

The Coming Of Christ

Meditations For Advent

By Richard F. Clarke S.J.

London Catholic Truth Society No.d446 (1964)

1. - What Advent is.

1. Advent is the season when we are taught to look forward both to the first coming of our Lord into the world at Christmas time, and also to His second coming at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. His first coming was to seek and to save that which was lost. His second coming will be to gather His elect into the celestial paradise, and to trample all His enemies under His feet. Shall I on that day be regarded by Him as a friend or as an enemy? Is my present life one of devotion to Him and union with Him, or one of selfishness, pride, impatience of the yoke of Christ?

2. Of all the miracles in the world, never was there one to be compared to His coming on earth in the form of a man. It was a miracle so entirely above and beyond our reason, that, unless we knew it by faith to be a fact, we should be inclined to pronounce it impossible. That the Infinite God should take the form of a creature! that the Eternal Word should be clad in a body formed of the dust of the earth! that He should of His own accord leave the highest Heaven for a life of suffering, and death of agony! Nothing but the power of God could work such a wonder as this.

3. Yet we know that it is a fact. 'For us men and for our salvation, He came down from Heaven.' He yearned over us with a Divine love. Willingly, joyfully, almost eagerly, He stripped Himself of all His glory. 'He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death.' Who after this can refuse to believe that He loved us and still loves us fondly, tenderly? Who can refuse to love Him in return, and to show this love by a loyal obedience to all that He asks of us?

2. - The Divine Decree.

1. What brought Christ down from Heaven? It was man's sin. From all eternity, the Blessed Trinity, looking forward to the fall of man, had decreed that the Eternal Word should clothe Himself with human flesh, and should be born into the world in order to repair the evil that man had wrought. Thus, God in His mercy provides a remedy for all the sins and follies of men even before they are committed. We do the harm, and God undoes it. Has He not often thus averted from me the consequences due to my evil deeds?

2. In what garb was the Son of God to clothe Himself when He became Man? In one that should give us some idea of the evil He came to undo. He, the Eternal Son, coequal with the Father, took the form of a servant, was born of a despised race, of humble parents, in poverty, and humility, and contempt. All this should impress on us how sin has deserved all these and every other evil imaginable beside. If these were the results of sin on the spotless Lamb of God, what must they be on sinful, feeble man?

3. The divine decree did not stop at this first coming of the Son of God. There is to be a second Advent, but one in which He will appear in human form indeed, yet now no longer in lowliness and humiliation, but clothed with all the brightness and glory which His Divine Nature can impart to His Sacred Humanity. In this second coming, He is to come and receive the reward that He has earned for His human nature, and for all those who had faithfully served Him. He is to come and reign. He is to crush all His enemies under His feet. Look forward to that glorious day, and pray that you may share the glory of the Son of God.

3. - The Announcement of His Coming.

1. For a short time after their creation, our first parents lived in perfect peace and happiness in the Garden of Eden. If they had continued obedient to the authority of their Creator during their whole time of probation, there would have been no need for the advent of the Son of God as their Redeemer from sin, for sin there would have been none. It was their deliberate rebellion that was the occasion that determined the visit of the Word to this world of ours. No wonder that the Church sings: 'O felix culpa!' 'O happy transgression', which earned a Redeemer such as this! Admire God's wonderful Providence in thus bringing good out of evil, and advantage to man for his very sin.

2. The promise made was couched in words that gave no immediate prospect of the crushing of the serpent's head and the destruction of His power. It left the curse of sin upon the earth and its inhabitants and announced the sorrows that would accompany them through their time of sojourn here. That law still holds. Christ came to abolish sin, but not its temporal consequences. "He who sins shall suffer", is a law which Christ fulfilled and in no way destroyed.

3. Yet the promise of a Redeemer rekindled the light of hope in the souls of Adam and Eve. They and all their children were ever looking and praying for His coming. God's intention was to keep them in expectancy. So, too, with His second coming. There has always been a tradition of expectation. 'Blessed is the man whom his Lord, when He comes, shall find watching.' Hence, learn to watch and pray. Come quickly, O Lord Jesus!

4. - The Long Darkness.

1. The light extinguished at the Fall was rekindled in the hearts of our first parents when the promise was given them of a Redeemer who should undo the fatal mischief that had been done. But in their children, Adam and Eve had to lament the fatal effects of that deadly evil that they had introduced into the world. As generation followed generation, thicker and thicker grew the darkness, farther and farther did men wander away from the light, that gave to each the power of guiding his feet aright from earth to Heaven. Thus it is that each ill deed goes on bearing its deadly fruit, often long after the doer is dead and gone.

