

ADVENT 2020

The material we offer here has a **FIRST PART**, to help us to live the season of Advent, it is a **REFLECTION** offered to be used individually, to inspire us and prepare our heart for the coming of Jesus, the Lord. And **SECOND PART** to celebrate individually or in community, with the O Antiphons, the days 17 to 23, as antiphons of the Magnificat, that introduce us into the mystery we expect.

TO DEEPEN, PRAY, INTERNALIZE

1. GOD'S COMINGS

Advent again! A **NEW** Advent! Because our living situation is different every day, every year, even if we repeat the liturgical cycle. A cycle that moves forward on spiral, deepening Christ's mystery in our own life, or our life in Him.

Advent comes in handy in our present situation because it always renews our hope. Not as a simple desire to have something that we do not have now but which we would like to have. It is a **hope well rooted in the path of God through history**, collected in the always living and present Word of Scripture, in an always living dialogue with the persons from all times and places, with them we keep making history with our life. The sacred Book closes with an invocation **Come Lord Jesus! Maranatha!** As if it remained open to continue updating and preparing **the comings of the Lord**, not only the one that already took place in Mary.

What St. Bernard abbot says on these comings is interesting (Sermon 5th in Advent) : **"In the first coming, the Lord manifested himself on the earth and lived with men even, as He says, they saw and hated him. In the Last, all will see the salvation of God and they will look upon him whom they had pierced. The in-between, on the other hand, is hidden, and it, only his chosen ones, see the Lord deep within themselves, and thus their souls save themselves as well as others for which they intercede. So, in the first coming of the Lord, he came in flesh and weakness, in this second, in spirit and power; and in the last in glory and majesty. This in-between coming is like a road that leads from the first to the last. In the first Christ was our redemption; in the last he will manifest himself as our life; in this in-between coming he is our rest and our consolation.**

However, in order that nobody think that these things we say about the in-between coming are our invention, let us listen to the Lord: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."

During Advent we remember not only what happened in Mary's womb, and hope for what has been promised to us, at the end of times. **We need to consider this in-between coming in which each one of us, goes out to meet the Lord**, who has not left, who is always with us. (Mt 28: 20.) As the poet Tagore says: He comes, he comes always. Between the memory of what was, and the hope of what will be, how can we meet the Lord? Where is He? Saint Paul says "he is not far from any one of us for 'in him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17: 27-28.) Christian life is precisely that, to encounter Him, live in Him, *grow until we reach his stature* (Eph 4:13), be in Him.

- What is your vital situation at the beginning of this new Advent?
- Why do you want the Lord to come? How do you prepare yourself to meet him?

2. TO KNOW GOD

This in-between coming happens **in our inner being**, where God secretly dwells. **We do not have to go to any external place to meet the Lord who comes, because it is from our inner being from where we go out in truth to his encounter.** We need this familiarity with the God who dwells in us, because on **knowing him from our inner being** we will be able to recognize him on our life journeys, in the hungry, thirsty, naked, in the prisoner... (Mt 25: 35-46), in the persons who surprise us and help us to rethink and change (Mc 7: 24-30), in the events... If we do not know him, we will not recognize him.

To know God is a theme that goes through the whole Bible. The people of Israel is stupid and foolish, because it does not know God (Jer 4:22), "Israel does not know, my people has not understood." (Is 1:3). The lack of knowledge of God leads the people to its ruin, to the disaster. For the sacred authors it is "obvious" to know God in his works (specially the human being the best of his works,) in his actions in creation and in history. Failure to do so, it is stupidity, lack of wisdom.

It is a petition of our Foundress Venerable Ma. Antonia París: "... give me, O Lord, light to know you and to know me and to know all that you want from me." Of our Founder St. Anthony Ma. Claret "Grant that I may know You and make You known."

It is a theme present also in many other saints: St. Augustin, St. Ignatius... to know ourselves and to know Him. The God more intimate to us than our own intimacy. We speak of an active knowledge in love, keeping his Word, and welcoming his presence in our inner being. The Holy Spirit has been poured out in our hearts, we are Temples of the Spirit and He gives witness to the Love of the Father and of the Son, and to the love with which each one of us is loved, to his presence in our intimacy.

Thus, this can be the orientation of the present Advent

- Where do you seek God? Where can you say that you find Him?
- What does it mean for you to be inhabited by God?
- What do you know about God? What relation does it have with your own knowledge?



