

# **The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

## **The Liturgical Year**

### **Dom Prosper Gueranger**

#### **The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

We have now entered into the week which immediately precedes the birth of the Messiah. That long desired coming might be tomorrow; and at furthest, that is, when Advent is as long as it can be, the beautiful feast is only seven days from us. So that the Church now counts the hours; she watches day and night, and since December 17th her Offices have assumed an unusual solemnity. At Lauds, she varies the antiphons each day; and at Vespers, in order to express the impatience of her desires for her Jesus, she makes use of the most vehement exclamations to the Messiah, in which she each day gives Him a magnificent title borrowed from the language of the prophets.

Today, she makes a last effort to stir up the devotion of her children. She leads them to the desert; she shows them John the Baptist, upon whose mission she instructed them on the third Sunday. The voice of the austere Precursor resounds through the wilderness, and penetrates even into the cities. It preaches penance, and the obligation men are under of preparing by self-purification for the coming of Christ. Let us retire from the world during these next few days; or if that may not be by reason of our external duties, let us retire into the quiet of our own hearts and confess our iniquities, as did those true Israelites, who came, full of compunction and of faith in the Messiah, to the Baptist, there to make perfect their preparation for worthily receiving the Redeemer on the day of His appearing to the world.

See, then, with what redoubled earnestness the Church, before opening the book of her great prophet, repeats her invitatory:

*The Lord is now nigh; come, let us adore.*

#### **From the Prophet Isaiah - Chapter 35**

*The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily. It shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise; the glory of Libanus is given to it, the beauty of Carmel and Saron. They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the beauty of our God. Strengthen ye the feeble hands, and confirm the weak knees. Say to the faint hearted; Take courage, and fear not. Behold your God will bring the revenge of recompense; God himself will come and will save you. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free; for waters are broken out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness. And that which was dry land, shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.*

*In the dens where dragons dwelt before shall rise up the verdure of the reed and the bulrush. And a path and a way shall be there, and it shall be called the holy way: the unclean shall not pass over it; and this shall be unto you a straight way, so that fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any mischievous beast go up by it, nor be found there: but they shall walk there, that shall be delivered. And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and shall come into Sion with praise, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

Oh, the joy of Thy coming, dear Jesus! How great it must needs be, when the prophecy says it shall be like an everlasting crown upon our heads. And could it be otherwise? The very desert is to flourish as a lily, and living waters are to gush forth out of the parched land, because their God is coming. Come, Oh Jesus, come quickly, and give us of that water, which flows from Thy sacred Heart, and which the Samaritan woman, the type of us sinners, asked of Thee with such earnest entreaty.

This water is Thy grace; let it rain upon our parched souls, and they too will flourish; let it quench our thirst, and we will run in the way of Thy precepts and examples. Thou, Oh Jesus, art our way, our path, to God; and Thou art Thyself God; Thou art, therefore, both our way and the term to which our way leads us. We had lost our way; we had gone astray as lost sheep: how great Thy love to come thus in search of us! To teach us the way to heaven, Thou hast deigned to come down from heaven, and then tread with us the road which leads to it.

No, there shall be no more weak hands, nor feeble knees, nor faint hearts; for we know that it is in love that Thou art coming to us. There is but one thing which makes us sad: our preparation is not complete. We have some ties still to break; help us to do it, Oh Saviour of mankind! We desire to obey the voice of Thy Precursor, and make plain those rugged paths, which would prevent Thy coming into our hearts, Oh divine Infant! Give us to be baptised in the Baptism of the waters of penance; Thou wilt soon follow, baptising us in the Holy Ghost and love.

## **MASS**

The prophet has made us thirst for that clear cool fountain, which he tells us is to spring up on the coming of the Messiah; let us ask, together with the Church, for the Dew which will give new life to our hearts, and for the Rain which will make them fruitful.

