

LAY CISTERIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBEY  
VIGILS READINGS  
Third Week in Advent  
December 15-21, 2019

**December 15, 2019**

**A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew** by Thomas of Villanova <sup>1</sup>

The gospel narrative tells of a question which John the Baptist, who was in prison, put to the Lord through his disciples. *Are you the one who is to come, or are we to look for someone else?* John himself was in no doubt about the matter. Even from his mother's womb he had recognized Jesus, and at the Jordan he had borne his testimony; but he sent this embassy for two reasons.

In the first place, John wished to instruct his disciples. He knew that his own death was imminent and, like the good leader and teacher he was, he made provision for his disciples, to ensure that they would have a teacher and protector. He wanted to see them safe under Christ's wing and in his care. John's second and paramount motive, however, was to draw attention to Christ. He knew that he had been sent to bear witness to Christ, and although he had given his testimony at the Jordan, few had accepted it. Knowing now that his death was near he devised a profitable and very prudent plan: he would put this question to Jesus publicly and thus bring him into the limelight, so that in replying to the question Jesus would at the same time bear witness about himself, and thereby reveal himself to the people. John knew that the Lord's reply was bound to be very fruitful, and events proved him right.

The disciples approached Jesus, and in front of the crowd put to him the same question which the Jews had put to John. Everyone eagerly awaited his reply, for there had already been a rumor among the people that he might indeed be the Messiah. The Lord gave no immediate answer, but delayed a little, and in their presence worked wonderful, mighty miracles. Then he invited them, *Go and report to John what you have heard. The blind are receiving their sight, the lame are walking, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.* He did not give an answer to them in so many words, but pointed to

his deeds, as much as to say, "*The works that I am doing are my witness. These are the works I am performing; judge for yourself whether I am the Messiah.*" This was an admirable reply, for he not only claimed by means of his works that he was the Messiah; he also proved it.

Isaiah had uttered three prophecies about the Christ. The first was this: *Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unsealed, and the lame man will leap like a hart.* The second was, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... he has sent me to announce good tidings to the poor.* The third declared, *He shall be a stone for stumbling over, and a rock of scandal as well, for both houses of Israel.* The Lord fulfilled these prophecies before their eyes, and implicitly quoted them in his reply: the first, by saying, *The blind are receiving their sight, the lame are walking ... the deaf hear;* the second in his claim that the good news is proclaimed to the poor; and the third by saying, *Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.*

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1992 – pg 20

**Monday, December 16, 2019**

**Sermon One for Advent** by St Aelred of Rievaulx <sup>1</sup>

You should know, dearest brothers, that this blessed season which we call *Adventum Domini* - the Advent or coming of the Lord - represents two things to us. Therefore we should rejoice in both for both bring us benefit.

This season makes present to us both comings of our Lord. First of all, that utterly gentle coming when the Son of God, *the fairest of the sons of the human family, the longed-for of all nations,* gave to this world his visible presence in the flesh which had been long awaited and ardently desired by all the Fathers. At that time he came into this world to save sinners. And secondly, that coming which we must await with firm hope and indeed often call to mind with tears, when this same Lord of ours, who first came

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<sup>1</sup>Aelred of Rievaulx - The Liturgical Sermons - Cistercian Fathers Series - #58 - Cistercian Publications - Kalamazoo - 2001 - p 57f

hidden in the flesh, will come manifested in all his glory. As we sing in the psalm: *God shall come manifestly*, that is, on the Day of judgment when he comes manifestly to judge. His first coming was made known to only a few just persons. In his second coming he will appear manifestly to the just and to sinners alike, as the Prophet clearly implies when he says: *All flesh shall see the salvation of God*. Just as the day which we shall in a short time celebrate in memory of his birth presents him to us as having been born - that is to say, it more expressly signals that very day and hour when he came into this world - so this season we are observing in preparation for that day makes him present as longed for, that is, as the longing maintained by the holy fathers, those who lived before his coming.

Beautifully then it is provided in the Church that during this season we read the words of those who lived before the Lord's first coming and their longings are recalled. Nor do we celebrate their longing for only one day, but for quite a long time. This is because whenever we are kept waiting a while for something we greatly long for, when what we love does come it seems sweeter to us. It is up to us, then, dearest brothers, to follow the example of the holy Fathers and to recall their longings and so to set our minds on fire with love of and desire for Christ.

You should know that it is for this reason that the observance of this season was enjoined on us: that we should consider the longing which the holy Fathers had for the first coming of the Lord. By their example let us learn to have a great longing for his second coming. We should reflect on what good things the Lord did for us by his first coming and what yet greater he will do for us by his second. And by considering this, we should love that first coming of his very much and very much long for the second.

And if we do not have a good enough conscience to dare to long for his coming, we should at least fear his coming and by that fear correct our faults. Then, even though we may not be able not to fear him now, we shall at least not fear him when he comes, but may be confident. It is indeed true, brothers, that those who pay careful attention to themselves now and fear the day of judgment before it comes will undoubtedly have no fear when it does come.

