

St. Paul Mother

Ortus Christi: Meditations for Advent



Mother St. Paul

**Ortus Christi:
Meditations for Advent**

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Ortus Christi: Meditations for Advent

PRAYERS

Deus, qui de beatae Mariae Virginis utero, Verbum Tuum, Angelo nuntiante, carnem suscipere voluisti: praesta supplicibus Tuis ut qui vere eam Genitricem Dei credimus, ejus apud Te intercessionibus adjuvemur.	O God Who didst please that Thy Word should take flesh, at the message of an Angel, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary; grant to Thy suppliants that we who believe her to be truly the Mother of God, may be helped by her intercession.
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(Collect for the Annunciation, said at Mass every day during Advent.)

Omnipotens sempiternus Deus, qui gloriosae Virginis Matris Mariae corpus et animam, ut dignum Filii tui habitaculum effici mereretur, Spiritu sancto cooperante, praeparasti: da, ut cujus commemoratione laetamur, ejus pia intercessione, ab instantibus malis, et a morte perpetua liberemur.	Almighty, everlasting God, Who by the co-operation of the Holy Ghost didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mother Mary to become a habitation meet for Thy Son; grant that as we rejoice in her commemoration, we may, by her loving intercession, be delivered from present evils and from everlasting death.
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(Collect said at Office after the *Salve Regina*.)

Conscientias nostras, quaesumus Domine, visitando purifica, ut veniens JESUS Christus Filius Tuus Dominus noster cum omnibus Sanctis, paratam Sibi in nobis inveniatur mansionem.	Purify our consciences, we beseech Thee O Lord, by Thy visitation, that when Thy Son JESUS Christ our Lord shall come with all His Saints, He may find a mansion prepared in us for Himself.
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(Little Office B. V. M. Vespers for Advent.)

PRAYER OF VEN. FATHER OLIER

<p>O JESUS, vivens in Maria, Veni et vive in famulis Tuis, In spiritu sanctitatis Tuæ, In plenitudine virtutis Tuæ, In veritate virtutum Tuarum, In perfectione viarum Tuarum, In communione mysteriorum Tuorum; Dominare omni adversae potestati, In Spiritu Tuo, ad gloriam Patris. Amen.</p>	<p>O JESUS, living in Mary, Come and live in Thy servants, In the spirit of Thy sanctity, In the fulness of Thy strength, In the reality of Thy virtues, In the perfection of Thy ways, In the communion of Thy mysteries. Dominate over every opposing power, In Thine own Spirit, to the glory of the Father. Amen.</p>
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(300 days, once a day, Pius IX, Oct. 14 1859.)

Sancta Dei Genitrix,	ora pro nobis.
Mater Christi,	ora pro nobis.
Vas spirituale,	ora pro nobis.
Vas honorabile,	ora pro nobis.
Vas insigne devotionis,	ora pro nobis.
Turris Davidica,	ora pro nobis.
Turris eburnea,	ora pro nobis.
Domus aurea,	ora pro nobis.
Foederis arca,	ora pro nobis.
Janua coeli,	ora pro nobis.

ORTUS CHRISTI

Advent Sunday

"**Arise**, be enlightened, ... for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is **risen** upon thee... The Lord shall **arise** upon thee ... the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy **rising**" (ortus).
(Is. lx. 1-3).

1st Prelude. A picture of the first streaks of dawn.

2nd Prelude. Grace to arise because the Light has come.

Point I. The Rising of Christ

The Church begins her new liturgical year with the words: "*Ad Te levavi animam meam*" – To Thee have I lifted up my soul ("Introit" for to-day) – as though she were straining her eyes to try to see something on the horizon. She cannot see anything very definite yet, but she is full of hope. *Deus meus, in Te confido, non erubescam*– My God I trust in Thee, let me not be ashamed, do not let me lift up my eyes in vain, she cries; and she keeps on looking. This will be her attitude all through the season of Advent, an attitude of expectancy, of waiting, of hope, of trust, of prayer. We know for what she is waiting – the *Ortus Christi*– the Rising of Christ. "The Lord shall arise upon thee" is the promise. "To Thee have I lifted up my soul" is her response. What is in her mind when she sees those first streaks of light? They are to her an earnest of what is coming, an earnest of the Advent of her Lord. St. Bernard says that His Advent is threefold, that He comes in three different ways: (1) In the flesh and in weakness, (2) in the spirit and in power, (3) in glory and in majesty.

The Church knows how much these three Comings mean to her children, and so at the first sign of dawn she forgets the long weary night, and calls to each one: "*Arise*, be enlightened for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet Him."

Let us then begin our Advent in the spirit of the Church. Let us arise once more as she bids us, rouse ourselves that is, to look with her at the dawn, while we say to ourselves: "Behold He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills. Behold He standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices." As we look we hear the voice of our Beloved, He is speaking to His Church. What has He to say as soon as He comes in sight? "*Arise*, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come" (Cant. ii. 8-10). It is the same injunction: "*Arise*."

Point II. The Rising of the Church

If the Bridegroom is rising, it is evident that the Bride must do the same. He is rising to come to His Bride, she must rise to go to Him. How? By meditating on His Advents; by thanking Him once more for them; by asking herself what use she has made of them hitherto, what use she intends to make during this New Year that is beginning; by preparing herself for them; by remembering that as His Bride she has a very real share in each.

1. The *past* Coming, "in the flesh and in weakness." We shall think about this coming more especially at Christmas, for which the season of Advent is a preparation. "The bright and morning star" (Apoc. xxii. 16) will by then have risen in all its fulness. The Word will be made Flesh and

once more we shall *rise* in the "quiet silence" of the night to worship our God "in the flesh and in weakness."

2. The *present* Coming, "in the spirit and in power" – His Coming in grace to the soul, to dwell with it by His Spirit. "In *power*" – because only He Who is omnipotent could work such a stupendous miracle as the miracle of grace. This miracle could never have been worked, had it not been for the first Coming. "The Word was made Flesh" that He might by His death redeem His people and restore to them the kingdom of grace which they had lost in Adam. This second Coming is to prepare us for the third.

