the Annunciation is God’s initiative through the Angel: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.”

The next words, also from the Gospel of Luke, are spoken not by an angel but by Elizabeth, as she greets Mary, who has come to help her in the Visitation: “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” The vision of faith must lead to practical charity.

Then, the name of Jesus is placed at the centre of the prayer, as it is at the centre of the Christian life.

The second part of the Hail Mary is from the Church, not from the Gospel of Luke, and it again leads us to Jesus, as Mary always does: “Holy Mary, Mother of God...” She is the mother of Jesus, who is God with us through the incarnation, and so in that sense, she is the Mother of God. It is an affirmation of the divinity of Jesus.

“Pray for us sinners...” We must recognise our sinfulness and repent, asking Mary’s intercession. “Now, and at the hour of our death.” The hour of our death is the most intense personal advent experience we have, as Jesus comes to us. But we can only prepare for that in the only time in which we can act, which is now.

So we should constantly pray the Hail Mary and the Angelus, which contains it, for together they express and help us experience the salvation that is the fruit of Christ’s coming.

Monday

4th Week of Advent

The Magnificat

Summary

Mary's "yes" to God is central to salvation, leading to the Incarnation. Her Magnificat, a song of praise and humility, reflects the spirit of Advent. This canticle emphasizes God's mercy, reversing worldly power, and resonates with the Beatitudes, calling us to live by Christ's values. The Advent season prepares us to welcome Emmanuel—God with us—through various "advents" in our lives: in Bethlehem, in sacrament and word, and at the end of time. Advent invites us to recognize the majesty and intimate presence of Christ, whose coming transforms the world. In his majesty and humility, Jesus calls us to respond with faith.

Reflection

Our Lady is, of course, at the very centre of the story of salvation.

It is her "Let it be done unto me according to your word" that opened the way to the coming of Immanuel, and it is her acceptance of the role of mother of the Messiah that changed the course of history. She is central to the season of Advent and Christmas simply because she is the mother of the Lord. During this Advent, as we reflect on the canticles related to the coming of the Lord, it is certainly the Magnificat of Mary to which we must devote close attention.

As we proclaim the canticle of Zechariah at every Morning Prayer, celebrating Zechariah's rejoicing at the coming of his son, John the Baptist, we proclaim the Magnificat of Mary every day at Evening Prayer. This song of praise recalls the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, where Hannah gave thanks to God for the birth of her son Samson, who, in his own way, would rescue Israel.

Mary is obviously central to the Incarnation, to Advent, and to Christmas. The coming of Christ in history happened because Mary said yes to God's invitation to become the mother of the Lord, as the second person of the Trinity, not clinging to

his divinity, entered into this world to suffer, die, and rise in glory. Mary's "yes" is at the heart of all that.

So every day we pray this great Canticle of Mary, which tells us about the meaning of the coming of the Lord and its implications.

Firstly, the canticle is marked by a spirit of both rejoicing and humility. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God, my saviour, for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant." Notice that she does not focus on herself, despite the astonishing role she is given. She proclaims the greatness of the Lord, as she always does. Mary leads us to Jesus, and that is what we should think about as we reflect upon her role in the coming of Christ during Advent.

Mary certainly recognises the significance of God's coming into this world and her role in it. She says, "From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name." Even here, while thanking God and acknowledging her role in the Lord's coming, she places the emphasis on the Almighty One who has done these great things for her. Holy is his name.

As in the "hallowed be thy name" of the Our Father, the name represents the reality of God. She is affirming that all comes from the Lord. In this coming of God into the world, it is God who is to be thanked.

She then proclaims the nature of God's advent into this world and its implications. He is not merely a new King David, conquering enemies. Instead, she says, "He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation." It is the Lord of mercy whom we welcome in Advent and Christmas.

When God enters this world, earthly values and structures to which we have become too attached, and which have drifted away from God, are overturned. This is a warning not to become wedded to the structures of this passing world. We recognise, as did St Thomas More and St John Fisher in the time of Henry VIII, that when we reflect on the Cosmic Advent at the end of time and take that as the standard, the pretensions of earthly potentates or self-satisfied cultures are insignificant.

Mary proclaims, "He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly." This reminds us of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Christ

came to transform the world and the heart of each of us. Mary continues, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever.”