2. Yet every man had light and grace sufficient, and more than sufficient, to enable him to walk in the ways of God, and to find his way to the Kingdom of Heaven. But none save a very few availed themselves of it. 'They loved darkness more than light.' The world gradually lost all regard for virtue or for God. How grateful should I be to God that I live in happier days.

3. If I had lived then, what should I have been? Even with all my countless graces and advantages, what a poor specimen I am of one made by God, for God, and in the image of God. In heathen days, should I not have been among the most depraved? Should I not have recklessly indulged my own

inclinations, irrespective of the voice of God warning and reproaching me? What chance should I have had of saving my soul in those days of dark corruption and depravity?

5. - Transient Gleams.

1. From time to time, there broke through the thick darkness of heathendom a gleam of light that seemed to be a harbinger of the coming day. Some sage or poet sang of a golden age that soon would be at hand. But the flash of light soon disappeared, and only left the darkness even darker than before. So in the life of those who have hardened themselves against God there are sometimes moments when the devil seems to have forsaken his prey, and there seems a hope of better things. But if Jesus' coming is still far away, the improvement soon passes, and the evil seems to have even a more complete mastery than ever before.

2. There is something very beautiful in the sentiments of the old Greek and Roman poets. Their minstrelsy rings sweetly in our ears. Their poems proclaim them men of the highest genius. But they have no power to effect a change of heart, such as is wrought by the inspired words of some great saint or servant of God. God must speak through man's voice, if it is to avail to turn others to God. Do I pray God thus to rule and direct my words that they may do His work?

3. So, too, many of the deeds of the heroes of antiquity appear worthy of the holy ones of God. Some may have been done from a supernatural motive, and may even have merited eternal life. But no act, however noble in the natural order, is of any value in the sight of God, unless it be done with some sort of conscious desire to please and serve Him. Do my ordinary actions possess this necessary characteristic?

6. - The Golden Thread.

1. All through the long ages that elapsed from the promise to the coming of the Redeemer, a golden thread of light from Heaven ran athwart their darkness. In the chosen people of Israel, there ever prevailed a strong conviction of the coming of a Saviour, who was to deliver His people from all sin and evil. It was handed down from generation to generation, and was again and again renewed by the inspired declarations of the Prophets of Israel. Thus, God in His mercy never leaves Himself without a witness to reveal to men of goodwill the message of hope.

2. So through all the centuries that have passed since the coming of our Lord, the Catholic Church has been the golden thread of light amid the darkness of heresy and heathendom. What a bright and glorious thread! What a contrast to all around! How it has, through God's mercy, enlightened my life! How can I ever thank God sufficiently that, led by its Divine light, I am travelling on in peace and safety to the Heavenly Jerusalem!

3. So, too, there runs through the life of all those who are to attain at last to the eternal happiness of Heaven a golden thread, which never wholly disappears, even though their steps may wander far from the right path. Sometimes it is kindness to the poor; sometimes devotion to the holy souls; very often, it is a reverence to the Holy Mother of God that thus runs through the whole of life. In my life, God has interwoven some such thread. Do I follow it up with grateful perseverance?

7. - The Causes of Delay.

1. If the wickedness of the world in heathen times was so great, how was it that the coming of the Redeemer was so long delayed? To this question, we can only give one answer with absolute certainty, that it was so decreed by Almighty God in His infinite wisdom. We cannot hope in this

life to comprehend the mysteries of the Providence of the Most High. We can only humbly bow our heads and say that the Redeemer came when God so willed, and that what God wills is necessarily the best.

2. Yet we can at least form some kind of conjecture as to the causes of delay. God works by natural means. In order that the religion of Jesus should spread all over the world by the ordinary working of the laws that govern the affairs of men, it was convenient that the world should be subject to one central power. This was never the case until, at the time of Christ's Nativity, the Roman Empire was mistress of the world. Thus, God prepares the way for His designs of mercy, and arranges the world's events according to His will, yet without forcing the wills of men.

3. There was another reason for the long delay. It was to teach us that God does nothing hurriedly. He always waits before putting into execution His decrees. In this, He wishes us to imitate Him. The Eternal Wisdom of the Most High needs no time for deliberation. His works are not gradually perfected, or improved on second thoughts. But ours are, and the slow action of the Providence of God should impress upon us the importance of waiting before we act, and considering and re-considering all our plans.

8. - The Approaching Day.