3. The *future* Coming, in "glory and in majesty" when He shall "come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead," and when all will be forced to *rise* and go to meet Him whether they will or not. It is those, who have *risen* voluntarily to meet their God in His second Coming, who will have no fear of the third. The second Coming, then, the Coming in grace, is the most practical one for us as we begin our Advent, and upon it we will meditate in our third point.

Point III. The Dwelling of the Blessed Trinity within us

This is what God's Coming in grace means – a soul in the state of grace is the host of the Blessed Trinity, neither more nor less. "*We* will come to Him and will make our abode with him," (St. John xiv. 23) and from the moment that grace enters, the soul becomes the abode of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost.

It was at the moment of Baptism that our souls were raised to the dignity of being hosts of God Himself. What happened then? God added to the natural gifts with which He had endowed man *supernatural* ones, summed up in the gift of grace. What is that? A participation in His own life, something which makes us "partakers of the *Divine* nature." (2 Pet. i. 4). He created man thus in the beginning, for He meant man always to possess supernatural as well as natural gifts. He meant always to live with man and talk and walk with him in the paradise of his soul; but Adam chased out the Divine Guest and lost this miraculous privilege for all his children. God, however, could not rest content to be outside the souls which He had created solely that He might live in them, and He devised a way (the first Coming of Christ) by which He might get back to the dwelling which He cherished so much. We need not follow the beautiful story of the Redemption through all its wondrous steps, we know it well enough; we will take it up at Baptism, when the divine gift of life which Adam lost was restored to the soul, when God came back to His chosen dwelling, and the soul regained its responsible position of host to the Blessed Trinity. When Satan had noticed that the soul was left exposed, that it was a human soul only, with nothing divine about it, he naturally had taken possession, as he does of all empty houses; (St. Matt. xii. 44) so at Baptism the Priest said: "Depart from him, thou unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Ghost." Where the Holy Ghost is, there are also the Father and the Son. The Blessed Trinity, then, waits to take possession of each soul, waits to come back to Its own, waits to restore the privilege that man had at the beginning.

Thus the new creation takes place, and the soul is no longer a human soul only, but divine, for the Divine Life within has made it one with Itself. Does man realize this privilege and rise to it? No! For the greater part of Christians we are obliged to say: No. As soon as they come to years of discretion, they invite back the unclean spirit and chase out their Divine Guest. What base ingratitude! And what folly! But God, who is rich in mercy is not repelled by such conduct; His one thought is to go back to His Temple which has been so profaned, and the scheme of Redemption included a method, (the Sacrament of Penance,) whereby, if man would, he could drive out the devil and invite back the Divine Guest. Is God angry? Does He upbraid? Does He allude to the past and throw doubts on the future? No, He *loves*, and all He asks in return is love. Such is our Guest!

Now what is my side of this great question? I am, or if I am not, I can be, a Temple of God. God is living within me. How much do I think about it? I often talk about recalling the Presence of

God, but it is His Presence *within* me that I have to recall. I make Acts of Contrition, of Love. To Whom? To the God within me. Do not let me forget that my heart is an altar where I can, whenever I will, adore God. He is there to walk with me and talk to me as He did to Adam of old. He wants me to live side by side with Him, and talk to Him as naturally as I do to my friend.

Let me try this Advent, as one of the best ways of preparing for the Coming of Christ at Christmas, and for His Coming in judgment, to *realize* what the supernatural life means, what *God in me* means, what it means to be the host always of God Himself. The realization will transform my life, will alter my point of view, will change me from a mediocre Christian into one who is filled with a great idea and who is occupied with it every moment of his time – an idea which is ever stimulating him to aim higher. *God in me* – then I am never alone, my life is intimately bound up with God's life. I am a partaker of His nature. O my God, forgive me for having thought of it so little; help me to *rise* to my great privileges. I thank Thee for letting a few streaks of Thy Divine Light reach my dark soul, and by the time that the Sun of Justice has risen in all His splendour this Advent, may my soul be flooded with the new light which the realization of the Divine Presence within it, will surely bring.

Colloquy with God within me.

Resolution. To realize this truth to-day, and every day more and more.

Spiritual Bouquet. "We will come to Him and make our abode with Him."

OUR LADY'S REST

"In omnibus requiem quaesivi, et in hereditate Domini morabor."	In all these I sought rest, and I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord.
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(*Ecclus. xxiv. 11*).

1st. Prelude. A statue of Our Lady.

2nd. Prelude. Grace to "abide in the inheritance of the Lord."

That the Church intends us to spend the season of Advent with our Blessed Mother is quite evident to anyone who takes the trouble to study the Liturgy. The Bridegroom is coming, but it is through the Virgin-Mother that He will come; and if we would be amongst the first to greet Him, if we desire a large share of His grace, if we would have no fear of His judgments, we must keep close to Mary.

Point I. "I shall abide in the inheritance of the lord."

The Church applies these words to Mary; let us try to see what they mean and how far we may copy her in her determination. "The inheritance of the Lord," what is it? The words bear many interpretations but we cannot be wrong, surely, in thinking that this inheritance was Mary's own soul; it was indeed "the inheritance of the Lord," an inheritance to which the Blessed Trinity had a special right, the Father because He had created her in grace, the Son because He had saved her from the stain of original sin, the Holy Ghost because He had ever sanctified her and kept her "full of grace." But what was it that made *this* inheritance more pleasing to God than any of the other souls which He had redeemed? Mary's correspondence with grace we naturally answer; but what do we mean by that? We mean, or we ought to mean, that Mary realized to the full that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost lived within her; and hence her resolution to abide in "the inheritance of the Lord," never to leave her Divine Guest, never to forget that she was the host and that it was her privilege to entertain. This is surely the secret of Mary's life and of her correspondence with grace. She dwelt in closest union with the God who dwelt within her.