## **Introit**

*Drop down Dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One: let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour.*

*Ps. The heavens show forth the glory of God: and the firmament declares the works of his hands.*

*V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

*Drop down Dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One: let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour.*

In the Collect, the Church implores God to hasten the time of His coming to her assistance; she fears lest her sins might keep her Spouse from visiting her; she, therefore, prays that this obstacle may be removed by His mercy.

### **Collect**

*Exert, we beseech the Oh Lord, thy power and come, and succour us by thy great might: that by the assistance of thy grace, thy indulgent mercy may hasten what is delayed by our sins; who lives and reigns God, world without end.*

The other Collects of the blessed Virgin, against the persecutors of the Church, and for the Pope, are given in the Mass of the first Sunday of Advent.

### **Epistle – From the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. (I Corinthians 4:1-5)**

*Brethren, let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God. Here now it is required among the dispensers that a man be found faithful. But to me it is a very small thing to be judged by you or by man's day: but neither do I judge my own self. For I am not conscious to myself of anything: yet I am not hereby justified: but he that judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge not before the time, until the Lord come: who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise from God.*

The Church here reminds the people of the dignity of the Christian priesthood. The occasion is an appropriate one, as the ordinations were held yesterday. She also brings before her sacred ministers the obligation they have contracted of being faithful to the duties imposed upon them. But let not the flock judge their pastor; since all, both priest and people, are living in expectation of the day of our Saviour's coming; not only of that second one, for which we are now preparing, but also of that last coming which will be as terrible as the other two are dear to the hearts of men. After having spoken these words of stern admonition, the Church resumes the expressions of her hope and her entreaties for the speedy coming of her Spouse.

### **Gradual**

*The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him: to all that call upon him in truth.*

*V. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name.*

*Alleluia, alleluia.*

*V. Come, O Lord, and delay not: release thy people Israel from their sins. Alleluia..*

### **Gospel - Sequel of the holy Gospel according to Luke. (Luke 3:1-6)**

*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip his brother tetrarch of Iturca and the country*

*of Trachonitis, and Lysnias tetrarch of Abilina, under the high priests Annas and Caiphas, the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zachary, in the desert. And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins: as it was written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight his paths: every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain: and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

Thou art nigh, Oh Lord, for the inheritance of Thy people has passed into the hands of the Gentiles, and the land which Thou did promise to Abraham is now but a province of that vast empire, to which Thine own is to succeed. The oracles of the prophets are being rapidly fulfilled, each in its turn; the prediction of Jacob himself has been accomplished: the sceptre is taken from Juda. Everything is ready for Thy coming, Oh Jesus! Thus it is that Thou renews the face of the earth; deign also, I beseech Thee, to renew my heart, and give me courage during these last few hours of my preparation for receiving Thee. I feel the need I have of withdrawing into solitude, of receiving the baptism of penance, of making straight all my ways: Oh divine Saviour, let all this be done in me, that so my joy may be full on the day of Thy coming.

During the Offertory, the Church salutes the ever glorious Virgin, in whose chaste womb is still concealed the Saviour of the world. Give us, Oh Mary, this God, who fills thee with Himself and His grace. The Lord is with thee, Oh incomparable Mother, but the happy hour is rapidly advancing when He will also be with us; for His name is Emmanuel.

### **Offertory**

*Hail, Mary, full of grace: the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.*

### **Secret**

*Hear us, Oh Lord, we beseech thee, and being appeased by these offerings, grant they may increase our devotion, and advance our salvation. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who lives and reigns with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, forever and ever.*

The other Secrets as on the first Sunday. During the Communion, the Church, now filled with the God who has just come into her, borrows the words of Isaiah, wherewith to celebrate the praise of the Virgin Mother. The same words apply also to the Church herself, since that same God, who made Mary His tabernacle, has this instant visited her.

### **Communion**

*Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son: and his name shall be called Emmanuel.*

**Postcommunion**

Having received what has been offered to thee, Oh Lord, grant, we beseech thee, that the more frequently we partake of these sacred mysteries, the more our devotion may increase. . Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who lives and reigns with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, forever and ever.

The other Postcommunions as on the first Sunday.