1. When the sun is soon to appear above the horizon, the morning star, shining with a light derived indeed from him, but nevertheless shining bright and clear even before his coming, gives the signal of his approach. So, the Holy Mother of God, dawning upon the world with a grace and beauty which was the gift of her Divine Son, anticipated His Incarnation and made the world more beautiful in God's sight than it had ever been before. Mary was more precious to God than all the rest of men, and this quite independently of her Divine Maternity. Consider why this was, and learn a lesson for yourself.

2. The morning star is still clearly seen when all other stars have been extinguished by the light of the coming day. Mary has a brilliancy so great that the brightness of all the other saints fades into nothing in comparison with hers. If this was the case even in comparison with the glory of St John Baptist, St Joseph, Abraham the Patriarch, the friend of God, Job, the model of patience, Daniel, the beloved of God, what must her glory be! Thank God for having created one child of Adam worthy of Himself.

3. Mary's consummate beauty is the consequence of there being in her nothing of her own. All was God's; no admixture of self in her motives, in her aims, in her joys and sorrows, her love and hatred. Her affections were simply a reflection of what God loved and hated; like God, she loved all things except sin, and those who were the declared and eternal enemies of God. She desired nothing for herself except that she might see God's holy will fulfilled in all. Is this the account that you can give of yourself? Only if this is so are you a worthy child of Mary.

9. - The Fulfilment of the Decree.

1. The promised coming of the Redeemer had indeed been long delayed. Patriarch had succeeded Patriarch, and died without having the privilege of seeing that long-expected day. The long line of the Prophets had passed away, but their desire after the Messiah had not been satisfied. God always keeps His servants waiting for His best gifts, and therefore it was but fitting that they should wait for thousands of years before receiving this Gift of gifts, this Gift in which He gave them Himself.

2. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity had also been waiting for one whose immaculate purity should make her fit, as far as any child of Adam could be fit, to be His Mother. There had been many holy women among the daughters of Abraham, but none without sin, and therefore none in whose womb the Son of God could find repose. If Christ thus could not come to dwell with one who was stained with sin, what must be the purity He requires now of those whose Guest He becomes in Holy Communion? O Jesus, forgive me all my careless receptions of You; my want of careful preparation, my faults innumerable!

3. Christ Himself had prepared a resting-place for Himself in Mary's sacred breast. As we read in Holy Scripture: 'The Most High has sanctified a tabernacle for Himself.' (Psalm 45:5 in the Vulgate, or Psalm 46:4 in the Hebrew.) So now, if I am to be fit to receive Him, He must prepare my heart. Do I think of this during my preparation for Communion, and pray Him to cleanse me from every stain in His most Precious Blood, to beautify with many graces the tabernacle where He is to abide?

10. - The Forerunner of the King.

1. St John Baptist was the chosen messenger to proclaim the coming of the King of kings. No other herald had so important an office. He had to prepare the hearts of men for the coming of the Messiah. It was this that constituted him the greatest of those who were born of women. If to proclaim the coming of Christ in the flesh was so solemn and responsible an office, what must be the dignity and responsibility of the priests of God, who are sent to announce His second coming in glory?

2. How did St John prepare for his work? By a life of seclusion and penance. From childhood, he lived alone in the desert, his bed the hard ground, his meat locusts and wild honey, his dress a camel's skin. Our Lord contrasts him with those who wear soft raiment. No one who lives a life of luxury will ever be an efficient messenger of God. A priest above all must avoid a life of ease and self-indulgence, if he wishes to win souls for Christ.

3. The secret of St John's success was thus the result of practising what he preached. He practised much more than he preached, for he enjoined upon his hearers the simple performance of ordinary duties while he led a life of continual penance and self-denial. If our words are to carry any weight, we must not preach without practising. The parent or superior, who has the training of the young, will never train them up to virtue unless he himself is a man of virtue. No one can reach the hearts of others unless he first carries out the lessons he teaches others. Do I do this?

11. - The Forerunner's Message.

1. The refrain of St John's teaching was a very simple and constant one. 'Do penance, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' It seems strange advice. The coming of the King of Heaven might be a reason for joy on the part of those who looked for Him, and of dread on the part of His enemies. But why for doing penance? For repenting? Yet the teaching of St John is true now, as it was at the time his words were first spoken. Penance, repentance, is the means of preparation for the advent of our King. This explains the Saint's love of penance. What penance do I practise with this object?