Point II. "In all things I sought rest."

Where did she seek this rest, this calm of which her whole life speaks? Within her own soul with her Divine Guest, in other words Mary lived an *interior* life. She preferred a life inside with God, to one outside in the world. Hers was a continual realization of God's Presence – of God's Presence within her; and it was this realization which enabled her to find rest in every circumstance of her chequered life. She did not allow outward events to mar her interior calm. Her Divine Guest was always there and to Him she could always turn. The consequence was that she was never agitated, disquieted, excited, anxious, troubled. She dwelt "in the inheritance of the Lord," and there she sought rest in all things whether it was in:

The joy of the Archangel's visit, or the difficulty of her visit to Elizabeth.

The anguish of the reception at Bethlehem, or the joy at the birth of her Son.

The Angels who sang: *Glorias* at His birth, or the neighbours who made unkind remarks.

The shepherds who came to worship in their poverty, or the Wise Men in all their pomp and splendour.

The ecstasy caused by her Babe's smile, or the distress caused by His tears.

The words of the Angel: "Of His Kingdom there shall be no end," or the words of Simeon: He shall be "a sign which shall be contradicted."

The peaceful home-life with Jesus and Joseph, or the hurried flight into Egypt.
The anguish of losing Him (Desolation), or the joy of finding Him (Consolation).
The active work for the little household, or the times of contemplation at Jesus' feet.
The long, happy days at Nazareth with her Son, or the sad day when He left His Mother's roof.
The account of His success: "All men go to Him," or the account of His failure: "They all forsook Him and fled."

The cry: "Hosannah, blessed is He!" or the cry: "Crucify Him, crucify Him! it is not fit that He should live."

The agony of watching Him suffer and die, or the delight of seeing His glorified Body.

The pain of being left in exile on earth, or the joy of hearing Him say: "Arise, My fair one and come, the winter is over."

In omnibus requiem quaesivi.— Not that all these things were the same to her, not that she was indifferent or did not care, she cared more than anyone else could, for her heart was perfect and therefore more delicate and sensitive than any other except the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What then was her secret? That she lived with the Blessed Trinity, and that made her see God's Will in all that happened to her, and see it so vividly that she almost lost sight of the particular circumstances, and hardly knew whether they were painful or joyful. The pain was a joy because it was God's Will, and the joy was only a joy because it was God's Will; so she never wanted to change any thing. She sought rest in the holy habitation, the home of the Blessed Trinity; she pondered things over in her heart, that is, she talked about them with her Divine Guest.

Point III. The Child of Mary

The child must copy the Mother. How is it with me? Surely if anyone ought to realize the Divine Presence within, it is a child of Mary! How far do I copy Our Lady in her interior life? What do I know of that deep calm within, into which I can always retire and seek rest, and where I can, if I will, rest so entirely that outward circumstances make little difference? If I have made the same resolution as Our Lady; namely, to "abide in the inheritance of the Lord;" pain and anxiety and difficulty will be an actual source of joy, because they afford an excuse for an extra visit to the Home within, and for longer conversations than usual with my loved Guest. If a difficulty or a humiliation or something that I do not like comes in my way, I shall not be troubled, my first thought will be with my Divine Guest. *He* has permitted this, even planned it. I will go and talk to Him about it, find out what He means, what He wants me to do and how I can best act in the circumstances to gain glory for Him. This is what is meant by the interior life, and it *can* be, it *ought* to be, far stronger than the exterior. It means a holy indifference to everything except God's Will; it means rest and peace about everything that happens, without any desire to have things altered; it takes all anxiety and disquiet and perplexity out of life and leaves a great calm which nothing has the power to disturb *except* a will in opposition to God's Will.

In omnibus requiem quaesivi.— Is it so very hard? Perhaps, for it means the spiritual life, and that means a continual battle against self; but it is a battle worth fighting. To fight is not only the way to "*seek* rest," but it is also the surest way to obtain it; for they alone who are continually fighting to keep the enemy out can hope to detain their Divine Guest within.

Colloquy with Mary. Help me, my Mother, to dwell, this Advent, in "the inheritance of the Lord," and when outward things are too much for me and I am apt to behave in a manner unworthy of a child of thine, do thou lead me by the hand into the place of rest and calm, where God Himself dwells, and where I shall see things from His point of view.

"O God, who didst please that Thy Word should take flesh, at the message of an angel, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grant to Thy suppliants, that we who believe her to be truly the Mother of God may be helped by her intercession."

(Collect to be said every day at Mass from Advent to Christmas Eve.)

Resolution. To "abide in the inheritance of the Lord" to-day.

Spiritual Bouquet. "In all things I sought rest."

MY SINS – A TRIPTYCH

"The night is past, and the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light."

(From the "Epistle" for the First Sunday of Advent).

1st. Prelude. The Foot of the Cross where my sins have all been laid.

2nd. Prelude. The grace of contrition and firm resolution.

It is clear from the words which she has chosen for her "Epistle" for the First Sunday of Advent that the Church intends us during this solemn season to think about sin, – the darkness of the past night and the light of the day that is coming and our duty with regard to both. It is not sin in the abstract, but our own personal sins that we are to consider. "Let *us* cast off the works of darkness." If the Apostle Paul included himself in that "*us*," we need not fear to do the same. It is meet, when we are thinking on the one hand of Him Who is coming to save us from our sins and on the other of His coming to judge us "according to our works," that we should give some thought to those sins. Nothing will better help us to understand the mercy of the Saviour and the justice of the Judge than a meditation upon our own sins. God *forgets* the sins He has forgiven, but it is better for us, more wholesome and more humiliating, to remember them sometimes. David says: "My sin is always before me" (Ps. l. 5). The object of this meditation, then, is not to cause trouble in the soul – trouble about sins that are *forgiven* can only come from the devil – but to excite in us a deeper contrition, more gratitude and a greater watchfulness.

