



Adore

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS
DAILY REFLECTIONS 2020

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Lord, let us see your face and we shall be saved. PS 80:3

The word “advent” comes from the Latin *adventus* meaning “coming or arrival”. It can also mean “new birth or new beginning”, hence its use for this time given to us to prepare for Jesus’ birth at Christmas.

Ah, another Christmas! What immediately comes to mind? Be honest. Do we think of God’s love for each of us? A divine love so perfect that he sent his only Son to save us; a Son who, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, is truly God-made-Flesh? Do we think of how we will spiritually and sacramentally prepare to welcome the Creator God who humbled himself to become one of us in the form of a creature, a baby, before whom we adore on bended knee? Or, are our first thoughts about the Christmas tree, the presents to be bought and wrapped, the cards to be written and sent, the food to be prepared, beating the last-minute traffic rush? *Oh yes, and where will I most conveniently fit in Christmas Mass this year?* Well, I think we can all relate to this, can’t we?

But in doing all these things, which really are important and need to be attended to, let’s not forget the very reason why we do them: we are celebrating the new birth, the new beginning of Jesus, our Lord and our salvation.

So, while still doing all these other things over the next four weeks please also take the time to stop, to remember, and to pray:

Jesus, Lord, Son of God, I adore you! Jesus, son of Mary, I adore you! Jesus, God made Flesh, I adore you! Jesus, only Saviour of the world, I adore you! Jesus, still present with us in the Blessed Sacrament, I adore you! Jesus, my Lord, my Redeemer, my Love, my Friend, I adore you and I thank you! Lord, let me see your face and I shall be saved! Amen!

FR CHRISTOPHER G SARKIS

Follow me. MT 4:20

One of the sound economic principles I learned a long time ago was that, “There is no profit without risk.” Who of you married people reading this had any idea what you were getting yourselves into when you married? Who of you has not taken a leap in the dark and signed up for something for which you could not be given a guarantee? And yet, something in you said there was just the chance that whatever it was, it was worth the risk.

Sometimes you were right and sometimes you were wrong but, who wants to end one’s life being a soppy piece of bread floating in warm milk? Wouldn’t you rather want to come to the end saying to yourself: “I took some risks. I smiled at someone and they didn’t smile back!” “I believed that everyone should be treated equally, and I got my fingers burned.” I am sure you can think of many different examples. And those kinds of things I believe bring us to some sort of understanding of this Gospel reading today—these disciples were invited to take a risk.

In the *Two Roads Diverged in a Yellow Wood* by Robert Frost, we read: “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.”

This is what Andrew did; this is what you, too, are called to do today. Take the road that holds the risk—whatever that is—and know that by doing so you adore the God who took the biggest risk of all. He came into this world looking for you, and even though it claimed his life, he thought you were worth the risk.

A little prayer to pray often:

I come to you today with all my heart—however you call. Amen.

MOTHER HILDA SCOTT OSB

Whether you turn to right or left, your ears will hear these words behind you, “This is the way, follow it.” IS 30:21

His little legs were pumping, front wheel wobbling and tears flowing as he struggled to keep up with his mum along the bike path. He was crying out to be heard and reassured. When mum realised, she turned back noticing the depth of his cry and compassionately knelt in front of him as he came to a stop, catching his breath between tears. “What’s wrong?” she asked. “Did you think we had left you?” “Yes,” nodded the little boy, no more than five years old. Tenderly kissing his tear stained cheeks, wiping them away and holding him close to her chest, she reassuringly promised, “We would *never* leave you; Daddy is right behind you and I am here.” Strengthened by this encounter, he filled his chest with a deep breath and powered on.

In this moment, I completely identified with the child and simultaneously felt the strong presence of the Father, with the tenderness and care we often experience in a mother, compassionately kneeling before me to speak those words over my own heart: “Did you think that I had left you? I would never leave you!”

This experience captures the essence of Isaiah’s words. The Father will hear your cry and be gracious. He will stand firm behind you with compassion, tenderness, faithfulness, belief, authority over all things, and will whisper, “This is the way, follow it.” Take a moment now to enter these images again and ask the Holy Spirit to draw you deeper into God’s loving care and the attentiveness of the Trinity to your authentic desires.

Holy Spirit, I ask for the grace to go deeper. On this journey to Christmas, whisper my next steps that I might come to know and adore God anew. Amen.



third
WEEK OF ADVENT

ARTWORK SPOTLIGHT

The Dream of Saint Joseph

PHILIPPE DE CHAMPAIGNE (1602–1674).

“The Dream of Saint Joseph”, c. 1642–43.

Oil on canvas, 209.5 x 155.8 cm. The National Gallery, London. Public Domain.

Abraham, St Paul tells us, was “convinced that God had power to do what he had promised. This is the faith that was ‘considered as justifying him’” (Rm 4:21–22). Like his father Abraham, Joseph was also justified by faith. The tests to which his faith was put resemble the tests of Abraham himself. Therefore, St Matthew calls Joseph a “just” man, a righteous man. In the Scriptures, righteousness was a quality which reflected God's Covenant with his people. A person who was “right” with God was one who sought to do God's will in every situation.