TO PRAY AND CELEBRATE WITH THE O! ANTIPHONS

MARANATHA : COME LORD JESUS!

The center of the liturgy of the first Christians is to invoke Jesus Lord, to celebrate his living and risen presence. They gave to Jesus the name and the lordship that the Old Testament gave to Yahweh, whose name they could not say and that they translated as Adonai (in Hebrew), Maran (in Aramaic) or Kyrios (in Greek): Jesus is the Lord! Not as an expression of power like other "lords", but as an expression of the paschal life, handed over for love to the extreme.

And as Christians we continue to invoke Jesus as Lord and we await Him because we need him and we are grateful for his presence, because we discover in him the saving hand of God; we invoke him: Maranatha! as the expression of **a desire**, Come Lord! And also, as the expression of **a reality**: The Lord is coming!

It is the repeated and updated cry of the Advent. MARANATHA! This was the way that the first Christians greeted each other; such was their hope and the feeling of the presence of Jesus among them. Expression of joy, of integral peace, of trust, of security, of strength in the persecution.

Today some persons use this expression as a mantra in the practice of meditation, accompanying by breathing. As we repeat the word Maranatha, we renounce to the images that could stir up thoughts. When we prepare ourselves to pray, it is the Spirit that prays in us, because we do not know how to do it (Rom 8:26-27) it is the prayer of Christ who dwells in us, and the emptier, the more space we can leave to him, we are less in the way with our distractions or imagination. Thus, the use of the word Maranatha as a way to silence and to center our spirit, to make place for the Spirit.

Late into Advent, approaching the celebration of the Birth of Jesus the Lord, from December 17, **we enter in the liturgical nucleus, by the hand of Mary**, the Mother, with the Gospels of the last week of Advent and with the **Major Antiphons**, that introduce the song of the Magnificat in the celebration of Vespers, and that go back to the first centuries of Christianity. They are the so called "O Antiphons" they were sung and still are in the cathedrals and monasteries with great solemnity. They include all the invocations Come! Maranatha! Applying to the Expected Lord diverse titles of great biblical richness.

They are short prayers addressed to Christ Jesus that condense the spirit of Advent and Christmas, in three attitudes: **the admiration** of the Church before the mystery of God made man: "O!" **The deeper understanding** of Christ's mystery. And the urgent supplication "**come.**" These three attitudes are present in all the Antiphons and as we meditate on them they grow in us.

"They show a progression in the development of the mystery of Christ, from its remote preparation reminding us the WISDOM, that has arranged all things in the original creation, to the EMMANUEL, 'GOD WITH US' PRESENCE OF God Love, clothed with our nature in Bethlehem, and suggesting through the others antiphons a progress and nearness of God to the human creature, along Salvation History." ¹

¹Alegre Vilas, José. *Ven. Cantos de amor para acoger la Navidad*. Ed. PPC, 2019. This book and other materials by this monk of Poblet has guided the reflections and comments of the Antifonas.

Turning our gaze to our society, we are really in need of the Word' WISDOM, of a LIGHT that may dispel the shadows, a foundation a CORNER STONE for our homes and encounters, we need a God who sprouts as a RENEWAL in the extinct faith, a God who has already come and has made of us his TEMPLE, his home and has left us the KEY to enter: HOLY MARY. With her, with Holy Mary of Advent, Mother of God and our mother we shout loudly and with trust: COME, come. With her we will deepen in the amazement, in the KNOWLEDGE OF Jesus, the expected of all times, we will strengthened our Hope, because Mary continues today giving birth to Jesus, the Lord, the Christ.

As an anecdote it can be said that the initial letters of each of these antiphons in Latin, reading from the last to the first form the acrostic **ERO CRAS**, which means "**I shall be tomorrow.**" This alludes clearly to the next day, which is **Christmas**, the day of **Jesus** birth in Bethlehem.

December 17

O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.

Day 17 invites us to consider the **Wisdom of God**, a prerogative that belongs to God alone, which is manifested in the work of creation, as an expression of his Love and Benevolence.

To whom has wisdom's root been revealed? Who knows her subtleties?

There is but one, wise and truly awe-inspiring, seated upon his throne:

It is the LORD; he created her, has seen her and taken note of her.