Point I. A Triptych – My Sins

Am I to consider all the sins of my life? The subject seems so vast, it is difficult to know how to condense it so that I may be able to bring it within my grasp. All sin may be summed up in one word – disobedience —*non serviam*. It was the sin of the Angels, it was the sin of our first parents and it is at the root of every sin that has ever been committed. God says: Thou shalt not, the sinner says: I will. God says: Do this and thou shalt live; the sinner says: I will not, I would rather die. Sin is man's will in opposition to God's Will. This thought simplifies the subject and makes it easier for me to call up the sins of my life and look at them. Let me make a picture of them – a triptych, a picture, that is, with three panels side by side, the middle one shall be called *Places*, that on the right hand *Persons* and that on the left *Work*.

1. *Places.* As I look at the middle picture I see it consists of numbers and numbers of small ones, each representing some place that is familiar to me – there is the house where I was born, there the school I attended, houses I have visited, hotels where I have stayed, gardens, playgrounds, lonely roads, walks on cliffs, villages, towns, churches, the sea-side, trams, omnibuses, trains, boats, bicycles, carriages, stations... I am fascinated and cannot help looking still, though the variety and number are almost bewildering. Each picture is so familiar; some awaken sweet and precious memories, from some I quickly turn away my eyes. All can witness to my presence, how many can witness also to my sins? "Indeed the Lord is in this place, and *I knew it not*." (Gen. xxviii. 16). That may to some extent be true and if so there is One who is always ready to say: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." *I* know how much *I* knew, and the best thing, the only thing for me to do is to make an Act of Contrition.

2. *Persons.* I turn to the right hand panel and there are crowds and crowds of *faces*, each one familiar – father, mother, brothers, sisters, relations, servants, teachers, scholars, friends, enemies, priests, confessors, acquaintances ... what impression have I left upon each of these? If they could be called up and asked: "What did you think of so and so?" what would they have to say? They

would have something, for I left *some* impression – and yet *none* of them know me as I really am. The three Persons of the Blessed Trinity have been near me *always* and always observant. They really know me. What have *They* to say? "If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?" (Ps. cxxix. 3).

This picture makes me sad! That is just what Our Lord wants from this meditation. Let me offer once more my heartfelt contrition and He will be glad that I had the courage to open the triptych.

3. *Work.* As I turn to the panel on the left I feel that I can breathe more freely – my work will certainly give satisfaction! It is something to be proud of; I have always got on well; I have never been idle and I have had a certain measure of success, and I feel that in that respect at any rate my life will bear inspection. But this picture too, as I look at it, seems to be divided up. Yes, I can see quite clearly all the different works upon which I have been engaged. All are very familiar and bring back for the most part happy memories, but some of them seem to be labelled. – What is it that is written across them? "*You did it to Me.*" And all the rest that have no labels? They do not count – so evidently considered the One Who put on the labels. He left them, passed them over, there was nothing there *for Him*. But that hospital that was founded is not labelled, nor that legacy promised for a charitable purpose! Surely some of these without labels are "good works!" And these that are labelled are such insignificant things, things I should never have remembered at all if they were not in the picture – a kind word, a smile, a hasty word kept back because I knew it would pain *Him*, suffering cheerfully borne because I wanted to be like Him who suffered for me. Why these and not those? Because He prefers *little* things? No, but because of the motive. Had the hospital been built out of love for Him and His sick, had it been built for the glory of God and not for the glory of self, it too would have been labelled. Had the hasty word been kept back that others might notice my self-control, it would *not* have been labelled. What counts with God is the intention with which a thing is done. If it is done out of love for Him, no matter how insignificant it is, yea, no matter how badly done, it will surely be labelled "*You did it to Me,*" and it will last when the mighty works that men have so much praised are crumbling in the dust, labelled with another label *You did it not unto Me*. Have I not need to make another Act of Contrition as I think of my works, my love of gain, my ambition, love of praise and success, of the motives of my so-called works of charity, of the times in which I have allowed my work to take the first place in my life, while my soul had to take the second?

I shut up my triptych and leave it at Thy Feet O my Jesus, where the Blood from Thy Wounds may ever drip upon it, while I with Magdalen stoop and bathe Thy Feet with my tears.

Point II. The Triptych. – God's mercies

As I look up, I see my triptych opened again and all the thousands of little pictures seem to be transformed. Each one is speaking to me of God's goodness and tenderness and love. How good it is to turn away from my own misery to His infinite mercy; yea, more – to recognize that the one is the cause of the other! And this is what He wants. If the sight of self does not lead me instinctively to look at Christ, it is a very dangerous thing, for it can only lead to despondency and discouragement. The object of looking at self and its deeds is so to look that everything good or evil may shrivel up and disappear, till self is there no longer, but Christ only and all *He* has done either for or through me. As I gaze now at the picture, I no longer see the places on earth which have known me for short periods of time, but my place in Heaven which by His mercy, if I persevere to the end, is to know me through all eternity; not my dear ones as I saw them on earth, but as they are now in my heavenly country waiting for me; not my innumerable sins of omission, nor my "good works" done to please self, but the work of Him who always pleased His Father, work which has made up for all my omissions, and which shines through every thing that I have done for Him,

making it, too, acceptable to His Father. It seems to me now that I want to linger over the picture, for His mercies are indeed infinite, and I shall never be able to thank Him enough for them.

But does He, the God of infinite mercy and plenteous redemption, never look at my pictures? He says: "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. xxxi. 34); and it is true. He will never open my triptych for the sake of looking at my sins, but may He not open it for the joy of seeing each of those thousands of pictures shining with pearls – the tears of contrition? Do not let me disappoint Him. This is the chalice of consolation which I can offer to the Sacred Heart in reparation.

Colloquy with Jesus thanking Him for making me look at my triptych and for all that He has taught me in it.

Resolution. Never to look at my sins without at once seeing *Christ*– a sight which will necessarily produce humility, gratitude and contrition.

