

**PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A)**

15 DECEMBER 2019



SUNDAY REFLECTION

The readings proclaimed this Third Sunday of Advent speak of transformation, change of life and rejoicing because the Lord is near.

In the first, the prophet Isaiah, in his imagery, shows that growth, splendor and glory emerge slowly and as people of faith, we must have courage and patience. God will save us. Blindness and deafness will be healed. Sorrow will end and we will rejoice in the Lord

The second reading taken from the Letter of James also reminds us of the Lord's coming and uses imagery of growth to challenge us to have patience. We must also have a hopeful heart if we are to embrace the transformation that will be ours when the Lord comes.

And the extract from the Gospel of Matthew, brings to us a conversation between John, through his followers, and Jesus. The Good News of life and light, transformation and change echo in the Lord's words. Yes, those with infirmities are healed – the blind, deaf, lame – all those who do not lose faith receive the Lord's healing touch. Truly Jesus is the one the world awaits, the one who will save all humanity, the true prophet of God.

As we celebrate this midway point in the Advent season, we can rejoice at the Good News reflected in these readings. However, we cannot be limited by physical cures and visible manifestations of power. In our world spiritual blindness, lack of courage to stand for values, being bystanders by our silence in the face of injustice in any form exercised by any individual or organization and inequality are the real ills that must be healed. As a community and Church, our prophetic voice must and can challenge the valueless leaders of today. But these readings also speak of anticipation, hope and glory. Indeed, we can rejoice because the Lord is with us and we can be the Good News the world needs by our courage, love and hope.

STEWARDSHIP: Each of us has his or her own role to play in the coming of the kingdom of God. John the Baptist was called to be the herald of the Messiah, preparing the way of the Lord. To what is the Lord calling me?

GAUDETE SUNDAY

A Week of Joy

This Sunday we light the roses colored candle on our Advent wreath and this week we celebrate Gaudete Sunday! Gaudete is the Latin word for joy. So what makes the third week of Advent different from the rest?

We get the term Gaudete from the first line of the introit of the Mass. The introit is the opening chant of the Mass. You may not even be aware of the term because it is often replaced by the opening hymn. But it's worthwhile to look at the introit in the missal and to reflect on it before Mass starts.

For Gaudete Sunday the Introit is taken from Saint Paul's exhortation in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

What is special about the Third Sunday of Advent? For much of the Church's history, this Sunday had a special name: "Gaudete" Sunday." The traditions surrounding this Sunday go back as far as the fourth or fifth century, as does the season of Advent itself. Advent, our preparation for Christmas, was originally a forty-day penitential season like Lent. In fact, since it used to begin on November 12 (just after the Memorial of St. Martin of Tours), it was called "St. Martin's Lent." "Gaudete Sunday" was the Advent counterpart to "Laetare Sunday," which marks the mid-point in Lent. On Gaudete Sunday, the season of Advent shifts its focus. For the first two weeks of Advent, the focus can be summed up in the phrase, "The Lord is coming." But beginning with Gaudete Sunday, the summary might be, "The Lord is near." This shift is marked by a lighter mood and a heightened sense of joyous anticipation. Liturgically, the colors

lighten as well. The priest usually wears rose-colored vestments, a hue seen only on Gaudete Sunday and Laetare Sunday. On this day, we light the third candle of the Advent wreath, which is also rose-colored, or if you prefer, pink. The word “Gaudete” is Latin for “Rejoice.” This celebration is a reminder that God who loves us is still in charge and that we await his coming not with fear, but with tremendous joy. Today’s Second Reading, from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, reflects this joy: “Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

Why Do You Tarry Lord?

So far in the weeks of Advent we’ve seen a subtle movement. We started with hope – trust that God will keep His promises. God laid the foundation for His promise of a savior immediately after the Fall. But the savior was a long time in coming. Why did God wait so long to send us the Savior?

One answer, expressed in the Baltimore Catechism, is that God wanted to impress on humanity the full horror of sin, especially in how it separates us from God. God wants our hearts to yearn for Him so that we’ll truly love Him.

Another answer is that at the same time God was teaching humanity how to love Him. If we look at Salvation History we see how God takes the Hebrew people, and through them all of humanity, shows how to build a relationship with Him step by step. So in the first week of Advent we exercise the trust in God that gives rise to perseverance. We settle in for the long haul and we prepare our hearts to learn the lessons God wants to teach us. That’s the week of hope.