2. Yet after all, it is the natural and most suitable means of preparation. It helps us to bring into subjection that lower nature, which rebels against the sovereignty of our King. It detaches us from finding our satisfaction in earthly things. It is in itself an act of obedience to our King. It renders us

humble, and teaches us to put our necks under the yoke. It saves us from being separated from the Kingdom we are to share by the long prison of Purgatory. Learn from all this, to love penance.

3. Penance is a necessary preparation for receiving our King when He comes to us in humble form in Holy Communion. This is why Confession is the preliminary of that Sacred Feast, and why contrition is necessary. We must purge our souls by prayer and penance and sorrow for sins, if we are to rejoice exceedingly in the Bridegroom's presence, and to hear His voice sweetly whispering in our ears. Do I prepare thus for Holy Communion?

12. - The Forerunner's Office.

1. St John was something more than a herald. He had to prepare the way for the King, to make the crooked ways straight, and the rough places smooth. His office was that which is entrusted to us all in our own sphere; to try to make the way in which the followers of Christ have to tread straight and easy. What a privilege if we can by our charity and our edifying life make the path of life more easy for those whose lot it is to tread the way of the Cross and to walk over rough or stormy paths. Is this your endeavour in your daily life, or do you place obstacles in the path of others by your bad example, want of charity and consideration, impatience, etc.

2. St John, as the Herald or Forerunner of Christ, had to proclaim the coming of the King. He himself expresses this by his description of himself as the voice of one who cries in the desert; that is, Christ spoke through his mouth. So He speaks through the mouths of all His servants just in proportion to their devotion and singleness of purpose. How poor an echo are my words of the whispers of Christ to the faithful soul. How mixed with the discordant notes of self-will to worldliness!

3. St John's estimate of himself in comparison with Him whom he announced was that he was not worthy to stoop down and untie the latchet of His sandal. This was the duty of the lowest slaves. It meant that he was unworthy to serve Christ, even in the capacity of a slave, and by doing the work that many slaves would consider beneath them. Am I willing to undertake the humblest and most menial duties in the service of Christ? Do I consider it a privilege to do so?

13. - Hope.

1. Advent is essentially a time of hope. It is not in itself a time of joy except so far as hope of joy to come brings with it a present gladness. It is an exact representation of our life on earth. We are in a place of exile and a valley of tears, but yet our hope amid all the darkness should be lighted up and rendered joyous by the prospect of future joy. The motto of our life is our Lord's farewell words to His disciples: 'You indeed shall have sorrow, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy'. This must be my consolation in all sorrow. I must try to forget my present troubles in the happy thought of the joy to come.

2. Why have we so little hope? Generally, because we seek to have our happiness here, and so forfeit the right to it hereafter, or at least forfeit the right to look forward to it with confidence and joy. We cannot eat our cake and keep it. If I seek my satisfaction in money, or comforts, or praise, or applause, or affection of others, I have my reward here and cannot expect to get any reward hereafter. I have no crown of justice to hope for if already I have had the crown of satisfied ambition, or pockets filled with money, or a tickled palate, or the buzzing applause of a crowd.

3. Our hope is also marred by our self-will, which prevents our will from being in complete conformity with the will of God. We are conscious of a sort of barrier between ourselves and Him,

which sadly interferes with our hope. We have assumed a sort of independence of God, which renders it impossible for Him to pour into our hearts that hope which is in exact proportion to our conformity to His will. If I were humble and more resigned in all things, I should be more full of hope.

14. - Rejoice.

1. The time of preparation is a mingled period of penance and of joy. Of penance, by reason of our sins, which have removed us so far away from God; of joy, at the prospect of being brought near to Him once more through Jesus Christ. On mid-Advent, as on mid-Lent Sunday, it is the joyful side of the matter that comes before us. More than this, joy is insisted upon as a duty. It seems strange that the command to rejoice should be necessary. Do not all men love joy, and seek after it unbidden? One thing it shows, that God desires that we should be full of joy. Thank Him for this merciful intention, and try to carry it out.

2. Yet it is not all kinds of joy that is recommended to us. There are many kinds of joy that the Apostle would be far from recommending. To rejoice in the world is but a sorry kind of joy, on account of its transitory character. 'Gaudete in Domino', says the Apostle – 'Rejoice in the Lord.' This is the only joy that lasts, and the only joy that is really worth the having.

3. What does St Paul mean by rejoicing in the Lord? He means the joy that is the result of such a love of God, as makes us simply wish that His will should be done in all things, and that feels positive joy in seeing the accomplishment of the Divine will, quite apart from any personal advantage or disadvantage that may accrue to ourselves. This is the secret of true joy, for then what befalls ourselves is a matter of indifference to us. Be it weal or woe, success or failure, we rejoice in it simply because it is what God has ordained for us. This is the meaning of our Lord's words, 'Your joy no man takes from you.'