Spiritual Bouquet. "My sin is always before me" but "Thou shalt give joy and gladness... and my mouth shall declare Thy praise" (Ps. l. 5, 10, 17).

THE LAST JUDGMENT

"The powers of Heaven shall be moved; and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty."

(The "Gospel" for the 1st. Sunday of Advent.)

1st. Prelude. The Last Day.

2nd. Prelude. Grace to meditate upon it.

The Church invites us during Advent to turn our thoughts towards the Second Coming of Christ – His Coming in judgment at the end of the world. The subject of the Last Judgment is perhaps one which we are rather inclined to avoid in our Meditations; but it is one about which Our Blessed Lord said a great deal; it is continually mentioned, too, in the Epistles and in the Apocalypse, and as we shall most certainly take a part in that last great scene of the world's drama, it is surely well for us to have a rehearsal from time to time.

Point I. The Coming of the Judge

When will He come? God "hath appointed a day wherein He will judge the world in equity by the Man whom He hath appointed." (Acts xvii. 31). The day then is *fixed*, "but of that day and hour no one knoweth, no not the Angels of Heaven, but the Father alone." (St. Matt. xxiv. 36).

How will He come? He "shall so come as you have seen Him going into Heaven" (Acts i. 11), the Angel told the Apostles who had just watched His Ascension. He will come, that is, in His beautiful Resurrection Body, dazzling with brightness and glory, with the wounds in Hands and Feet and Side. He will come "with much power and majesty" (St. Matt. xxiv. 30) for He will come to judge, not to preach penance nor atone for sin; He will come unexpectedly "as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 2) "at what hour you think not" (St. Luke xii. 40); He will come "with thousands of His Saints" (Jude 14) for all those "who have slept through Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thess. iv. 13); He will bring, too, "all the Angels with Him" (St. Matt. xxv. 31); He will come "with the voice of an Archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (1 Thess. iv. 15); He will come "with the clouds" (Apoc. i. 7); He will come "in the glory of His Father with His Angels" (St. Matt. xvi. 27); He will come "as lightning" (xxiv. 27) and before Him will come His Cross – "the sign of the Son of man" in the heavens (verse 30), every eye shall see it. What different emotions that sign will excite!

Point II. The Effects of His Coming

"Every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth shall bewail themselves because of Him" (Apoc. i. 7).

"We shall all rise again." (1 Cor. xv. 51).

"The sea will give up the dead that are in it, and death and hell ... their dead that are in them." (Apoc. xx. 13).

"The dead who are in Christ shall rise first." (1 Thess. iv. 15).

"We shall be changed, for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Cor. xv. 52).

"He shall send His Angels with a trumpet, and a great voice, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds." (St. Matt. xxiv. 31).

"Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them (those who died in Christ) in the clouds to meet Christ." (1 Thess. iv. 16).

"Then shall He sit upon the seat of His Majesty," (St. Matt. xxv. 31) and "render to every man according to his works." (chap. xvi. 27).

Then "the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth and the works which are in it shall be burnt up." (2 Pet. iii. 10). And all these events are to take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye!" (1 Cor. xv. 52).

With the vivid words of Scripture before us, it is not difficult to make a picture of the scene – the sign of the Cross where all can see it; the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God heralding the approach of the Judge; the Son of Man, coming in the clouds with all His Angels and thousands of His Saints (all those from Heaven and Purgatory); the cries of those to whom His coming is as that of "a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 2); the shouts of joy of "the children of light" (verse 5); the opening of the graves, the sea giving up its dead and the reunion of each soul, whether from Heaven, Purgatory or hell, with its body; the changing of the bodies of those who are living on the earth into Resurrection bodies; then the great multitude of the elect clothed in their bodies of immortality rising to meet their Lord in the air; then "the great white throne" set up and He who is "appointed by God to be Judge" (Acts x. 42) taking His seat upon it, "His garment ... white as snow ... His throne like flames of fire ... thousands of thousands" ministering to Him (Dan. vii. 9, 10); the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne (Apoc. xx. 12), "ten thousand times a hundred thousand" standing before Him. (Dan. vii. 10).

Point III. The Judgment

(1) *The Separation.* Quickly the Angels separate that vast multitude into two companies – those on His right Hand and those on His left, the sheep and the goats, those who are to enter into life everlasting and those who are to enter into everlasting punishment (St. Matt. xxv. 46); those who have been faithful over the few things entrusted to them and those who have hidden their Lord's talent; those whose lamps are burning and those whose lamps are going out. There is fixed a great chaos between the two companies, so that they who would pass from one side to the other *cannot*, it is too late. (St. Luke xvi. 26).

(2) *The books.* "And the books were opened ... and the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works." "And another book was opened, which is the book of life," and only "they that are written in the book of life of the Lamb" shall enter Heaven. (Apoc. xx. 12, xxi. 27). "Every man's work shall be manifest" (1 Cor. iii. 13); "every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of Judgment" (St. Matt. xii. 36). Then will be seen, and *all* will acknowledge it, the triumph of right over wrong, the triumph of the Kingdom, the triumph of Christ; then will be adjusted all that we have so often longed to adjust but could not, for "let both grow together till the harvest" was the King's order. Then will seeming injustices be explained and crimes that have called to Heaven for vengeance receive their just reward. Then will the unanimous cry be: "The Lord He is God," and all will be forced to add: "He doeth all things well."

(3) *The Sentences.* There are only two: (1) "Then shall the King say to them that shall be on His right Hand: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." He tells them why they are to have such a blessed reward – they have been faithful subjects of their King during their lives on earth, they have ministered to His needs, lived for Him and not for self. They seem surprised, they cannot remember doing acts of charity to their King and He explains: "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me." (St. Matt. xxv. 40). The sentence "Come" is pronounced on those who lived their lives

for their King, who did all they had to do, no matter what it was, for Him, thus uniting themselves with Him, and now He will unite Himself with them for all eternity – "*Come!*"

(2) "Then He shall say to them also that shall be on His left Hand: Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." And again He gives His reasons for this terrible punishment – they would not acknowledge Him as their King, would not serve Him, lived for self instead of for Him and His brethren: "As long as you did it *not* to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me" (verse 45). During their lives they separated themselves from the King and His interests: "We will not have this Man to reign over us;" now He will separate Himself from them for all eternity. – "*Depart from Me!*"

Then He "will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle, and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into My barn." (St. Matt. xiii. 30). "The Angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire" (verses 49, 50). "Then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear let him hear" (verse 43).

