

1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*Freedom is not held by those who do not thirst for it.
Rafael Alberti*

Inaugurate the "new time"

Together with the evangelist Luke we begin this time of Advent, of grace and hope. The language of this text (Lk 21:25-28.34-36), surprising and disturbing, assures us that God's salvation makes its way through the ups and downs of history. This certainty implies an enormous commitment for believers. The passage has two distinct parts. The first announces the coming of the Son of man (vv. 25-28) and the second exhorts the disciples to be prepared for it (vv. 34-36).

The gospel proclaims: **your redemption is at hand.**" Luke speaks of the second coming of Jesus: the parousia. Jesus' discourse is apocalyptic and adapted to the culture of his time (apocalypse does not mean catastrophe, as we tend to think, but revelation. The Second Coming of the Lord will reveal history to itself. The truth that was hidden will appear in full light. We will all get to know each other better (1 Cor 13:12b).

In us there is anguish, fear and dread, not caused by "the signs in the sun, the moon and the stars". Our anxieties and insecurities are caused by various agents: external, such as economic crises, social conflicts, abuse of power, lack of bread and work, citizen frustration; Internal, they come from ourselves, like the lack of self-knowledge that makes us live slaves to the tyranny of our defenses, hidden under a mask pretending to cover fears and insecurities, hunched over ourselves, paralyzed blaming others for our own mistakes and misfortunes... and, above all, without asking the right questions so that the truth can emerge. Yes... **salvation comes!**

Away from instilling fear, Luke presents this event as good news. Jesus is the Savior, and his arrival will mean the definitive liberation, the fullness of the reign of God (Lk 21:31). The **attitude of vigilance** to which Advent invites us is to be alert **to discover the "Christ who comes"** in current situations, to recognize him and together with Him to face them as a necessary process of a total liberation that passes through the cross. Let it not be that, that day surprises us 'like a trap' that unexpectedly falls on those who have allowed themselves to be numbed by an irresponsible and superficial life.

What can we do? "To be awaken and pray", because this Spirit of freedom and liberation is discovered with *a living Hope, meeting point between the promises of faith and the precarious signs that today surround those promises.* Hope is memory that tends to be forgotten; it is nourished by prayer, adheres us to the promises of faith and inspires us, every day, in the search for its footprints in the signs of time.

Listen to yourself

- Read carefully (from the senses) and without haste the biblical text, the commentary. You can reread more than once.
- Stand among the disciples of Jesus, receive that Word that is also for you; he addresses you a particular invitation, what is it? Notes
- What aspects of your life do you need to free to discover Jesus who comes in the precariousness of your existence? Notes. Dialogue with whoever can best guide you.

Read Inside Your Heart

«*If you remain in my Word... you will know the truth and the truth will make you free*” (Jn 8,31-32).

Christian freedom has its foundation on two fundamental pillars: first, the grace of the Lord; second, the truth that Christ reveals to us, that is himself.

In the first place it is **a gift from the Lord**. The freedom we have received from baptism is fruit of the death and resurrection of Jesus. From Him alone do the fruits of new life spring according to the Spirit

The second pillar of freedom is **the truth**. The reality of the living Christ, which directly touches the daily and general meaning of personal life. **Freedom makes one free to the extent to which it transforms a person's life and directs it toward the good**. In order to be truly free, we not only need to know ourselves on the psychological level, but above all to practice truth in ourselves on a more profound level — and there, in our heart, open ourselves to the grace of Christ. Truth must disturb us, let us return to this extremely Christian word: restlessness. It is the sign that the Holy Spirit is working inside us, and freedom is an active freedom, that comes from the grace of the Holy Spirit. It must constantly question us, so that we might move ever deeper into what we really are. In this way we will discover that the journey of truth and freedom is an arduous one that lasts a lifetime. Remaining free is arduous, it is a struggle; but it is not impossible. It is a journey in which the Love that comes from the Cross guides and sustains us: Love that reveals truth to us and grants us freedom. Freedom makes us free (Gal 5, 1.13), makes us happy and gives us wings, gives us hope. It shows the way of a new time. And it points the way to a new time. It's up to you to accept it or let it go. (cf. *P. Francisco*, Audiencia, 6 10 2021).