Responding in Joy

In the third week of Advent we enter into the “fullness of time.” We’ve received God’s loving plan of salvation. We’ve entered into the work on our souls meant to prepare the way for the Lord. We’ve grown in trust. We’ve participated in the disciplines of Advent – prayer, sacrifice and alms giving – and allowed these practices to change our hearts. And now we recognize that the time has come!

It’s time for the Father to bring it all to fulfillment. And He does that in the Gift of His Son. So our hope and our peace are now united to joy as we acknowledge the goodness and mercy of our God. We are still in a state of anticipation, but it’s now the anticipation of Christmas Eve. We know the good stuff is coming, but we just have to wait one more night.

A Special Time of Prayer

December 17th marks a very special time of prayer each year. The Gospels at Mass are taken from the infancy narrative. Rather than focusing on the future joy of Jesus’ “second coming,” we now focus on Emmanuel –Jesus with us now.

READINGS FOR FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

22 DEC ‘19

Is. 7:10-14: The future incarnation is prophesied through Isaiah. Good will come and dwell with His people.

Rom. 1:1-7: St. Paul is writing to relatively new Christians without much background in the Jewish scriptures, trying to introduce them to the character of Jesus as one who has long been predicted to come as the ‘Son of God’ and that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine.

Mt. 1:18-24: Matthew takes Isaiah's words about the Lord's sign to the people that God would always be with them – a child named Immanuel – and applies them to the coming birth of Jesus.

COMMENTARY ON THE PROPER PRAYERS OF ADVENT FROM THE ROMAN MISSAL

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Collect

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
Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever.

Commentary

- Many will be familiar with this prayer from the *Angelus*, which commemorates the Incarnation of Christ.
- The prayer comes from the seventh century Papal practice at Rome where it was assigned to March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, when the angel appeared unto Mary when she conceived Christ, for the 1970 Latin edition of the *Roman Missal* the prayer was transferred to the last Sunday before the birth of our Lord.
- The Angel announcing the birth of Christ refers not only to the Angel that appeared to Mary in the Annunciation but also to the Angels that appeared to the shepherds who came to do homage to the new-born babe.
- The prayer does not refer explicitly to the death of Christ, but rather subtly refers to Christ's Passion and Cross. As disciples of Christ, our way of life is often described as taking up our cross. The prayer also subtly refers to our future glory, already revealed in our history when Christ appeared in glory to the disciples. The Christian way of life, then, is characterized by carrying our cross and already sharing in the glory of the resurrection.
- This prayer preserves an early insight that the whole mystery of Christ from His incarnation, passion, death and resurrection and His continuing presence in His body the Church is one integral mystery. The specific moments of this mystery in salvation history are mapped out over the course of the church year, but this prayer reminds us that every Sunday, every liturgy celebrates the whole mystery and our share in it.

Prayer over the Offerings

May the Holy Spirit, O Lord,

sanctify these gifts laid upon Your altar,
just as He filled with His power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
Through Christ our Lord.

Commentary

- In the opening prayer the Angel made known the Incarnation which was accomplished in the sanctifying power of the Spirit according to this prayer. The incarnation and the consecration of the bread and wine are connected in this prayer by the working of the Spirit.
- The Roman Sacramentaries representing both the Papal and parish practices of the city were widely diffused North of the Alps where the two traditions and local practices were conflated in numerous ways. From that creativity this prayer first appears in Francia during the eighth century and eventually became part of the Roman tradition.
- At St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, over the altar there stands a monumental baldachin, a canopy supported by four corkscrew columns of Bronze by Bernini. On the underside of the canopy directly over the place on the altar where the gifts of bread and wine are placed is an image of the Holy Spirit. The entire baldachin is, indeed, an architectural expression of the role of the Spirit in the transforming the gifts of bread and wine laid upon the altar. Many older churches have such an expression of the Holy Spirit above the gifts.
- We prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ with this reference to the incarnation, that is to the Annunciation of the Angel to the Virgin Mary when she conceived our Savior. The Spirit active in the mystery of the incarnation is also active now in the transformation of the bread and wine. In many churches as we approach the altar to receive communion, we come to stand under a dome with the image of the Spirit at its peak. So too the Spirit sanctifies the assembly engaged in the liturgy and brings unity to the Church.

Prayer after Communion

Having received this pledge of eternal redemption,
we pray, almighty God,
that, as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer,
so we may press forward all the more eagerly
to the worthy celebration of the mystery of Your Son's Nativity.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Commentary

- Having already received the pledge of eternity, we pray to celebrate worthily the beginning of that pledge in the nativity of Christ.
- Newly composed for the 1970 Latin edition of the *Roman Missal*, the first part of the prayer comes from the Mass booklet for the feast of St. Lawrence that was included in a sixth century compilation of Roman Mass booklets. The second half

was adapted from a prayer assigned to Friday of the third week of Lent in seventh-century Papal practice.