Colloquy.

Inter oves locum praesta,
Et ab hoedis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra.
(Among the sheep grant me a place,
separate me from the goats,
placing me on Thy right Hand).

Resolution. To remember "the doctrine ... of eternal judgment" (Heb. vi. 2) to-day.
Spiritual Bouquet. "He shall come again to judge the living and the dead."

TRADERS AND TALENTS

"A man going into a far country called his servants and delivered to them his goods; and to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability; and immediately he took his journey."
(*St. Matt. xxv. 14*).

1st. Prelude. Jesus telling this parable to His disciples.

2nd. Prelude. Grace to learn the lessons from it which He intended.

Point I. The Talents

It is Christ Himself Who is the Author of this parable and He told it to show us how we are to prepare for His Coming. Every word of it is of importance and bears some instruction or warning for Advent.

The "*man going into a far country*" is the Man-God, He Who came from Heaven to take our human nature and to redeem us to God by His Blood. His work of Redemption is finished and He is going back to His own country – "*A far country*" – implying that He will be gone a long time.

(He) "*called His servants*." They are His own servants, He has created them, He has bought them with His Blood, they belong to Him – their service, their time, their very lives are His, and this not because they are *slaves* forced to labour, but because of their own free will and out of love and gratitude to Him who has bought them from the cruel slavery of sin, they have said: "I love my Master ... I will not go out free" (Ex. xxi. 5).

"*And (He) delivered to them His goods*." They are *His* goods not the servants', they all belong to Him and He entrusts them to His servants to take care of them and to do the best they can with them while He is gone. What are these "goods?" All the good things which God has given to man – his life, his preservation, his Baptism, his christian education, intellect, faith, health, rank, wealth, talents, conscience, opportunities of doing good, position, – and all have to be traded with, for the Master to Whom they belong. His "goods" include too what the world would label "evils" – ill-health, difficulty, failure, poverty, incapability; these have to be traded with too, and there is often a higher profit to be made out of these than out of the others. They are all the Master's goods and He delivers them to His servants.

"*To one He gave five talents and to another two and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability*." He knows His servants, and He knows exactly the strength and capability of each. He measures each burden before imposing it and calculates each sum before giving it. This servant can manage five, this one two, this can only manage one. It is no disgrace to have only one talent, the ability of the servants is the Master's affair, not the servants'. They cannot turn to Him and say: "Why hast Thou made me thus?" (Rom. ix. 20). He makes each one according to His own Will and endows him according to His Will too. What the servant has to remember is that he is responsible for all that is entrusted to him, that he *can* trade with it and that it is not too much for him, it is "according to his proper ability," and that though his Master will never try to reap where He has not sown, He *will* expect to reap where He *has* sown, He will expect a harvest from each talent.

Point II. The Traders

"He that had received the five talents went his way and traded with the same and gained other five." He lost no time, he loved his Master and he loved the "goods" because they belonged to his Master and because they had been lent by Him. The whole of their value lay in the fact that they were the Master's; he felt responsible, he must not only take care of them but put them to the best account, and so he set to work at once to trade with them, and he did well, for he gained *cent per cent*!

"And in like manner he that had received the two gained other two." There was no jealousy, no thinking the Master partial or that He had underrated his powers in only giving him *two* talents. He loved and trusted his Master; the two talents were very precious because they were His and because He had chosen them out with such love and care, giving the servant just what he could manage, no more and no less. He went and traded and did as well as the first, *cent per cent*.

Thus the good servants, that is those who love, who have said, *I will* not go out free, are always trading for their Master. They say to themselves: This talent, this time, this opportunity, this health, this strength belongs to my Master not to me, I must use it for Him. They forget sometimes; the Master is so long away and they act as if the goods were their own, and even trade with them for their own profit, using their talents to attract people to themselves rather than to their Master! But as they really love Him and want to "trade" for Him only, they see the dishonesty of their trading and they do their best by acts of reparation to restore to Him His own. When He comes back, He will not expect perfection but *effort*. Some, He says, will gain "a hundred fold" but for our consolation and encouragement He adds: "some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold" (St. Matt. xiii. 8).

"But he that had received the one, going his way digged into the earth, and hid his lord's money." He lost no time either, his mind was made up at once, he would take no trouble, make no effort, would hide his Master's talent and forget all about it; he wanted no responsibility, he could not be troubled with "trading." His Master could not expect much from him, he argued, because he had entrusted so little to him, he knew he was not capable of doing *much*, but he would do nothing at all. He did not waste or spoil his Master's goods, his sin was one of *omission*— you did it *not* to Me. He dug in the earth instead of laying up treasure in Heaven.

Point III. The Reckoning

"After a long time the Lord of those servants came and reckoned with them." Each servant must come up before Him to give an account and to be judged according to his works.

"Lord, Thou didst deliver to me five talents, behold I have gained other five over and above."

"Lord, Thou deliveredst two talents to me, behold I have gained other two." The Lord gives exactly the same answer, the same reward to each, showing clearly that what counts in the reckoning is not the *number* of good works but the spirit and intention and motive with which they are done, be they many or few.

"Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things." The reward is not given to the most capable, nor to those who have the most or the greatest talents, but to those who have been *faithful* over the few things entrusted to them. They have traded with their talents for God's glory and for the salvation of their own souls. They have realized that each thing entrusted to them was a "good," whether it was sickness or health, poverty or riches, prosperity or adversity, and they have said about each: This belongs to the Master, how can I best use it for Him? Now they find that the merit of each action done, each suffering borne for Him, has been carefully stored up.