QUIET YOUR SOUL BEFORE GOD

- Find a time and space to be with Jesus alone.
- From what has been reflected so far, what are you left with?
 - Focus on it. Leave it in God's hands so that He may transform it into what suits you.
- Enjoy stillness, silence and listen to His voice.



2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*In the heart of every winter lives a beating spring,
and behind each night comes a smiling aurora.*

Khalil Gibran

Awaken Hope!

God announces the closeness of the Kingdom through John and assures with Isaiah that "all will see the salvation of God" (Lk 3:1-6). For the God who comes with the gift of salvation we must prepare the way in the present of our history, personal and social.

Luke emphasizes that the Baptist is, above all, the precursor of Jesus and that his thing has been to prepare the way for him. With this prophet culminates the "time of Israel", which is the time of promises, and the "time of Jesus" is inaugurated, which is that of fulfillment. A time in which "the salvation of God" will fully break out for all.

John the Baptist, prophet precursor of Jesus, was the son of a "mute" (silent people) who renounced the "priesthood" (the privileges of inheritance), and a "barren" (fruit of the Spirit). "The word came to him" when he was isolated from power and in contact with the people. The word always comes from the desert (where there is only word) and it is addressed to the affluent (among whom idols inhabit) to unmask them. Salvation comes in history with one condition: conversion "prepare the way of the Lord."

The invitation is **to enter into the dynamism of conversion**, to set out on our way, to change. To change from within, growing in what is fundamental, in love, to "discern what is of value" (Phil 1:10). From that condition we will listen to the Lord who comes, and we will go out to meet him.

This renewal from within has its external manifestation because the mountains are "lowered", the valleys are filled, what is crooked is straightened out and what is rugged shall be equalized (Bar 5:7). Rough edges are ironed out, inequalities are suppressed, and distances are shortened so that salvation reaches everyone. Transformed humanity is a reconciled and equalized humanity, integrated into a family of faith, "sons gathered from East to West" (Bar 5:5). To convert is to broaden the heart and expand hope to make it to the measure of the world, to the measure of God. A more egalitarian humanity that respects the dignity of all is the best way for God to come bringing his salvation.

What can we do? Advent, *waiting for the one who comes*, and hope go hand in hand. **To hope is to be able to change**, to dream of and provoke utopia, even in those situations where it seems impossible. United in hope we journey together to the encounter with God. But at the same time, He journeys with us pointing the way because "God will lead Israel to the light of his Glory, with his justice and his mercy" (Bar 5,9).

Listen to Yourself

- Read carefully (from the senses) and without haste the biblical text, the commentary. You may read more than once.
- Put yourself among the Jesus' disciples, welcome this Word which is also for you; he makes a especial invitation for you, which one? Take note of it.
- Identify what spots in your heart are still in need of transformation. The Word is coming and wants to find a place and wants 'be welcomed' in your heart. What personal mountains have been lowered, or what valleys have been flattened, or what aspects of your life have become straighter, less rugged in this past year? Take notes. Dialogue with someone who can enlighten you more.

Read inside your heart

Peter and John went to Samaria and, with the laying on of hands, conferred the Holy Spirit. Then, 'seeing Simon that, when the apostles put on their hands, the Spirit was granted, he offered them money saying, 'Give me this power too, so that anyone upon whom I lay my hands may receive the holy Spirit'' (Hch 8, 18-19)

The desire of power that Simon wants reminds us of the power that Satan offers Jesus: 'I will give all this power and the glory of these kingdoms' (Lc 4,6). Simon asks for an absolute power that goes beyond the power of each person: to dispose of the holy Spirit. Peter said to him, 'cursed be you with your money, if you believe that God's gift is for sale. This power is not for you, nor does it belong to you, because God does not approve of your attitude. Repent of your wickedness and ask to be forgiven for your claim. I see you, turned into bitter thread and bound in bonds of evil.'" (v. 20-22)

The atmosphere is perfectly described. Simon hears how his inner state of bitterness, enclosure, morbid taste for power is discovered, which blocks him and encloses him in his personality.