He has poured her forth upon all his works, upon every living thing according to his bounty; he has lavished her upon his friends.

Fear of the LORD is glory and splendor, gladness and a festive crown. (Eclo 1: 6-10)

Creation with its splendor, beauty and perfection awakens in us **amazement and the ardent desire**, the nostalgia of the Creator's hand, thus "O." But **it is also a cry**, first of all of creation itself which groans for the mistreatment it suffers, the abandonment, the manipulation... as we are seeing especially during this year dedicated to *Laudato Si*. It is a cry of humankind disoriented, in pain and lost in the journey of history. We are touching our deepest weakness, thus we cry out **COME**, and show us the way! The words of Jesus resound within us "**I am the Way, the Light and the Life**" of whom the apostle Paul says: **Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.**(1Cor. 1:24)

The book of Wisdom responds also to this cry and transmit to us hope when it declares that the Wisdom of God "**renews the universe**; And passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets.(Wis 7:27)

Our God is a God who has ears, as history has manifested it, he listens to the cry of his children, he listens to the groaning of the earth that cries as in the pains of childbirth and He does not abandon his creatures. Wisdom entered once more in the good soul of a woman, Holy Mary to begin a loving relationship, of friendship, life, and hope with her, and through her with the whole humankind. God, the Creator of all Beauty put the recreation in the hands of a human creature. He knocks again to the door of a simple heart to ask for collaboration. He invites her to beget Life in the world, in history, to give birth and vanish the "pain" of childbirth of the new and

definitive Creation. He does not impose on her his project he only presents it and waits for Mary's free response. "Everything was awaiting your response" as the poet Casaldáliga says... and Mary says YES, and Love begets again love in the human creature, definitive Love to make new all things. Christ begotten in Mary's womb, is he who makes new all things. (Ap 21:5)

The journey of salvation undertaken by the divine Wisdom keeps waiting for answers, collaborators and renovators. In this journey Mary invites us to remain in the same relation of friendship and availability she lived with her Creator and Lord.

December 18

O Sacred Lord of ancient Israel,
who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush,
who gave him the holy law on Sinai Mountain:
Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.

We are invited to contemplate **God as the Shepherd of his people**, he takes care of it, and calls Moses to be his instrument of salvation. He shows us the passion of the flame and of the encounter with the Lord. We welcome the strength of his Word:

Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the LORD appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, "I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father," he continued, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. But the LORD said, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering.

Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey... Come, now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" He answered, "I will be with you; and this shall be your proof that it is I who has sent you: when you bring my people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this very mountain." "But," said Moses to God, "when I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?" God replied, "I am who am." Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you."

God spoke further to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. "This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations. (cf Ex 3:1-15)

This is a text very rich in content, on the essence of God and of the human being. The God who seeks us with passion and who enjoys the relationship with men, the God who listens and sees, the God pro-vocateur that seeks collaborators in his liberating mission... and Moses overwhelmed with fear that makes him cover his mouth, who questions the identity of the God who speaks to him and sends him, who doubts of his own ability, who dialogues with Yahweh.

Moses obeys and really liberates Israel from the Egyptian dominion. Adonai, the Shepherd of Israel, besides liberating seeks a relation of communion and will give on mount Sinai a Law to the People to be at the service of life and justice. He did not reach his goal, and he will come down from the Mountain to speak to the heart of the people, clothed with its own nature, to teach the Way to the Promised Land, the road to love.

*Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you...
The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of
the Most High will overshadow you
Therefore the child to be born will be called the Son of God... (Lk 1:28ff)*

Mary allows the Spirit of God to hold her and from this embrace the Word is born clothed with our nature, to hold us and show to us his love with a Word and with human works. Mary sings out of joy when she experiences the embrace of the divine love and makes her *Magnificat*, her own life that brings hope to the heart of the human creature.

Let us hope he will send also now his Word and soften with it our heart. May it find in our heart the necessary echo: **LET IT BE DONE!** Thus Holy Mary teaches us: *let it be done unto me, not the written and mute word, but the incarnate and living word...vitaly engraved in human shape in my womb... in short, be it done unto me, as it has never been done in any other human being before me and will never be repeated after me... Let it be done unto me, **aspiring it in silence**, as a personal incarnation, personally owned by me in my inner being.* “(S.Bernardo, Praising the Virgin Mary)

Come shepherd of the house of Israel, with the power of your arms, the Word, your Word and the Spirit of Love.