"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." It is His joy, His interest, His glory that the faithful servant has studied on earth, now he shall share them for ever.

"He that had received the one talent came and said: Lord, I know that Thou art a hard man" expecting the impossible, "and being afraid I went and hid Thy talent in the earth; behold here Thou hast that which is Thine." He could have traded and made *cent per cent* as the others had done and earned the "*Euge*" ("Well done!") He not only did not do this, but he put all the blame on his Master Who with such care had given him just the talent that was suited to his ability. He was *afraid*, he said, afraid of what? Of his Master because He was hard and unjust? No, this was only an excuse, he knew his Master and he knew it was not true. What he was afraid of was hard work, effort, ceaseless watching against temptation. It was far less irksome to bury the talent and live a life of ease, letting things just take their course, and hoping all would come out right in the end; but at the end things were not right, for he had nothing to give to his Master, the one talent *was* the Master's, he knew that quite well: "Behold here Thou hast that which is Thine."

"*Wicked and slothful servant*" – wicked, because he had robbed God of His rights; slothful, because he would not raise a finger to serve his Master.

"Take ye away therefore the talent from him and give it him that hath ten." It is a solemn thought that a grace refused by one may be handed on to another who is more faithful.

"To everyone that hath shall be given" is a principle of the Kingdom. He ever giveth "grace for grace" (St. John i. 16). For every grace used He gives "more grace" – "he shall abound."

"From him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away." There is such a thing as a last grace, a last opportunity. God has nowhere pledged Himself to give the grace of repentance; grace is ever a free gift and He is not unjust if He withholds it. I can never say: I will sin and repent after! To sin is in my power, but to repent is not. Our Lord speaks of sinners filling up the measure of their iniquity (St. Matt. xxiii. 32). Had Herod reached the limit, filled up the measure? Is that why Our Lord refused to speak to him? We do not know, but we do know that it is possible for a sinner to sin to such an extent – not necessarily by gross sin, but by steadily refusing God's grace and the opportunities offered to him – that what he has, that is, his opportunities, will be taken from him.

"*The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness.*" He ever shunned the light and now it will *never* be his. He was *unprofitable*, that was his sin, he did nothing for his Master. All sins, however terrible, will be forgiven if the sinner turns to God and repents, because his repentance shows that he is "trading," though he may often fail in his business; but the unprofitable servant carries on no trade with God at all, he leaves Him out altogether. There is nothing for God to do but to leave him out in the "exterior darkness" which he has deliberately chosen.

Colloquy with the Master, Who though He is a "long time" coming, is never far from those who are trading for Him.

Resolution. Never to leave the Master out of anything I do.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Well done good and faithful servant!"

STIR UP!

"I think it meet ... to stir you up by putting you in remembrance."
(2 Pet. i. 13).

1st. Prelude. Paul writing to Timothy: "Stir up the grace of God which is in thee" (2 Tim. i. 6).

2nd. Prelude. Grace to stir myself up this Advent.

On the Sunday before Advent and nine times during the Advent Masses, the Church puts on the lips of her children this prayer: *Stir up, O Lord*. Let us try in this Meditation to catch her spirit which runs all through the Advent season and see what it is that she wants God to stir up.

Point I. His own Might

We ask Him during Advent to stir up His might for four different reasons.

(1) *To protect and deliver us.* "Stir up Thy might, we beseech Thee O Lord and come: that by Thy protection we may deserve to be delivered from the threatening dangers of our sins and by Thy deliverance be saved." (The "Collect" for Advent Sunday.)

We ask Him to show His might by *protecting* us from dangers and by *delivering* us from sin. We want to spend a good Advent, we want to prepare well for His Coming, then there rise up before us the "threatening dangers of our sins" – those old temptations that are sure to come back again as soon as we begin to put forth fresh effort. Are we to be discouraged, to dread them, to say we are sure to fall again, and thus give the enemy a hold over us? No, but to believe that our God Who is coming will protect us in the day of battle, that though to humiliate and to strengthen us, He may still permit the temptations, yet He will Himself be our shield and buckler, and will deliver us if we trust in His strength and not in our own – "Stir up Thy might, O Lord, and come to protect and deliver."

(2) *To free us from adversity.* "Stir up Thy power, we beseech Thee O Lord and come, that they who confide in Thy mercy may be more speedily freed from all adversity" (The "Collect" for Friday in Ember week).

The adversity from which the Church prays to be freed here is probably the same as she continually teaches us to pray for deliverance from in her Litanies: war, pestilence, famine, floods, earthquakes – all things which damage the peace of nations and the produce of the earth, great national disasters. From all such the world will never be free till the Advent of her Lord, till God stirs up His power and comes to save it. Meanwhile for our consolation we can remember that it is when God's judgments are in the earth that the nations learn justice (Isaias xxvi. 9). Adversity is a great teacher and trainer for Heaven, and as we advance in the spiritual life we see more and more that many things which are adversity to the body are prosperity to the soul. We should naturally like to be freed from the adversity of sickness, poverty, failure, loss of friends, of health and strength, but all these adversities have their work to do. "These are they who came out of great tribulation," and it is probable that but for the tribulation many would never "have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Apoc. vii. 14). Let us strive to be amongst those who *trust* Him, who *confide* in His mercy, who believe that He knows what is best for them, and who gladly let Him arrange all for them. He *will* stir up His power and speedily free them one day, but it will not be till the flail of adversity has done its work and the corn is ready to be garnered in the heavenly barns.

(3) *To save us.* "Stir up Thy might O Lord and come to save us."

In the Masses for the third week, that is Ember week, the prayer occurs five times, twice in the Mass for the third Sunday and three times in that for Ember Saturday. The time of the birth of

the Saviour is drawing nearer, and the Church is beginning to be importunate. Stir up Thy *might*; for though He is coming as a little helpless infant, He is God "mighty to save."

