

December 23: O Emmanuel (O, With Us is God)

From Scripture Isaiah 9: 6

*For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Prompts for Reflection from *Gaudete et Exsultate* #151

Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord's presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness? If, gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then enter into the Lord's heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy.

Let us pray

*Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
come and save us, Lord our God.*

December 24

From *Gaudete et Exsultate* #176

I would like these reflections to be crowned by Mary, because she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other. She is that woman who rejoiced in the presence of God, who treasured everything in her heart, and who let herself be pierced by the sword. Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side. She does not let us remain fallen and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our converse with her consoles, frees and sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: "Hail Mary..."

Rejoice and Be Glad!

Praying the last days of Advent with the O Antiphons



The O Antiphons are so called for the very simple and very obvious reason that they begin with "O"! They introduce and conclude the praying of the Magnificat at Evening Prayer of the Church/ Vespers in the last days of Advent.

Each Antiphons celebrates an attribute—or title—of God taken from the Old Testament. They express the promise of joy that the coming of the Messiah would bring to the world. As Pope Francis reminds us in his encyclical *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 'The prophets proclaimed the times of Jesus, in which we now live, as a revelation of joy.' We will draw on this encyclical over these last few days leading up to Christmas Day and reflect on prophetic words and images and pray for a deeper appreciation of the joy Christ has brought to the world.

December 17: O Sapientia (O Wisdom)

From Scripture

Psalm 50(51) includes the following verse about the importance of wisdom:

*Indeed you love truth in the heart;
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom.*

From *Gaudete et Exsultate* (#167/8)

Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.

This is all the more important when some novelty presents itself in our lives. Then we have to decide whether it is new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world or the spirit of the devil. At other times, the opposite can happen, when the forces of evil induce us not to change, to leave things as they are, to opt for a rigid resistance to change. Yet that would be to block the working of the Spirit. We are free, with the freedom of Christ. Still, he asks us to examine what is within us – our desires, anxieties, fears and questions – and what takes place all around us – “the signs of the times” – and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom. “Test everything; hold fast to what is good”.

Prompts for Reflection

- How seriously do I take making time to “examine what is within me” as I make decisions about my faith—my life?
- What helps me to develop the wisdom that helps me test everything and decide what is right to hold fast to?

Let us pray:

*Wisdom of the Most High,
ordering all things with strength and gentleness,
come and teach us the way of truth.*

December 22: O Rex Gentium (O King of the Nations)

From Scripture Isaiah 9: 7

*His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

From *Gaudete et Exsultate* #25

Just as you cannot understand Christ apart from the kingdom he came to bring, so too your personal mission is inseparable from the building of that kingdom: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33). Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. Christ himself wants to experience this with you, in all the efforts and sacrifices that it entails, but also in all the joy and enrichment it brings. You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavour.

Prompts for Reflection

- What are the sacrifices I make to build up Christ’s kingdom?
- How does my life as a Christian bring joy and enrich my life?

Let us pray:

*King of the peoples
and corner-stone of the Church,
come and save Man
whom you made from the dust of the earth.*

December 21: O Oriens (O Dayspring)

From Scripture—Isaiah 30: 18

*Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you;
therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you.
For the Lord is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.*

From *Gaudete et Exsultate* (#105)

The best way to discern if our prayer is authentic is to judge to what extent our life is being transformed in the light of mercy. For “mercy is not only an action of the Father; it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are”. Mercy “is the very foundation of the Church’s life”. In this regard, I would like to reiterate that mercy does not exclude justice and truth; indeed, “we have to say that mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God’s truth”. It is “the key to heaven”.

Prompts for Reflection

- How do truth, justice and mercy bring light to a dark world?
- How is my life transformed by mercy—receiving it—and giving it?

Let us pray:

*Morning Star,
radiance of eternal light,
sun of justice,
come and enlighten those who live in darkness
and in the shadow of death.*

December 18: O Adonai (O Lord)

From Scripture—1 Peter 2: 9-10

*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.
Once you were not a people,
but now you are God’s people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.*

From *Gaudete et Exsultate* (#6)

The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God’s holy and faithful people, for “it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness”. In salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in a human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people.

Prompts for Reflection

- How do I balance my individuality with being a member of the People of God?
- How important are my relationships—in my family—my worshipping community—my brothers and sisters around the world?

Let us pray:

*Ruler of the House of Israel,
who gave the law to Moses on Sinai,
come and save us with outstretched arm.*

December 19: O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse)

From Scripture Isaiah 11: 1-2

*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

From Gaudete et Exsultate (#23-24)

You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world.

May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission. The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that you do not abandon the path of love but remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens.

Prompts for Reflection

- How do I feel about my life being a mission—the message that God wants to speak to the world by my life?
- How can I draw on the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be a sign of God's love for the world?

Let us pray

*Root of Jesse,
set up as a sign to the peoples,
come to save us and delay no more.*

December 20: O Clavis David (O Key of David)

From Scripture Ephesians 2: 19-22

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

From Gaudete et Exsultate (#34)

Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, "the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint".

Prompts for Reflection

- How do I feel about the call to be loved and liberated by God—and so be a saint?
- How can I live as a citizen of heaven here on earth?

Let us pray

*Key of David, who open the gates of the eternal kingdom,
come to liberate from prison
the captive who lives in darkness.*