

Scripture*First Sunday of Advent*

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44

Scripture tells us: "But of this one thing be not ignorant, my beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). The first intimations that there would be a Messiah compared to when he actually did appear covers a span of years that is longer than the two-thousand years the world has anticipated his Second Coming. The finite's lack of understanding of the Infinite can surely cause impatience and eventually turn a culture away from God. Pope Benedict XVI said: "We could say that Advent is the time when Christians should awaken in their hearts the hope that they can change the world, with the help of God." Understanding the impatience factor, however, the Holy Father also said: "In Advent, the liturgy often repeats and assures us, as though seeking to defeat our mistrust that 'God is coming'." Trust in the word of God is what often separates the saints from the rest of the pack. Those who now walk the corridors of heaven lived earthly lives fully believing what God revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. In this Gospel it is not abundantly clear if the one who is taken is saved or the one who is left. Among some of the early writers there is a difference of opinion. Our Lord uses Noah as an example which could mean that Noah and his family were left in the ark while the rest were taken or swept away by the flood. The flip side is that Noah was taken away in the ark while the others stayed behind to die in the flood. No one knows for certain how the real event will play out but it is clear that there is a distinction between receiving mercy and receiving judgment. Notice the scenarios used here: Two men out in the field and two women grinding at the mill. These are images of the daily workload; therefore our Lord seems to be suggesting that our daily work and concerns are necessary.

What separates one man from the other and one woman from the other is that one of the men and one of the women are consumed with the concerns of this world and indifferent to the concerns of salvation.

Whereby the other man and woman are fulfilling their daily duties because they are a necessity of life, but see their duties as a partial fulfillment of what God has called them to do, thus living their life for God. There's nothing in the text that suggests that the two who will receive judgment were grave sinners; therefore we seem to be visiting, as we frequently do, the topic of indifference and being lukewarm. Lukewarmness has to be one of the biggest, if not the biggest topic of concern in Scripture that is most ignored. You might say that many are indifferent to the scriptural warnings of indifference. Indifference often reveals itself in our modern day with statements like: "I'm a good person; I never hurt anyone, therefore I don't really see the need to go to church" - or - "I give up one hour every Sunday for God and that's enough." This, of course, is individualism and completely ignores the duties and concerns of being a viable part in the Body of Christ. Our Lord says: "Be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." This is a call for perpetual vigilance - making Christ the center of our lives. The voice of John the Baptist crying out: "Prepare the way of the Lord!" should still echo in our hearts today.

This calling was given to one man before Christ began his public ministry. As we await our Lord's return that call to prepare his way has now been assigned to all of us.



From the Catechism... *The place of Mary in Christian Tradition*

437 The shepherds, the angel announced the birth of Jesus as the Messiah promised to Israel: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." From the beginning he was "the one whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world," conceived as "holy" in Mary's virginal womb. God called Joseph to "take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," so that Jesus, "who is called Christ," should be born of Joseph's spouse into the messianic lineage of David.

"Conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit and Born of the Virgin Mary"

I. Conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit . . .

- 484** The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates "the fullness of time," the time of the fulfillment of God's promises and preparations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the "whole fullness of deity" would dwell "bodily." The divine response to her question, "How can this be, since I know not man?" was given by the power of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you."
- 485** The mission of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined and ordered to that of the Son. The Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of Life," is sent to sanctify the womb of the Virgin Mary and divinely fecundate it, causing her to conceive the eternal Son of the Father in a humanity drawn from her own.
- 486** The Father's only Son, conceived as man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is "Christ," that is to say, anointed by the Holy Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence, though the manifestation of this fact takes place only progressively: to the shepherds, to the magi, to John the Baptist, to the disciples. Thus the whole life of Jesus Christ will make manifest "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."

II. . . . Born of the Virgin Mary

- 487** What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ.
- 488** "God sent forth his Son," but to prepare a body for him, he wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary"
- 489** Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women *prepared* for that of Mary. At the very beginning there was Eve; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a posterity that will be victorious over the evil one, as well as the promise that she will be the mother of all the living. By virtue of this promise, Sarah conceives a son in spite of her old age. Against all human expectation God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises: Hannah, the mother of Samuel; Deborah; Ruth; Judith and Esther; and many other women. Mary "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from him. After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her, the exalted Daughter of Zion, and the new plan of salvation is established."

The Immaculate Conception

- 490** To become the mother of the Savior, Mary "was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role." The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as "full of grace." In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.
- 491** Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, "full of grace" through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:



The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.

- 492** The "splendor of an entirely unique holiness" by which Mary is "enriched from the first instant of her conception" comes wholly from Christ: she is "redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son." The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" and chose her "in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love."

"Let it be done to me according to your word . . ."

- 494** At the announcement that she would give birth to "the Son of the Most High" without knowing man, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary responded with the obedience of faith, certain that "with God nothing will be impossible"

- 496** From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived "by the Holy Spirit without human seed." The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it truly was the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own.

- 497** The gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée. The Church sees here the fulfillment of the divine promise given through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son."

Mary—"ever-virgin"

- 499** The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. In fact, Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it." And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the "Ever-virgin."

- 500** Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus. The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact James and Joseph, "brothers of Jesus," are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls "the other Mary." They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression.

- 501** Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save: "The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren, that is, the faithful in whose generation and formulation she cooperates with a mother's love."



The Annunciation



Virgin Mary Directress



Word Wise

- Blessed Virgin Mary* A common way that the Mother of Jesus is named in Catholic Tradition. Often the names or titles conferred on Mary indicate what we believe about the nature of The Incarnation, Jesus and the way of salvation through him. For example: Mother of God was a title that the Council of Ephesus conferred on Mary to affirm the divinity of Jesus against those who believed him to be a demi-god or angelic being above humans but below God.
- Panagia* The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God "the All-Holy" or panagia. Eastern Christians celebrate her as "free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature." This is the same understanding that we have of what god does for each of us in our baptism into Christ and his Church.
- Theotokos* In Greek this means "God Bearer". Called in the Gospels "the mother of Jesus," Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as "the mother of my Lord." In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly "Mother of God"
- Fathers of the Church* In the Earliest centuries following the apostolic period through the fifth century AD, bishops and theologians who added to the understanding of doctrine in significant ways are called the "Father's of the Church". For example St. Augustine helped to formulate our understanding of original sin and sacramental theology and is considered a Father of the Church.
- Rosary* A form of prayer which has existed in different forms in the church since the second century. First referred to as the poor person's Psalter, it was a way for the illiterate and non-monastic believers to pray at different times of the day as they walked or worked in the fields and shops. There are 150 psalms and in the full rosary there are 15 decades or groups of 10 Hail Mary's that recount the word of the gospel of Luke from the Annunciation story. The rosary that is currently popular was developed by St. Dominic and reflects on the mysteries of the life of Jesus and the way of salvation. St. Philip Neri's rosary was 64 beads prayed with the brief prayer: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me."

Use the following space to list questions or thoughts from reflecting on the material in these Companion Notes that you would like to share when the group meets again.

Remember to read the scriptures for the 2nd Sunday of Advent in Cycle A as noted in your Catechumen's Companion on p. 6 and do the Suggestions for Journal Keeping.