Joseph is called a just man because he did the right thing with regard to Mary, his wife. Somehow, with love's insight, he knew Mary's innocence and holiness. It would not be right to expose her to the severity of the Law of Moses. As a man of the Covenant, endowed with God's own compassion, Joseph could only be gentle with Mary.

As a son of David, Joseph would have had hopes of paternity. But with Mary pregnant by another, Joseph's hopes of paternity seem to be as fully frustrated as Abraham's were when his wife, Sarah, proved to be sterile. But in deciding to put Mary away, could Joseph not find another wife and so become a father?

God commands Joseph not to divorce Mary. Perhaps, Abraham was better off! He at least finally had a son of his own flesh through the miraculous end to Sarah's sterility. But Joseph's hope for natural fatherhood would not be fulfilled. He would not have a son of his own flesh. He would have to accept someone else's son as his own.

A just man is essentially a man of faith who hopes in God. Of Joseph, as of Abraham, it can be said, “He put

his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness" (Gn 15:6). A just man is open to receive the fulfilment of God's incredible promises. And so, faith is really a complete surrender to God that he might accomplish in him whatever he wants. This is why St Paul speaks of faith as obedience (cf. Rm 1:5).

And so, Joseph receives God's richest blessings. God's two greatest treasures are given to Joseph as his own—Jesus, God's own Son, and Mary, the mother of this Son. Jesus is truly Joseph's Son because Mary, Jesus' mother, is truly Joseph's wife. Jesus is thus lawfully born into Joseph's family.

So, when Joseph accepts someone else's son as his own, it is not a frustration of his hope for paternity, but rather a marvellous fulfilment of these hopes. Joseph's fulfilment surpasses that of Abraham, for he receives Jesus, Abraham's Son who is God, whereas Abraham received Isaac who was only a promise of the greater Son to come.

St Paul assures us, "All baptised in Christ ... you are one in Christ Jesus. Merely by belonging to Christ you are the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised" (Ga 3:27–29). If Joseph is the father of Jesus in a real sense, then he is father of all who are "one in Christ Jesus". By his self-sacrificing faith, Joseph has become the father of us all, inheriting this title more fully than Abraham himself.

Philippe de Champaigne (1602–1674) presents us with Gabriel suspended above St Joseph and surrounded by a soft ray of light, pointing with one hand to heaven, and with the other to Mary. Kneeling before the open Scriptures, Mary glances towards the angel, her arms crossed in complete submission to God's will. The angel seems to be suggesting that Joseph imitate that total self-giving.

Joseph has always been considered the patron saint of workers, particularly carpenters and joiners. Scattered on the floor are his tools—a wooden mallet, chisel and axe. He is shown as youthful rather than elderly as was more common. The ornate chair and tasselled cushion on which Joseph rests his head are at odds with the simplicity of his garments. But Champaigne's figures in all his paintings were inspired by classical sculpture.

This subject was a common feature in 17th century painting, promoted by, among others, St Francis de Sales (+ 1622) and Pope Gregory XV who in 1621 had instituted the feast of Saint Joseph on 19 March.

MGR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

15 DECEMBER 2020

Tuesday of the 3rd week of Advent

Zephaniah 3:1–2, 9–13

Psalm 33(34):2–3, 6–7, 16, 18–19, 23

Matthew 21:28–32

He answered, “I will not go,” but afterwards thought better of it and went. MT 21:29

When asked to do something by his father, the first son answered, “I will not go,” but afterwards thought better of it and went and did what he was asked to do. But when we feel called to do something, if our initial response is, “I will not go,” even if we later change our mind, there is a risk that we will lose the opportunity and the moment will pass us by.

I can remember an occasion when I was at Canterbury West Train Station, standing on the platform, waiting for a train to London alongside many other people. On the opposite platform, a mother appeared with a child in a buggy and several shopping bags attached to the handles. She made her way to the subway to cross over to the platform I was on. The subway was accessible only by steps, there was no slope or elevator, so she could have done with some help, but everyone on the platform, myself included, hesitated. It was as if we were waiting, hoping for someone else to step forward and help. I don't know why we held back. Perhaps some of us were embarrassed to stand out in front of the crowd? Perhaps some of us had been knocked back before when offering to help someone? We all felt called to do something, but our initial response was, “I will not go.”

And then, like the first son, I had a change of heart and made my way to the subway to help. But by the time I got there she had already made it up the steps, out of the subway and onto the platform. I missed the opportunity. My change of heart had come too late.

Lord, help us to see and not miss opportunities to help those in need. Amen

FR ANTONY JUKES OFM

Do not be afraid; your prayer has been heard. LK 1:13

Imagine being conscripted into the army, winning the lottery and being elected as pope all on the same day. Was this how Zechariah felt when he was chosen to offer sacrifice within the Holy of Holies? Dangerous business, worshipping: the incense of adoration functioned as a literal “smoke screen” to protect him from seeing the face of God, lest he die.