19 diciembre

O Shoot from the Stem of Jesse,
you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples;
kings stand silent in your presence;
the nations bow down in worship before you.
Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.

Today's invocation is an urgent cry: Come, do not delay anymore. It is an ardent desire with a certain tone of anguish. It appears in a heart that has not yet lost hope completely and is still able to see the SHOOT from the stem of Jesse.

But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, (Is 11, 1-2)

This Spirit is alive but as dormant in the heart of humanity. Silenced. In each one of us. As poet Maragall says: “when a branch cannot hold anymore **the spring it has inside**, through the abundant leaves **a flower sprouts** as a wonderful expression” God knows the need we have of his help, his children, and he has always ready the awakening of his spring in the human heart.

The spring like fabric of human history begins with Mary's Yes. She proclaims the saving power that enters History to change the present order as she sings in her *Magnificat*. She lives a life

that starts in her center, with a vitality that increases with age and stature through history, from the deep spring she carries inside. The flower that sprouts from her womb is Jesus, the true sprout from David's stem, the desired of the nations.

We are called to continue the weaving of this vital fabric that provides the "warmth" that humanity needs. This is each one's inner spring, the Spirit that dwells in us will be able to renew our life because it points out to a whole new hope.

Make sure you keep alive your sense of wonder, the knowledge of Jesus who does everything new and the hope in Him.

20 diciembre

O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel,
controlling at your will the gate of heaven:
Come, break down the prison walls of death
for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death;
and lead your captive people into freedom.

It is at home, where we find the meaning of life. Ask the homeless. The world is our home, beautifully and carefully arranged for the family Life of the children of God. However, we do not enjoy completely this home, rather we are deteriorating it.

God comes with Jesus to rebuild the house. He is the key. How difficult it is to open a door whose key you do not have... There are tutorials in YouTube with tricks to do it! Jesus is the key, like he also said that he was the Door through which the sheep enter. He gives access to us to a true home, the children of God's home, the ecclesial community. Another antiphon has presented Jesus as the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd according to John. We recover in these O antiphons the **sense of wonder and hope**, because with Him we get back the security of a roof, of a family, of rest and care.

In this task of rebuilding the House, God found a unique and wonderful collaborator, a woman from our human race, who welcomed him in her heart and in her womb. She also had the key to decide the entrance of Jesus in the world, and from her freedom she opened wide her whole being for Most High to dwell in her to become absolute nearness. Even today she keeps giving him to us and she warns us that we can be one of those who when the Word comes to encamp on the earth, do not welcome him. Because our own the door of our heart can be open only from the inside, nobody, not even God can open it by force.

The people of this woman have acknowledged Mary's response to the Creator and sings to her around the whole world: Hail door that let our light go through... Heaven's door... Mother of life, who begot the Creator. Mother of the Cenacle, house of Love, where you gathered the scattered disciples waiting for the Spirit, keep convoking us today to be the family of God, welcoming the Liberator from all kinds of selfishness and slavery in our own home.

Let us sing the Magnificat, with Mary's soul and let us allow God to enter also in our history.

December 21

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice:
Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.

Today's antiphon brings to our mind the Benedictus: "the Sun from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death." A day to contemplate, from our situation of darkness and anguish, the Lord as the Sun, as the Light. Like a call from our inner being, that is always with the nostalgia for light and justice, to contemplate the divine light always ready in the strength of his Word and in the living and close example of Holy Mary.

We recall the feeling of joy and serenity that the dawn brings to us, after a long and sleepless night, maybe taking care of a sick person... each dawn leads us to praise and thanksgiving for the life that dawns. We remember the text so typical of Advent-Christmas

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing... For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. (Is 9:1-5)

A great light on the lampstand, to shine on those who dwell in the house. A light, a Child wise and strong, but also meek and humble whose kingship shall bring peace to the world. To shine in the house, the Lord has chosen a precious lampstand: Holy Mary. This friend of God, the blessed among all women shall raise on high the lampstand so that the light may reach all the spaces and corners of the House. Mary receives this light on our earth. Thus we greet her with words from the Fathers of the Church:

*Hail full of grace, O you all shinning
By you, darkness has disappeared, and light has shone.
Hail, O, seven-lamps candelabrum,
Adorned with the seven lights of the gifts poured upon by the Spirit.
Hail, o Dioptre of happy omens, through which those submerged in darkness and in the shadow of sin, on seeing the Sun of justice who came in glory from on high, have been fully enlightened."*
(S.Andrew of Creta. Hom. 5 on the Annunciation)

We come to Mary to allow the light to dawn upon our darkness and awaken in us the desire of God, of growing in the light.