(4) *To accelerate His Coming*. "Stir up Thy might, we beseech Thee O Lord and come; and succour us with great power, that by the help of Thy grace, the indulgence of Thy mercy may accelerate what our sins impede." (The "Collect" for the 4th. Sunday of Advent).

We ask Him to stir up His might in *coming*. His Advents show His Omnipotence. Only a *God* could come to this world to save it, only a *God* could come to a soul and raise it to the supernatural state. These are miracles and we ask Him to stir up His might to come and work them. It is our sins that hold Him back and hinder His work both in our own souls and in the world. We want them to do so no more and so we ask for His succour and indulgence.

Point II. Our Wills

"Stir up the wills of Thy faithful, O Lord, we beseech Thee; that earnestly seeking after the fruit of good works, they may receive more abundant helps from Thy mercy." (The "Collect" for the Sunday before Advent).

Here we pray for something which it is far more difficult to "stir up" – our own wills. We are not sufficiently in earnest; the might and the mercy of God are there waiting to help us, but we have not the energy nor the desire to receive them. We weaken our wills by yielding to temptation, by deliberately going into occasions of sin, by allowing ourselves to be careless about rules and resolutions, by letting things drift and contenting ourselves with a low standard. Advent is a time to rectify all this, to pull ourselves up and make a fresh start, and if we are in earnest, we shall gladly join in the prayer: "Stir up the wills of Thy faithful, O Lord," stir up *my* will. It is not a prayer to be said lightly for it means much – a will stirred up to "seek after the fruit of good works" means constant and continued effort; it means mortification, suffering, death to self; it means a determination to do or suffer *anything* rather than run the *least* risk of committing the *least* sin; it means constant unremitting attention to little things – to the smallest duties, the least prickings of conscience; it means hard work. *Dare* I say this prayer? If I am *really* anxious for "the fruit of good works," I shall dare anything. Fruit is impossible without hard work either in the natural or the spiritual world.

"Who is sufficient for these things?" Certainly I am not, but the consolation is that the work is *co-operative*. As soon as I pray: Stir up my will, O God, because I want to bring forth fruit to Thy glory; He will be there giving me "*more abundant helps*" from His mercy. God does not expect me to work alone, nor to suffer alone, nor to make efforts alone. What He wants is a good will. He is coming "to men of good will," and nothing can prove that I am one of them, better than a fervent prayer that my will may be stirred up, cost what it may. The "abundant helps" will immediately be at my service; and when it seems sometimes as if, in spite of all my efforts, the day is going to be lost, I will hold on still, remembering that the help is "*more abundant*" when the need is greater. The stores of His mercy are infinite and He ever gives *more* to the generous soul.

Point III. Our Hearts

"Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the ways of Thy only-begotten Son: that by His Coming we may be worthy to serve Thee with purified minds." (The "Collect" for the 2nd Sunday of Advent).

Here lies the secret; if our *hearts* are stirred up there will be little difficulty about our *wills*. If I *love*, I shall gladly make efforts, no trouble will be too much, no work too exacting, no sacrifice too great, no mortification too hard. "*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*" My will is to be

stirred up to *seek*, but my heart is to be stirred up to *prepare*. It is my King Who is coming, He Who has a right to my heart, and He is quite sure to pass by my way, for to win my heart and make it all His own is one of the special reasons of His Coming. No pains, no cost shall be spared in my preparation; my heart shall be decorated with the flowers that I know He loves and hung with banners which shall speak of my gratitude for all He has done. This is the preparation of the heart – the preparation of *love*; and it will not stop at my own heart, for if I really love my King I shall take an interest in all the work that He is coming to do; I shall try to prepare His way for Him in the hearts of others; I shall let them know that Jesus of Nazareth is going to pass by. Perhaps I shall have no opportunity of speaking about His visit, but the careful preparations I am making will not go unnoticed – each thing that I do out of love to Him will in some way or another spread His Kingdom in the hearts of men.

Colloquy. With my King Who is coming.

Resolution. To do something *to-day* in preparation.

Spiritual Bouquet. "Stir up!"

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST. (1)

His Preparation

"This is he of whom it is written: Behold I send my Angel before Thy face,
who shall prepare Thy way before Thee."
(*St. Matt. xi. 10*).

1st. Prelude. Picture of the Naming Day of St. John the Baptist who is on Our Lady's knee, while Elizabeth and the kinsfolk are discussing the name and Zachary is writing on a tablet; St. Joseph is looking on.

2nd. Prelude. The spirit of penance.

Often during Advent the Church directs our thoughts to the great Precursor of Jesus Christ, to him who was sent to prepare His ways. On four occasions she chooses for the "Gospel" in the Mass, passages which relate to St. John the Baptist and his work of preparation. If we would prepare well for the coming of our King, we cannot do better than meditate on St. John the Baptist and try in our small measure to prepare as he did.

Point I. The Preparation before his birth

(1) *A prophecy.* Four hundred years before the Precursor's birth, Malachias prophesied of him: "Behold I send My angel," that is My *messenger*; and Our Lord tells us expressly (His words are noted by three of the Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke) that this messenger was John the Baptist, who was sent by God to prepare the ways of the Messiah.

(2) *His miraculous conception*— for his parents were both "well advanced in years." Both his father and mother were "just before God walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame;" and they had their cross to bear — the "reproach" of having no son and therefore no hope of the Messiah being born to them; but this did not prevent them from praying, as all fervent Israelites prayed, for the coming of the Messiah. The answer to their prayer was nearer than they thought. One day as Zachary was performing the most solemn part of his priestly office — offering incense on the golden altar that stood "over against the veil" which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies — he saw an angel standing on the right side of the altar, who, after he had calmed his fear, told him that his prayer was heard, that the Messiah was coming, and that his wife Elizabeth was to bear him a son who was to be His Precursor, "he shall go before Him." The angel then prophesied many things about this child, which all show how careful was God's preparation of His Precursor:

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