What was Zechariah praying for? Yom Kippur was the day of atonement on which the high priest asked for forgiveness on behalf of the nation for a year’s worth of inadvertent sin. However, the sacrificial system lacked the capacity to secure forgiveness for deliberate sins. Enter the “scapegoat”: a living sacrifice onto whose head the sinfulness of Israel was transferred, to be cast out into the wilderness.

Both Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed fervently for God to be merciful to their nation. But it seems Zechariah had stopped even daring to pray that they would be given a son—otherwise, he would not have doubted Gabriel’s word. Do I have confidence in God’s love for “humanity”, but doubt his love for me? Do I believe in his provident care for all creation, but struggle to trust him with my mundane worries?

In the Lord’s providence, both big and little prayers are answered in Jesus. Zechariah’s son would be the one to announce the coming of the true “Lamb of God” who takes away the sins of the world, inviting us into the Holy of Holies, his Heart, to adore the face of God forever—no smoke screen required.

*Lord, if you can hold the world, you can hold this moment.
Amen. (Taken from Jason Gray’s song, Sparrows)*

SR SUSANNA EDMUNDS OP

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel. LK 2:36

You may have heard of Venerable Madeleine Delbrel (1904–1964): France’s Dorothy Day. Her cause of canonisation is currently underway. She was a convert to Catholicism—a mystic, poet, contemplative and incredible humanitarian who worked in Paris all her life, especially during the Great Depression and through World War II. Her temple was the streets of Paris; her fellow worshippers were those who suffered; her authority was God; her meeting place was God.

She once said: “By reading and reflecting, I found God; but by praying, I believed that God found me and that he is a living reality, and that we can love him in the same way we love a person.”

Madeleine understood that on the streets of Paris her heart rubbed shoulders with the hearts of those around her; it was one heart which embodied the Holy Spirit. This woman is worth our attention.

I think there are many similarities between Madeleine Delbrel and Anna the prophetess who likewise went looking for and found God in her Temple and told everyone she came across about it—her heart rubbing shoulders with theirs.

All Scripture is invitational and calls us into the depths of who we are, and today in this reading it is fair enough I think to ask ourselves, “Who are the ‘Annas’ in my life?” What have they told me about God? How are you “Anna”? Where and what is your temple? Let me tell you a secret: Ponder these questions and then look around your life and you will see that God, himself a living reality, has entered your life.

A little prayer to pray often.

It is your face O Lord that I seek. Amen.

O sing a new song to the Lord. PS 96:1

When the psalmist instructs you to sing a new song to the Lord, what are your lyrics? Yes, a new year is coming, and if our hours and days are like the phrases of a song, then the verses are like years. What will you say to the Lord, God willing, with this next verse of your life?

St Gemma Galgani wrote in her diary on New Year's 1895: "During this new year I resolve to begin a new life. I do not know what will happen to me during this year. But I abandon myself entirely to you, my God. And my aspirations and all my affections will be for you. I feel so weak, dear Jesus, but with your help I hope and resolve to live a different life, that is, a life closer to you." These are the words of a life song that makes a saint.

St Thomas Aquinas tells us that that, "The word which sounds externally, is a sign of the word which lies hid within." What words are your heart singing? Perhaps they are, "I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy enough. If I just work a little harder, maybe then God will love me. Maybe."

It is time for a new song. It is time for us to sing a song that proclaims the truth of who we truly are:

I am loved. I am a son/daughter of God. I feel so weak, but I trust in you, Jesus. I surrender this new year and my life to you. Amen.

Let us sing these words until our hearts believe them.
Happy New Year.

PETER GILMORE

3 JANUARY 2021

The Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60:1–6
Psalm 71(72):1–2, 7–8, 10–13
Ephesians 3:2–3, 5–6
Matthew 2:1–12

Above you the Lord now rises and above you his glory appears. IS 60:3

“If I had the chance to begin again, I would be resolved to do it better.” That is a common human desire. At this time of the year, a lot of people make New Year’s resolutions. In regard to our faith, we often resolve to take up or renew a particular spiritual discipline. These resolutions are important as some things will never happen unless we resolve to make them happen.

But perhaps the best way to make a change in one’s life is not through personal resolve. We have probably all tried that, and come up empty. We sometimes attribute more goodness to ourselves than we possess because we are good intentioned, and so we make excuses for our bad behaviour. We say: “I meant to do better,” or “I didn’t intend that to happen.” Scripture is realistic about the inadequacy of our good intentions. This is why the story of redemption is about God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The prophet Isaiah writes about the Jews making their pilgrimage to Jerusalem after they have experienced a lengthy exile. He imagines all the people of the earth making this pilgrimage to the light: “Arise, shine out, your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising on you” (Is 60:1). We need to hear this—the light has come. We cannot generate for ourselves the light that we need. It has come to us. Grace is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

There is always the chance to begin again, no matter what we have done, no matter what the world has done to us. Grace and forgiveness are always available. There is always the possibility of new life.

Lord, work with us and in us, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Amen.

FR SEAN CULLEN