**Tuesday, December 17, 2019**

**The wisdom that planned our salvation:  
a reading from the *Letter to Diognetus*.**

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“O Wisdom”

No one has ever seen God or known him, but God has revealed himself to us through faith, by which alone it is possible to see him. God, the Lord and maker of all things, who created the world and set it in order, not only loved us but was also patient with us. So he has always been, and is, and will be: kind, good, free from anger, truthful; indeed, he and he alone is good.

He devised a plan, a great and wonderful plan, and shared it only with his Son. As long as he preserved his secrecy and kept his own wise counsel he seemed to be neglecting us, to have no concern for us. But when C through his beloved Son C he revealed and made public what he had prepared from the beginning, he gave us all at once gifts such as we could never have dreamt of, even sight and knowledge of himself.

After making all his plans in consultation with his Son, God still allowed us for a time to go our own way, to be swept along by unruly passion, enslaved by sensuality. This does not mean that he took pleasure in our sins, but only that he tolerated them. When we had shown ourselves to be unworthy of life, his goodness would make us worthy of it. When we had shown our inability to enter the kingdom of God by our own power, we would be enabled to do so by God's power.

How immeasurable is God's generosity and love! He did not show hatred for us or reject us or take vengeance. He gave his own Son as the price of our redemption, the holy One to redeem the wicked, the sinless One to redeem sinners, the just One to redeem the unjust, the incorruptible One to redeem the corruptible, the immortal One to redeem mortals. For what else could have covered our sins but his Sinlessness? In whom could we have been sanctified but in the Son of God alone?

How wonderful a transformation, how mysterious a design, how inconceivable a blessing! The wickedness of the many is hidden in the One who is holy, and the holiness of One sanctifies the many.

**Wednesday, December 18, 2019**

**"O Adonai": a reading about Jesus the Lord, from a sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen.**

The very Son of God, older than the ages, the invisible, the incomprehensible, the incorporeal the beginning of beginning, the light of light, the fountain of life and immortality, the image of the archetype, the immovable seat the perfect likeness, the definition and word of the Father: he it is who comes to his own image and takes our nature for the good of our nature, and unites himself to an intelligent soul for the good of my soul to purify like by like. He takes to himself all that is human except for sin. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary, who had been first prepared in soul and body by the Spirit; his coming to birth had to be treated with honor, virginity had to receive new honor. He comes forth as God, in the human nature he has taken, one being, made of two contrary elements, flesh and spirit. Spirit gave divinity, flesh received it.

He who makes rich is made poor; he takes on the poverty of my flesh, that I may gain the riches of his divinity. He who is full is made empty; he is emptied for a brief space of his glory, that I may share in his fullness. What is this wealth of goodness? What is this mystery that surrounds me? I received the likeness of God, but failed to keep it. He takes on my flesh, to bring salvation to the likeness and immortality to the flesh. He enters a second union with us, a union far more wonderful than the first.

Holiness had to be brought to us by the humanity assumed by one who is God, so that God might overcome the tyrant and so deliver us and lead us back to himself through the mediation of his Son. The Son arranged this for the honor of the Father, to whom the Son is clearly obedient in all things. The Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep, came in search of the straying sheep to the mountains and hills on which we used to offer sacrifice.

Christ, the light of all lights, follows John, the lamp that goes before him. The Word of God follows the voice in the wilderness; the bridegroom follows the bridegroom's friend, who prepares a worthy people for the Lord by cleansing them by water in preparation for the Spirit. We need God to take our flesh and die, that we might live. We have died with him, that we may be purified. We have risen again with him, because we have died with him. We have been glorified with him, because we have risen again with him.

**Thursday, December 19, 2019**

**O Adonai: the Lord who loved us first; a reading from William of St. Thierry's *On the Contemplation of God*.<sup>1</sup>**

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You alone are the Lord. By ruling us you save us and we are saved by serving you. Lord, you save your people and bless them, but what does it mean to be saved by you if not to receive the grace of loving you and of being loved by you? And so, Lord, you willed the Son at your right hand, the man you made strong for your service, to be called Jesus, which means Savior, for *he will save his people from their sins*, and indeed *salvation is to be found in him alone*. He taught us to love him by first loving us, *even to the extent of dying on the cross*. By loving us and holding us so dear he aroused our love for *him who first loved us to the very end*.

This is what really happened. You loved us first to make us love you, not because you needed our love, but because only by loving you could we be what you created us to be.

*In many ways and on various occasions you spoke to our ancestors through the prophets. Now in these last days you have spoken to us through the Son, your Word, by whom the heavens were made, by whose breath the whole heavenly host came to be.* By speaking through your Son you made the extent of your love for us as plain as day. You did not spare your own Son

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but gave him up for all of us. And he himself loved us and gave himself up for us. This Lord, is your Word to us, your omnipotent Word. While all things were in profound silence (that is, in the depths of error) he came from his royal throne, the stern conqueror of error and gentle apostle of love. You wanted us to love you because otherwise our salvation would not have been just, and we could not do so unless you made it possible. Therefore, Lord, you loved us first. For our part, we love you with the love you yourself have given us. Your love is your goodness. It is the Holy Spirit. By his inspiration, by keeping us from harm and by providing for our needs, he unites God to us and us to God.