- This prayer reflects on the rite of communion it concludes and uses the language of commerce to speak about the Eucharist as a pledge or a down payment or a guarantee of eternal redemption.
- This prayer also looks forward to the coming week in which we celebrate the Nativity of Christ. We prepare to celebrate Christmas by preparing presents, meeting social commitments, decorating the home and preparing the festive meal. This prayer suggest that we consider our preparations in light of the mystery we are preparing to celebrate. The Nativity is also called the feasts day of our salvation. The prayer challenges us to discern how our many commitments arise from this mystery of our salvation and to judge wisely the many ways of preparing for the feast according to their worthiness to the mystery we celebrate.
- As we prepare to celebrate the Nativity of Christ, so we have already received the foretaste of the wedding feast of the lamb, the heavenly banquet. While the Church year maps the life of Christ over the course of a cosmic year, each liturgy celebrates the whole mystery of our salvation in Christ. So too the Christmas holiday gives opportunity to celebrate this mystery of God's love among us not only on Christmas day but also at every meal and on every day.

PRAYER FOR LIFE DECEMBER 2019



Intercession

May women experiencing challenging pregnancies receive loving care as they
Prepare to welcome their children.

Prayers

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory be...

Reflection

Each year at Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ our Savior. As we prepare for this joyful celebration, we recall the journey of the Holy Family from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Far from home, poor, and in great need, Mary and Joseph find refuge in a simple stable. But this humble setting among the livestock soon welcomes the heavenly host of angels and the infant Jesus Himself. Today, many women find themselves pregnant, poor, without a home, and in great need. They often feel alone, scared, and overwhelmed, not knowing where to turn. During this challenging time, expectant mothers need a refuge of their own. Like the Holy Family, they are reliant on the kindness of others. This year, may the story of the first Christmas inspire us to reach out to mothers in need. May we be ready to offer loving support and encouragement as they prepare to welcome their children. By answering this call, may we too come to share in and witness to the miracle of new life.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one)

- Offer a prayer for all mothers in need: (www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/a-prayer-for-pregnant-mothers.cfm)
- Contact your local pregnancy resource center. Ask about ways you can help, such as volunteering or donating baby items.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to Do for this month's intention.

One Step Further

Mothers in need are in our parishes and neighborhoods. In March 2020, the Church will take up a new, nationwide effort called "**Walking with Moms in Need: A Year of Service**" (usccb.org/moms-in-need). Parishes will be encouraged to assess, expand, and better communicate resources to pregnant moms and families in need. Learn more in this interview with Archbishop Naumann: www.bit.ly/wwmin-interview.

Did You Know?

March 25, 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the papal encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) written by Pope St. John Paul II. This anniversary year gives us a wonderful moment to focus on supporting expectant mothers in challenging circumstances.

ICON JOSEPH'S CONSENT

Origin of Image

At first glance this icon looks like an illustration of a familiar theme in religious art, the journey to Bethlehem mentioned in chapter 2 of Luke. We see Mary and Joseph, she is obviously pregnant and riding on a donkey. But in truth, the scene presented to us is from a totally different Biblical text, Matthew 1:18-25.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and they shall name Him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named Him Jesus.

Theology & Symbolism

Joseph is shown to us welcoming Mary into his house. He is portrayed for us as a young man. Most traditional icons that include Joseph show him as an old man. Scripture says nothing about the age of Joseph at the time of Jesus' birth. But since Mary was a widow at the Crucifixion (Jn. 19:27) and Joseph is not mentioned in any Gospel accounts of Jesus' period of public ministry, he is presumed to have died before them. During the first century, life expectancy was short. Joseph could have been an "old man" of 21 when he married his new bride of 14.

The appearance of Mary is unusual when compared to other Eastern icons, but will readily be recognized by those familiar with Our Lady of Guadalupe. This apparition of the Blessed Virgin appeared to a humble native named Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin near Mexico City in 1531. When Juan Diego tried to convey her wish to the local bishop that a church be built in her honor, the bishop demanded proof. She complied by miraculously imprinting her image on the Indian's cloak. This image of the Virgin serves as the model of Mary's features and dress. The angel is not named for us in the Gospel account, but tradition suggests him to be Gabriel, the same divine messenger who brought the news to Mary at the Annunciation.