The coming of Christ, whose advent we celebrate each year, is the pivot of history. It is the fulfilment of God’s ancient covenant with his people. It is the overturning of injustice in this world. Such is the Cantic of Our Lady, which we proclaim every day in the Liturgy of the Hours at Evening Prayer. But this cantic speaks not only of Christ’s coming through Our Lady at Bethlehem but also of the way we should welcome Christ into our own daily lives. We must be people who live by the principles proclaimed in the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Magnificat. As the Carthusians say in their great motto, “While the world spins, the cross stands firm.” That sense of fidelity to the Lord amid a world that is often spinning out of earthly control is what we celebrate each Christmas and in the Advent season, which prepares for it. The coming of God into this world is always a transformative reality. Now is the time to sharpen our awareness of this.

Tuesday
4th Week of Advent
Emmanuel: Intimate Majesty

Summary

This reflection on “O Emmanuel” emphasizes God’s transcendent yet intimate presence through fire—a symbol of sacrifice, purification, and majesty. From the burning bush to Pentecost, fire represents divine action, revealing God’s grandeur. Jesus, both fully divine and human, allows us to experience His glory and closeness, especially in sacraments. The Advent journey invites us to anticipate Emmanuel’s coming in many forms: historically in Bethlehem, cosmically at the end of time, personally in death, and daily in word and sacrament. We encounter Him as both friend and Lord, holding the mystery of His majesty close as we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

Reflection

O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Saviour of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God. [Isaiah 7:14; 8:8; Matthew 1:18-23]

In the Bible, the imagery of fire speaks to us of sacrifice, where the victim is consumed by fire, symbolising the totality of a sacrificial life. There is also the fire of purification, as seen in references to silver and gold purified in fire, and the lake of fire in the Apocalypse. Then there is the fire of Pentecost, the evangelical fire spreading throughout the world by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But beyond all of these is the fire of majesty, which reveals God as infinitely beyond us. We see this in the burning bush in Exodus, where God calls Moses by name and instructs him to take off his shoes, for he is on holy ground. We recall the fire of Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, and the pillar of fire that led the people through the desert. Then there is Elijah, the prophet of Advent, who foreshadowed John the Baptist and was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. In the New Testament, we are brought to the Mount of

Transfiguration, where Jesus, radiant in glory, is joined by those two great witnesses to the majesty of God, Moses and Elijah.

In the first chapter of the Apocalypse, John has a vision of the majesty of the risen Lord, and at the end, we see the glory of the heavenly city, Jerusalem.

God is infinitely transcendent in the glory of the Blessed Trinity, which we only know of because the second person of the Trinity, incarnate among us, chose to reveal something of the divine reality. In II Corinthians, St Paul writes: “it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (II Corinthians 4:6)

We must be attentive to the majesty of the transcendent Lord, to the glory of the Triune God, and of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The modern tendency to make Jesus our “buddy” is misguided, as is the parallel tendency to reduce the liturgy to something homely and banal, rather than a privileged invitation to experience what God does, gloriously present among us in a sacramental way. He is the one who acts in every sacrament, working through human participants.

But the awe-inspiring wonder of the advent among us of Immanuel, God with us, is that the transcendent Lord has allowed us to experience his intimate presence without diminishing his divine majesty. So it was at Bethlehem: a little babe, so vulnerable, yet accompanied by choirs of angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest.”

We must always be attentive to what is sometimes called the Catholic “and”: faith and works, Jesus as the divine second person of the Trinity incarnate among us, fully divine and fully human in nature.

This is true in Advent and in every dimension of the Lord’s coming: the historical advent at Bethlehem, the Cosmic Advent at the end of time, the most personal advent at the hour of death, and the advent in word and sacrament.

In each encounter, we must recognise the humanity of our experience while also fully acknowledging his divinity. Throughout our earthly journey, as we move toward the heavenly Jerusalem, our risen Lord comes to us quietly, as on the road to Emmaus, always inviting. He is our friend and brother, yet also Our Lord and God, infinite in transcendent majesty.

In prayer, in our reading of Scripture, in our sacramental life and liturgical celebration, in our moral behaviour, and as a community of disciples, we live as Advent Christians. We rejoice in our encounter with the Lord, whom we hasten to meet, as the Advent Collect reminds us, while remaining conscious of the glory of his transcendent majesty.

“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.” (Apocalypse 22:17)

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely, I am coming soon.’”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Saviour of all people, come and set us free, Lord our God.