The text continues... Simon replied, "Pray for me to the Lord that nothing of what you have said may happen to me" (v. 24).

The way of the Gospel is a struggle of a contrasted nature. Contrasted in the heart of the human being and in the structures of the world. The growth of the Gospel implies an alternate struggle in which it is necessary to be always alerted to overcome an adversary stronger and more intelligent than us, hence the need to surrender to the force of the Spirit in a permanent dynamism of discernment and change to straighten out what is crooked (cf. C.M Martini. The inner garden)

We are all at the same time wheat and weeds that grow together in the same field. It is important to recognize the circumstances, situations, options, where we are both, and how the dynamics of evil move even if we do not want it that way. And encourage us to make free and responsible choices.

Waiting for the one who is coming sustains us in the hope of conversion. Awaken that hope!

QUIET YOUR SOUL WITH YOUR SISTER

- Choose one or two struggles or meaningful experiences you have discovered, remembered... share them with one sister of your community, **in a spiritual and fraternal conversation.**
- Give each other a prayer commitment

Keep in mind that spiritual conversation implies an attitude of deep and serious listening to the other, seeking to understand what she wants to convey with her words and her attitude. It is a listening that does not make judgments, comparisons, or assessments. There must be enough time for each one to communicate from within, her thoughts, feelings, and the spiritual sense of the subject. In a deep sharing that enriches each other, it makes the worth of the other grow, makes her be.



3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Have a good conscience and you will always have joy. If there is any joy in the world, surely the man at heart has it

Thomas de Kempis

Joy with Meaning

The evangelist Luke in his text 3: 10-18 speaks of the testimony of John the Baptist, the precursor. His preaching impresses the people who approach him to ask: "What should we do?" (v. 10), is proof that they have understood the message, they perceive that John's baptism requires something more.' The answer comes immediately: share what you have: cloth, food... (vv. 10-11).

John's preaching is concretized in the fraternal relationship, in the practice of justice, in the renunciation of violence and in professional ethics; dimensions that reach every human being and show that salvation reaches everyone. The Gospel intends that the hearer of God's Word be converted, that is, that his conduct and behavior be in accordance with the righteousness that the Kingdom demands. Conversion is a change of behavior rather than a change of ideas. To convert is to act in an evangelical manner. The Gospel invites us to a "conversion to the future" which unfolds in the Kingdom.

The temptation for not converting is to remain in a permanent search "of" ... or be content with asking without listening to the true answers. According to the Baptist conversion requires "throwing the chaff (to know how to select or choose". "Gather the wheat" go to the most important thing and do not stay with the shells, get to the point) and "to burn the straw" (throw overboard the useless or what immobilizes us). With our gestures we discern what brings us closer to that which distances us from the coming of the Lord.

St. Paul, in turn, tells us to be joyful; joyful for the coming of the Lord, for maintaining hope, for placing ourselves in the process of conversion and for sharing with our brothers and sisters the Lord's Supper. In the Bible, joy accompanies every fulfillment of God's promises. This time the joy will be particularly profound: "The Lord is at our side" (Phil 4:5). The practice of justice and the experience of joy will lead us to authentic peace, to the Shalom (life, integrity) of God.

What can we do? It is the question which many of us formulates. The answer of John the Baptist is not an empty theory. It is through gestures and concrete actions of justice, respect, solidarity and Christian coherence, how we show our will of peace, thus we build a social fabric most worthy of the children of God, we conquer the profound and radical changes that our life and our society need. For this, we must purify the church (and to teach and help others to do likewise), allow the Spirit of the Lord to invade us, liberate us from the ties of selfishness and accommodation, and to dispose ourselves with joy, hope and enthusiasm to contribute to the construction of a more human future, an expression of the Kingdom of God that Jesus brings us. And, spontaneously, a joy full of meaning pushes us to say forcefully: come to us your Kingdom, Lord!