**Friday, December 20, 2019**

**The Anew thing@ brought forth by God from among his people; a reading from treatise by St. John Chrysostom. 1**

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“O Key of David”

Christ had the power to set the human race free from all evils C not only the Romans, but the Persians, and simply every race of barbarians. And he succeeded in doing this with no force of arms, nor expenditure of money, nor by starting wars of conquest, nor by inflaming men to battle. He had only eleven men to start with, men who were undistinguished, without learning, ill-informed, destitute, poorly clad, without weapons or sandals, men who had but a single tunic to wear. ...He was able to persuade so many nations of men to pursue the true doctrine, not only in what concerns the present life but also the life hereafter. He succeeded in winning over these men to drag down their ancestral laws, to tear out their ancient customs, long and deeply rooted as they were, and to plant in their place other ways, which led them from the easy-going life to his own program of austerity. And he succeeded in doing this when the whole world was waging war against him, when they jeered at him, and forced him to endure the most shameful death of the cross.

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*Demonstration Against the Pagans That Christ is God.* Trans. Paul W. Harkins, Fathers of the Church Series, vol. 73. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1985. pp. 191ff.

These successes are not confined to the cities. They have spread to the desert, the villages, the fields, the islands, the ship basins, and harbors. Not only simple citizens and petty rulers but even those who wear the imperial crown have shown great faith and served as subjects to him who was crucified. I shall now try to prove that all this did not simply happen but that it had been predicted long beforehand.

I do not wish you to suspect that what I say had not been foretold. Therefore, I must bring forward as evidence the books of the Jews, the Scriptures, over which the Jews have kept such careful guard, and set before the eyes of those who are still unbelieving the predictions and testimonies about Christ would become man and still stay God. *This is our God; no other will be compared to him. He has discovered the whole way of understanding, and has given it to Jacob, his servant, and to Israel, his well-beloved. Since then he has appeared on earth and moved among men.*

Do you see how, in a few words, the prophet made it altogether clear that Christ, still remaining God, became man, that he moved among men, and that he is, himself, the Lawgiver of the Old Testament? For the prophet said: *He has discovered the whole way of understanding and has given it to Jacob, his servant, and to Israel, his well-beloved.* For here the prophet shows that, before his coming in the flesh, he arranged and disposed all things, that he did all things by giving the Law, by exercising his providence, and by granting to men the blessings of his care.

**Saturday, December 21, 2019**

**The prophets foretold that God would be seen among humankind; a reading from St. Irenaeus.<sup>1</sup>**

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O Radiant Dawn.

There is one God who, through the Word and Wisdom, made everything and brought everything into harmony. It is he who is the Creator and who

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<sup>1</sup> *Contra Heresies*, Book 4, 20, 4-5.



gave this world over to the human race. Because of his greatness he is unknown to all the beings whom he has made; for no one, either in ancient times or today, has looked upon the great eminence in which he dwells. Yet because of his love he is known at all times, thanks to him through whom he created all things. He is none other than the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who in these latter times became a human being among humans in order to join the end to the beginning again, humanity to God. That is why the prophets, when they had received the gift of prophecy, foretold in their preaching that he would come according to the flesh and that the uniting and communion of God and humanity would be realized according to the Father's good pleasure. From the very beginning the Word proclaimed that God would be seen by humans, that he would live and talk with them on earth and that he would take part in the work which he himself had planned. He proclaimed that he would do this to save his work, and proclaimed that he would let himself be seized by it, "to save us from the hands of all who hate us", from all spirit of transgression. He also proclaimed that he would act in such a way that "we shall serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life" (Lk 1.71, 74), so that, caught up by the Spirit of God, humanity might attain to the glory of the Father... The prophets, then, foretold that God would be seen among humankind, according again to what the Lord said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5.8).

It is true that because of his greatness and inexpressible glory, "no one shall see God and live" (Ex 33.20), for the Father is unattainable. But because of his love and goodness towards humanity and of his power to do all things, he goes so far as to grant to those who love him the privilege of seeing God — just as the prophets foretold — "for what is impossible with humans is possible with God" (Lk 18.27). By their own power humans will never be able to see God; but God, if he wills it, will be seen by humans, by those whom he intends to see him, when — and how — he intends it. For God can do all things: seen of old through the intervention of the Spirit in the manner of the prophets; then seen again through the mediation of the Son in accordance with the adoption, he will be seen again in the Kingdom in accordance with the Fatherhood, the Holy Spirit preparing humanity in advance for the Son of God, the Son leading them to the Father, and the Father bestowing on them that incorruptibility and eternal life which comes

to everyone from the fact of their seeing God. Just as those who see the light are themselves in the light and share in its splendor, so those who see God are in God and share in his splendor. Now, the splendor of God gives life. Those who see God will thus share in life.

END OF READINGS