15. - Rejoice always.

1. St Paul goes beyond the mere command to rejoice, and to rejoice in the Lord; he also bids us to rejoice always. Is this possible? Yes, it is quite possible. If it were not, the Apostle would not have imposed it upon us. It is not easy, because our self-love and our selfishness destroy joy. But the saints, who had driven self-love out of their hearts, found it a pleasant and an easy task to be always joyful. If we desire the same, we must do our best to get rid of this hindrance to our joy.

2. How are we to accomplish this task? It must be a gradual one. It is to be arrived at by many acts of submission to the will of God, and to the will of others when opposed to our own; and the submission must have for its motive, not the intellectual conviction that what we ourselves desire is in itself inferior, but the determination to submit for the sake of submission, and as an act of reverence to God. We must be willing to submit both will and intellect to those set over us, without complaining or questioning their commands. Do I do so?

3. When this painful process is over, and when at length we begin to learn the happiness of giving up our own will to the will of others, we soon begin to receive the reward of our self-conquest. We acquire by degrees an undisturbed calm of soul, and an increasing strength of will, as the fruits of our victory over self, and above all a happy consciousness that we have been learning the lesson of conforming our will to the will of God, in which the happiness of Heaven consists.

16. - The Second Coming of Christ.

1. When the Apostles on Mount Olivet were gazing after their Master, who had just ascended into Heaven, two Angels stood by them, and announced to them that He who had just vanished from their sight would return in like manner. Our Lord Himself had already declared that He would come again with power and great glory and would sit upon the throne of His glory. At the sound of His approach, the dead will rise from their graves to meet Him, and the nations of the world who have not accepted His sway will be filled with unspeakable terror and dismay. What will be the dispositions with which I shall rise again to meet Christ? What would they be now if He were to come today?

2. The object of His coming will be to judge the living and the dead. All that is now hidden will be made manifest before the world. All the secret thoughts and whispered words, and actions concealed from the eyes of men, will then be made manifest. How should I like to have all my base and low motives dragged to light, all my unkind words revealed to those against whom they were spoken, all those actions, of which I cannot myself think without shame, proclaimed so that all may behold them?

3. Our Lord will come, radiant in majesty and glory, to crush His enemies under His feet and reward His faithful soldiers and servants. How great then will be the ignominy and shame of the mighty men of earth, if they have not bowed their neck to the King of kings! How full of joy will be the hearts of all who have humbled themselves before Him! How will they be beautiful beyond compare, and honoured before His holy Angels! Learn now to humble yourself under the yoke of Christ.

17. - The Signs of His Coming.

1. One of the signs of the Second Coming of our Lord being nigh at hand, will be that no one will expect it. All the world will be satisfied that things will go on, as hitherto for many a century, and they will ask: Where is the promise of His coming? In this, too, life of the individual is often a miniature of the history of the world. Christ comes again to many an unexpected soul when sudden death, through some accident or unsuspected disease, carries off in a moment the man who thought he had long years to live. 'Blessed is he whom his Lord, when He comes, shall find watching.'

2. Another warning of our Lord's approach will be the coming of Antichrist. He will be one whose authority and power will be a counterfeit of that of the Vicar of Christ. His distinguishing marks will be overweening pride, hatred of the Catholic Church, widespread dominion, a spirit of rebellion, which will enlist in his service all who revolt against the authority that comes from God. Examine yourself to see if there lurks in you any of this dislike of lawful authority, and pray for the grace of loyalty to men for God's sake.

3. Before our Lord's coming, there will be a terrible persecution of the servants of God. In these days, when there is an ever increasing spirit of tolerance, it is hard to understand this. But under the spirit of what is called religious liberalism lurks a deadly hatred of the Church of Christ. It breaks out from time to time, as in the French Commune. It slumbers now, but will blaze up again some day. Pray for grace to withstand all the assaults of the persecutor.

18. - The Uncertainty of His Coming.

1. Ever since our Lord's Ascension into Heaven, His servants have watched for His return, crying out: 'Come, O Lord Jesus, come quickly!' In the days of the Apostles, in the early ages of the Church, in medieval times, men believed that His coming was close at hand. In these later days, it is

true, the expectancy is not so immediate as it once was; but the very fact that we think the world has still centuries to run, may be an indication that the end is not far away. Can I from my heart offer the prayer that His coming may not be long delayed?