22 diciembre

O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart;
O Keystone of the mighty arch of man:
Come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.

We are beings of clay. Vases beautifully made, even with our cracks that can be sources of life. Like that vase of the tale, that complained to the water boy for not being as perfect as the others, and that she had seen that on her path the flowers and the plants grew for the water that fell through her cracks ... it seems that we are always more aware of our fragility than of the “weigh of love” that God deposited when he fashioned our clay. Life blows crack the pot that we are, allowing the precious content of our inner being to fall out. We invoke the potter God who has molded us and blew in our “nose” his breath of life (cf. Gn 2:7). Sometimes we complain and rebel against our Maker, and we hear the invitation of the Prophet Jeremiah to go down to the Potter’s workshop to be remolded anew by the power of his Word, new every day...

In the infinite generosity of God and of his love for his creatures, he decides to come to live the experience of our fragility and to teach us how to join together the clay that we are with the water of his breath of life, his Spirit, spring of water welling up to eternal life. In this new creation the point of departure will not be the nothingness. The Creator had kept a special vessel: Holy Mary. She will receive abundantly the Word: Be it done unto me according to your Word! Thus she will become the “spiritual, venerable and worthy of devotion vessel” as we acclaim her in the Rosary.

With Mary we learn how to put every day our humble clay in his Hands to be restored, and to receive his spirit of life. With Mary we learn to reissue the original unity of the human being with God, to collaborate with the Potter to give rise to new pots according to his Wisdom, as she teaches us to sing in the Magnificat: He does great things in me. We sing with her to **awaken more and more in us the desire of Love**, true breath of life in our fragile humanity, and this will make possible the unity, the reconciliation, leaning on the rock of Christ, on the strength of his Word.

December 23

O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver,
desire of the nations, Savior of all people:
Come and set us free, Lord our God.

“God-is-with-us.” It is not God with me, but with us. The Desired of the nations and savior of the peoples is already close at hand. Maybe we have already made our crib, our manger, where many and diverse characters are present, people of all conditions of life: the Magi, the shepherds, the peasants, the children... diverse Nativity scenes that update the characters that surrounded the Holy Family: the unemployed, the homeless, the abused women, the immigrants... The whole earth is ready to be a Manger, to welcome the Savior of the peoples, the Emmanuel, God-is-with-us, He is such, thanks to the availability of Holy Mary. We found

Bethlehem where God Love, who wants to remake that “us,” is born. Bethlehem is also the heart of each person. God keeps coming and calls us to live a relationship of friendship with Him, who on clothing himself with our humanity wants to be “friend of all men.” This is a great mystery. To welcome the Emmanuel is to open ourselves to fraternity and friendship.

We have journeyed with Mary these last days of Advent from the hand of the Word, giving way to Christmas. We are overcome with the wonder of the pilgrimage of her faith, an inner journey that kept everything in her heart: the unexpected, what she did not understand, the little joys lived with Joseph, or with the companions of the pilgrimage to Bethlehem.

The Major Antiphons, as we said at the beginning, supposed a progression in the mystery of Christ. Till we arrive to what is unthinkable: A God who dawns among us as man, in the fragility of a CHILD, in the most hidden and lost place, in the silence of the night; a God who makes himself present and will pass through the earth in the silence of love, doing good and healing the oppressed. **O marvelous, marvelous exchange!** God becomes man so that the humans may reach God.

Therefore, it is a day **to exercise ourselves in the amazement and contemplation**, with Mary and like Mary. Let us prepare Christmas in the inner silence, not so much with the burden of the external preparations and pre-made greeting cards. The Emmanuel, the sacrament of Love that comes without noise, shows us an open way to the universal fraternity. God-is-with-us not only with me.

God: a CHILD

My Lord: a child

Give us light: a child

Give us faith: a child

Save us: a child

My Lord: a child.

<https://youtu.be/nSA3pHOtRHg> Sing Nana a Jesús