Listen to Yourself

- Read carefully (from your senses) and without hurry the biblical text, the commentary. You may re-read more than once.
- Situate yourself among Jesus' disciples, receive that Word which is also for you; she addresses a particular invitation, which one? Take notes.
- Remember your path of growth in the coherence between what you say and do, desire and can, between the image you have of yourself and what you really are. What form or measure of Christ you are acquiring? Acknowledge the work God has done in you... around you. Rejoice! Give thanks! Ask that you may continue growing...

Read yourself in “the we”

“I would dare to say that the historical unity toward which humankind is heading unstoppably, even in the midst of multiple contests and vicissitudes, is the shadow, the reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem in this world. A unity that we have to build in all the fields as the authentic mission of the human being, because it is related to the unity of the eternal reality of the heavenly Jerusalem, that has to be built with the strength of charity which unifies the world. Here are melt, although without identifying, the unity as the longing of the human being and charity as the groan of the Spirit. Everything that is accomplished at the civil and social field for the unity is unveiled, purified, and sustained, in its deepest dimensions, in the sphere of charity, which is the unifying force of humanity.

However, despite this, it is a conflictive reality, continuously attacked and threatened, unstable, fragile and subjected to dramatic tests. We must strive to see it in so much darkness. It takes precisely a spirit sustained by faith to perceive it clearly among human divisions.

I consider that the dramatic reality of the opposition to the unity of the human family, as well as its manifestations, violence, abuses, genocides, destruction of the planet... must be understood as a spiritual element of history. Otherwise, it could not be explained how it is possible for the world to tend to unity and yet always fall back into division.

We have to be aware that the two realities coexist: the need for unity and continuous betrayals of it. The intelligence of evil always seeks to divide; we live in a permanent conflict and in this struggle, faith is at stake.

The cross of Christ, culminating moment of the struggle, is the place where the unity of the humankind is accomplished in its moment of greatest disintegration and darkness. The cross is the most meaningful point of the road toward unity and of the dramatic opposition, where the disintegrating fury is unleashed against every attempt at unity of hearts. Whoever seeks outside the mystery of the cross purification and peace with himself and with others, in the context of inexorable conflict, will not come to truly understand history.” (Cf. C. M. Martini. *El Jardin interior*)

Advent, *Jesus who comes*, challenges us to the commitment of the we, to answer in concrete where is your brother? and to collaborate in the construction of a more humane society. We are invited to rediscover in fraternity and social friendship a joy with meaning from the Easter light.

Activate the heart together with the community

- Find a time to share in community.
- Choose an experience of growth in coherence and share its fruits: joy, peace, hope...
- Dialogue about some points of this reflection or of previous ones that are illuminating....
- As a community, can any more steps be taken so that Jesus be present and reach out to others this Christmas? And... to build unity, social friendship, brotherhood...?
- Do you remember any experience or example of the Founders?



4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Do not go outside, go back to yourself. In the inner man dwells the truth
 Saint Augustine

Bless God = Well-say to God

This Sunday text (Lc 1, 39-45) is part of the "Infancy narrative" according to Luke. In the chapters that compose it, the light of the Paschal faith is projected on the figure of the child Jesus, so that, already from its conception, the first Christian community presents the mystery that encloses his person.

The story moves to a double level. In the foreground the meeting between the two future mothers. Elizabeth recognizes that Mary carries "the Lord" in her womb and congratulates her because her faith will make it possible for God's plans to be fulfilled. Both women anticipate the mission of their respective children and the relationship they will maintain during their public lives. Mary, as bearer of the good news of salvation; Elizabeth, proclaiming the joy of the arrival of the Messiah and recognizing herself unworthy that "the mother of her Lord" comes to visit her.

Mary, the Galilee, goes to Judah, the region where one day the son within her will be rejected and condemned to death (Lk 1:39). At the greeting of the young woman, the child that Elizabeth is about to give birth "jumps for joy" (vv. 41 and 44). Elizabeth soon after alludes to what she feels inside herself, it is about the joy of the child, the future John the Baptist. Joy is the first response to the coming of the Messiah. To experience joy because we know we are loved by God is to prepare ourselves for Christmas.