2. Men sometimes tell us that when six thousand years have passed, the world will have run its course, and Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. It may be so; but rash indeed is he who ventures thus to fix the time, for it is our Lord Himself who tells us: 'Of that day and that hour no man knows, nor the angels of God, but the Father only.' One of the essential characteristics of that day will be its suddenness. Hence learn the importance of being always ready, and then you will be always safe.

3. We may not live till the Second Coming of Christ surprises the world; but we shall live until the day which is the call for us to judgment. That day is not far off; it may be very near, and the chance is that it will either come unexpectedly, or else will be preceded by a time which will be but a poor time for preparation. I must be prepared now, I must always be prepared for the moment when I hear the voice of God summoning me, and then the sooner that time comes the better for me.

19. - The Preparation for His Approach.

Who is there who does not desire to meet Jesus Christ, when He comes again, with joy and not with trembling? To ensure this three things are necessary.

1. We must have friends amongst those who will come again with Him. Just as few die a happy death, unless they have some advocates in Heaven, so few indeed will meet our Lord with joy, unless they have some who will welcome them as having befriended them for Christ's sake. Unless we have been men of supernatural charity, we shall stand defenceless on that day. Alas! how faint and feeble my charity has been; how little I have done to procure friends who will plead for me on that day.

2. We must also have had the thought of Jesus often present to our minds in life, if His coming is to be a joyful one to us. He must be no stranger to us. He must have been our guide, our friend, our Master, our companion. We must have walked with God on earth, if we are to walk with Him in the celestial paradise. The more familiar has been our friendship with Him, the greater will be our happiness in meeting Him again.

3. We must also have carried our cross willingly after Him on earth, if we are to meet Him with a well grounded confidence of a great reward in the kingdom which He has won for His elect. O how overflowing will be the delight of those who have lived mortified and self-denying lives for His sake! What a trifle will all their sufferings then appear in comparison with their abounding joy when the Archangel's trumpet sounds!

20. - The Dangers of the Careless Soul.

1. There is in human nature a fatal tendency to procrastinate, especially when that which we know we ought to do is something to which we are naturally disinclined. All men are naturally disinclined to do violence to themselves, and force their pride and self-will to yield before the sway of Christ, to put on His yoke and carry His Cross. Hence, men put off and make excuses to themselves and fancy that what is difficult to them today will be easy to them tomorrow! O fatal mistake! Each day that we postpone the task of submission, it becomes more difficult, more distasteful. Why then do I not hasten to submit myself entirely to Christ?

2. From day to day the careless soul thus goes on putting off, crying: 'Tomorrow I will amend my ways;' and when tomorrow comes, it still cries: 'Tomorrow.' How fatal is this folly! Tomorrow may never come, or if it comes, you may have forfeited the grace. 'Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

3. This postponement is always accompanied by some deliberate disobedience to the commands or to the holy inspirations of the Spirit of God. Thus, the careless soul becomes more engrossed in earthly things and more and more disinclined to make the necessary effort. Thus it is that so many will be surprised by the coming of their Judge at the moment when they least expect Him, and are quite unprepared to meet Him. O Jesus, save me at any cost from the deadly state of the careless soul!

21. - 'O Sapientia'. 'O Wisdom!'

Before the feast of Christmas, the coming Saviour is welcomed in seven antiphons, which greet Him under various titles, and entreat Him to come quickly to enlighten and deliver His people.

'O Wisdom, who came forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching in Your strength from end to end, and sweetly disposing all things, come and teach us the way of prudence.'

1. The first title given to Jesus is that of Wisdom. He was the Eternal Wisdom of God, and the source of all wisdom to men from one end of time to the other. With Him all wisdom; without Him no wisdom. Yet I have sometimes fancied myself wise when I was acting quite apart from Him, and perhaps His wishes or commands. What utter folly!

2. It is the Eternal Word that disposes all things sweetly. Everything that happens in Heaven or earth is arranged by Him, and is arranged not unkindly, or harshly, or bitterly, but sweetly. Why then do I regret what I ought to know He has arranged sweetly, i.e., with designs of love for me if I take it in the right spirit?

3. 'Come and teach us the way of prudence.' This is our first petition to Him who is to come. If only He imparts prudence, all must be well. Prudence chooses the right end, namely, the glory of God, and the right means to the end, namely, what we know God asks of us now, and in our present circumstances. Teach me, O Jesus, that lesson of prudence, which will guide me safe to the Kingdom of Heaven.

22. - 'O Adonai.'