ICON; THE ASSENT OF MICHAEL

Origin of Image

Michael has been honored since the early centuries of Christianity as the supreme guardian angel of the church. He is one of only three angels named in the Bible, the other two being Gabriel and Raphael. His name in Hebrew means "*Who is like God?*", the war-cry of the good angels in the heavenly battle. His name is recorded four times in Scripture; twice in Daniel, once in Jude, and once in Revelation.

When St. Michael the Archangel is pictured for us in art, the usual pose is warlike, showing him clad in armor with sword in hand, sometimes standing over the devil pictured as a snake or dragon. In sharp contrast, this icon presents him dressed in classic Greek robes, holding a radiant circle known in iconography as a mandorla. This is a symbol used to indicate Divine revelation. On the mandorla is pictured Jesus as a young boy, Christ Emmanuel, "God is with us."

This icon honors this saint specifically for assenting to the Incarnation, thereby siding with the Holy Trinity in their plan for human-kind and for heaven.

Theology & Symbolism

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer and place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

This dramatic passage from Revelation 12:7-9 is a brief synopsis of an ancient legend. God reveals to the hosts of heaven that His Son will become human and that redeemed humankind will then be higher than the angels. The archangel Michael accepts the will of God while Lucifer rejects it. The battle that results is the fundamental struggle between good and evil, a titanic battle that makes all human wars seem feeble by comparison.

From Michael's mandorla, Jesus Emmanuel gazes directly into the soul of the viewer. His right hand is raised in benediction and His left holds a scroll, signifying the Word of God. His large forehead is symbolic of great spiritual power, the strong neck symbolic of physical strength. The overall impression conveys Christ's kingship over all the universe, despite His physical youth. Christ's halo, the iconographic symbol for sanctity, is inscribed with a cross and the Greek letter omicron, omega, nu, spelling "HO ON." In English, this becomes "Who Am," the name used for God in Exodus 3:14. On the background is written "IC XC," Greek shorthand for Jesus Christ, *Iesous Khristos*.

Michael's face is depicted in Byzantine form. The eyes are large and soulful, gazing within or gazing at infinity. The nose is long, contributing a look of nobility. The mouth is small and closed, symbolic of contemplation. Angels are nearly always presented in androgynous or gender neutral fashion, symbolic of their heavenly nature different from humanity. Michael's head is surrounded by the halo of sainthood. The halo and background are covered by gold leaf, used in icons to indicate Divine light. The letters on the background are Greek initials standing for "Archangel Michael."

The Great "O" Antiphons

In our society there is a pressure to hurry things along, get it done and move on to the next, whatever the next might be. The Advent Season is an example of this. Since decorations for Christmas seem to go up earlier each year and Christmas sales and Christmas Clearance sales seem to come earlier and earlier and of course the ever present, poor quality Christmas music starting right around Halloween. We are moved right into Christmas without the opportunity to really prepare for the Season which Advent invites us to do.

When out shopping in mid-November, and I hear the strains of "Silver Bells" and "The Little Drummer Boy" wafting from hidden store speakers, I just want to cover my ears. The ever-present repetition of Christmas carols often serves to point out that the rest of the world is celebrating Christmas, while we're still in the season of Advent. For me, the one exception to this audio barrage is a simple chant for Advent, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." This song, with its longing for the coming of the Savior, genuinely belongs to Advent and not to Christmas. Its melody is based on Gregorian chant, and its verses are all taken from the Church's "O antiphons." These antiphons introduce the Magnificat, or Canticle of Mary, in the Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours from December 17 through December 23. Each antiphon begins with a traditional title for Christ. They are: "O Wisdom," "O Leader of the House of

versions of English translations since they were originally in Latin, and the hymn O Come, O Come Emmanuel contains all the O Antiphons.)

Tuesday December 17: O Wisdom (*O Sapientia*)

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.

Wednesday December 18: O Lord and Ruler (*O Adonai*)

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.

Thursday December 19: O Root of Jesse (*O Radix Jesse*)

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.

Friday December 20: O Key of David (*O Clavis David*)

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.

Saturday December 21: O Radiant Dawn (*O Oriens*)

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

Sunday December 22: O King of the Nations (*O Rex Gentium*)

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.

Monday December 23: O Emmanuel

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

Week 3, Joy

Dear Jesus, help us focus on you during this busy season. May we stay aware of the joy you bring into our lives. We want to find you in the everyday moments and come with hearts of gratitude to your manger on Christmas. Amen.

AS WE SEEK CHRIST,
AS WE FIND HIM,
AS WE FOLLOW HIM,
WE SHALL HAVE
THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT,
NOT FOR ONE FLEETING
DAY EACH YEAR,
BUT AS A COMPANION
ALWAYS

Thomas Merton