Elizabeth then pronounces a double blessing. As it always happens in important manifestations, Luke emphasizes that she does it because she is "filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 41). Mary is declared "Blessed among women" (v. 42), her status as a woman is outstanding; as such she is considered loved and privileged by God. This is ratified by the second reason for praise: "Blessed is the fruit of your womb" (v. 42). This fruit is Jesus, but the text underlines the fact that for now he is in a woman's body, in her womb, woven from her tissue. Thus, Mary's body becomes the holy arc where the Spirit dwells and manifests the greatness of her feminine condition. In her visitor, Elizabeth recognizes the "mother of the Lord" (v. 43), the one who will give birth to the one who must liberate her people, as announced by the prophet Micah. (5:2-5).

To bless (*bene-dicere*) means to say/desire the good, to exalt, to glorify. Prior to the birth of Jesus, blessings appear in the Gospels from Zechariah, Simeon, Elizabeth, and Mary. Everyone blesses God for what He does. But, at the same time, Jesus blesses the children, the sick, the disciples, the Father. Every blessing is addressed to God. The prayer of blessing is, above all, praise of thanksgiving. The saints are blessed and especially "blessed" is Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps Elizabeth pronounce a blessing: "Blessed are you among all women and blessed be the fruit of your womb!" Blessed, Happy or blessed are those who believe in God, those who practice the Word, those who bear fruit, the poor with whom Jesus identifies. Mary believed. This was her greatness and the foundation of her happiness: her faith. Mary's whole life is based on her faith, on the adhesion she has given from the first moment to the revelation that came to her.

Listen to Yourself

- Read carefully (from the senses) and without haste the text and commentary. You can reread more than once.
- Place yourself in Isabel's house, next to Mary, visiting those who need it; receive the Word that is also for you; he addresses you a particular invitation, what is it? Notes
- What do the words visit, blessing (to bless in Latin: *bene dicere* - well say) to God, faith evoke in you? Remember God's blessing in your life, community, province. Do you share it with others, do you 'say' it to others?

Read Inside Your Heart

Visiting (going to, leading to) and well-saying to God (communicating to God) are two aspects that stand out in this passage. The experience of God's love moves us to act, to communicate, to say the joy and peace that the encounter with God or with those who belong to him leaves.

The power of the Spirit arouses an extraordinary communicative capacity, reopens the channels of communication obstructed in Babel and restores the possibility of an easy and authentic relationship in the name of Jesus. At Pentecost he raised up the Church as a sign and instrument of communion of human beings with God and of the unity of the human race.

But the gift of communication (and its content) can be rejected. One of the reasons is the lack of confidence in the gratuitousness and sincerity of the communicative act. At the bottom of this rejection is the suspicion that God's actions are not selfless. Ancient wound of mankind in Eden, how is it possible that God forbidden you to eat all fruit? (Gen 3:1). It is a temptation that is perpetuated in history and permeates all areas: friendships are cut short, families are separated, relations are broken, sacred pacts between nations are violated, divisions are produced, social communication is falsified, news is adulterated or exaggerated. Wrong, imperfect, disorienting communication has at its base blockages and communicative ruptures between people and groups.

Interpersonal, group and social communication channels need to be re-cleaned up. How? Recognize in the face and words of Jesus the self-communication of God to the human being. The whole mystery of creation and redemption is a great act of divine communication that manifests to us one God in three persons who can also be designated as fruitful silence from which the Word through which the Encounter is carried out is born (Cf.C.M Martini. *The inner garden*).

In the Encounter we learn the communication of love, and this really enables us to visit and to say well, because what we have seen and heard, that is what we announce to you (1 Jn 1:3) and of what abounds in the heart the mouth speaks.

Quiet Your Soul Before God

- Seek a time of silence to be with God.
- It may be before the empty cradle of the Child Jesus who is coming.
- I describe with one word my communication with God. I describe with one word my communication with others. When I say, 'I tell myself.' Does good say spring from my mouth? Why?
- How is my blessing of God? Does it come from an experience of God? Are these words learned, obsolete or from routine?
- I write a letter, a Christmas card, blessing (praising) the Lord for his coming and I send it or give it to someone I will visit.
- At the end of this four weeks journey, what am I left with? What can I offer to the Child who is with us?