'O Lord God!'

'O Lord, and Leader of the house of Israel, who did appear to Moses in a flame of fire in the bush, and did give to him the law on Mount Sinai, come to redeem us with Your stretched-out arm.'

1. The Saviour for whom we look is also our Lord (Adonai), the Leader and Chief to whom we have sworn fealty. We speak of Him continually under the familiar name of our Lord, and each time we do so we reassert our acknowledgment of the obligation to follow where He leads, and to be subject to Him in all things. O happy followers of such a Leader! If we tread in His footsteps, and obey His voice, He will set our feet in green pastures, and lead us to the fountains of the water of life.

2. The flame of fire in the burning bush was a figure of Jesus in Mary's sacred womb. Holy indeed was the place where God was present, and whence He promised to His people their deliverance from Egypt. So He still speaks as if concealed in Mary's womb, and reminds us that He has made

her holy with a holiness second only to His own; and when we draw nigh to her, we hear His voice announcing to us that He has heard our prayers offered through her, and will soon come to deliver us from our enemies.

3. What shall be our prayer to Him when He inspires us to make our request with boldness at the throne of grace? 'Come to redeem us with Your stretched-out arm.' Come to deliver us from the effects of our past sins. Come to deliver us from the attachment to some sin that still lurks within us. Come to deliver us from all our countless negligences and imperfections. Come with Your arm stretched out to ward us from the foe, O Lord and Lover of our souls.

23. - 'O Radix Jesse.'

'O Root of Jesse!'

'O Root of Jesse, who stand for a sign to the nations, before whom kings shall shut their mouth, of whom the Gentiles shall entreat mercy; come to set us free; and no longer delay.'

1. The King who is to come is of the root of Jesse, (David's father,) since He is of David's royal line. He is the true David, who laid low the spiritual Goliath, the prince of darkness, who in pagan times defied the power of the living God. He is above all the Man after God's own heart, in that the one motive of His Heart was to carry out His Father's will. If this is the motive power of my life, then I too am of the root of Jesse, and in spite of failings, am a man after God's own heart, just in proportion as this motive is ever present to me.

2. Jesus is a sign to the nations; a sign of contradiction to His enemies, but before whom the most powerful will have to shut their mouth in humble subjection; a sign to His friends, the men of goodwill in every clime and country, who will be drawn to Him to offer their joyful homage at His feet, entreating of Him that mercy which He is more ready to grant than they to ask. To me He is a sign, either fondly loved, or neglected and treated as of no account.

3. O Root of Jesse, O King and Saviour, 'come and set us free'; free from all that displeases You, free from the snares that entangle our feet, free from our perverse attachment to our own will, free from the power of the devil, free from our slowness in obeying Your commands and holy inspirations, free from all that hinders us in Your service; come and say the word, and we shall be delivered.

24. - 'O Clavis David.'

'O Key of David!'

'O Key of David, and sceptre of the house of Israel; who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens; come and deliver from the prison-house the captive who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.'

1. The key and the sceptre are the symbol of supreme authority; they indicate the sway that the Saviour is to hold over His faithful people, and the right which He alone possesses of opening the gate of Heaven to the children of men, and of extending to them the golden sceptre of His mercy and forgiving love. To me, O Key of David, unworthy though I am, open in Your mercy the door of Heaven; stretch out to me, all undeserving, the sceptre of Your favour and Your love.

2. You shut, O Lord, and no man opens. O shut not upon me the door which will admit me to draw nigh to You. Shut not upon me the door of Your mercy and grace. Shut not the door which leads me

into the inner sanctuary of Your love. Shut not the door of that fold wherein Your favourite children dwell in peace and happiness. Shut not, above all, the door of Paradise at my last hour.

3. Come then, O Lord, and open to me now the door of my captivity. I am a captive to my own self-will; a captive to my want of charity; a captive to my vanity and love of display; a captive to my self-indulgence and dislike of mortification; a captive to a thousand faults of which I am scarcely conscious. 'Come, O Lord, and set the captive free.' I am weak, and cannot break my chains unless I receive from You the necessary strength; come, O Lord Jesus, come quickly.

25. - 'O Oriens.'

'O Eastern Morning Sun!'

'O Orient, splendour of eternal light and Sun of Justice; come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.'

1. The night of Pagan times was long and dark, and seemed hopeless. Deeper and deeper the nations were sinking in misery and vice. But at length the Orient, the brightness of the eternal light of Heaven, rose, and scattered the darkness, changing the gloom into a brilliant day. So, too, to those who have been long shrouded in the dense gloom of sin or sorrow there waits the same Divine light, ready to scatter their darkness in a moment, if only they will draw nigh to Him. He waits for me, ready to brighten my path, to scatter my sins and sorrows, if I will avail myself of His love.

2. That rising light is the Sun of Justice, who shall exercise His justice in delivering the captive, and in recompensing His friends a hundred, nay, a thousand-fold, for every little service done to Him. For His justice is virtually identical with His mercy, and rejoices to employ itself in works of pity and of love.

3. Come then, O Orient, O Sun of Justice; 'shine on those who sit in darkness', on those who are enveloped in the thick mists of heathendom and heresy. Come and enlighten their ignorance, that they may not perish. Come and deliver them from the shadow of death, for they cannot deliver themselves. Pour upon them such a flood of light and grace as may guide their feet into the way of peace.

26. - 'O Rex Gentium.'

'O King of the Nations!'

'O King of the nations and desired of them, and the corner-stone that makes both one, come and save man whom You did form of dust.'

1. Never was there a King who had such a claim to sovereignty as Christ our Lord. He is King by Divine appointment and His own right. He is King by the consentient voice of His subjects, and by the right of conquest. He is King by reason of His having purchased us with His own Blood. What unnumbered claims He has on me, and beside all the rest, does He not deserve to reign supreme by reason of His having won me by His love?

2. Christ was desired by all nations, long before they knew Him whom they desired. The heathen world felt a craving want, which it could not define, but which was the desire for the Saviour who should free them from the bondage of sin. So now, men of good-will outside the Church feel something of the same strange longing. Nothing will satisfy it save submission to their King by union with His mystical body the Church of God.

O, how happy am I, whose desires are fulfilled in that I am no alien, but a servant of that King whom to serve is my own desire.

3. Christ is the corner-stone that makes both one; the King of Peace, whose work it is to unite together those who love Him in the unity of mutual love of one another for His sake. Thus, He desires that I should be united to those around me, that there should be no dissension or disunion. Do I in this fulfil the pleasure of my King?

27. - 'O Emmanuel.'

'O God With Us!'

'O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the expectation of the nations and their Saviour, come to save us, O Lord our God!'

1. Emmanuel, God with us, is a name that in every way belongs to Christ our Lord. He is with His people in all their needs, ever ready to help and console them. He is with us on every altar, waiting for us to come and pour out before Him our sorrow and our needs. He is with us, above all, in Holy Communion, when He comes to dwell in our heart, and to bring with Him every grace that we need. He is with us in the hour of death, and He will be with us for ever in Heaven.

2. He who thus comes to dwell with us in familiar friendship is our King; He who thus condescends to be our companion is the God who has an absolute right to our obedience. He is our Lawgiver, and the statutes that He enacts for us have but one end and aim and object, to lead His subjects into the ways of happiness and the paths of peace.

3. Come then, O God, our Lord and our Saviour. 'Come and save us' from all the perils of the evil one, and from our own weakness and frailty. Come and save us in the hour of temptation, for You alone are our King, and none save You shall rule over us. Come and bring us safe through this valley of tears to Your Eternal Kingdom, where we shall dwell for ever, O sweet Jesus, in the everlasting delights of Your blissful company.

28. - Christmas Eve.

1. How did Mary and Joseph spend the first Christmas Eve? St Joseph spent it in a fruitless attempt to find a lodging for his holy spouse. Vainly he sought for a place in the caravanserai, or inn, where travellers were received. Vainly he went from house to house in Bethlehem. Everywhere he was disappointed. Thus it is, that God prepares His saints and chosen ones for some signal blessing. We must not be cast down by the fruitlessness of our efforts. It is a sign that some great grace is close at hand.

2. Mary meantime was patiently waiting. She was simply praying that God's will might be done, whatever suffering it might bring to her. She was offering herself to God, to be used by Him, as He should see fit. She was making acts of perfect conformity to the will of God in all things. Blessed are those who wait patiently in such a spirit. God will soon fulfil all the desires of their heart.

3. Yet Mary and Joseph, in spite of the sorrow of the one, and the anxiety of the other, were both of them overflowing with heavenly consolations. How could it be otherwise, when one of them carried Christ in her chaste womb, and the other was more dear to God than any other of the sons of men, for he was Mary's chosen spouse, and he knew that before another day was past she was to bring forth into the world the Son of God. Our happiness, like that of Joseph and Mary, does not depend upon our external circumstances, but on the love that we bear to God in our hearts.

