

ADVENT 2019
Meditation 1 – for small community faith groups
Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – November 24th

Before entering the four weeks of Advent, the Church reminds us of the preeminence of Jesus Christ, the King. In the introduction to his Epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul describes Jesus Christ in these terms: *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth.”*

St. Paul wrote to several new churches other than Colossae, such as Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, to support them in their mission of evangelization, to strengthen them in their faith while rectifying certain heresies that had cropped up. The letter to the Colossians was written around 62 or 63. At that time, St. Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Colossae was an ancient city of Phrygia in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), located about 160 km east of Ephesus. In this letter, St. Paul puts the focus on Christ, He is everything in everything.

Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Laudato si’, mi’ Signore (Praise be to you, my Lord)* reminds us of what creation is. God created our world as we know it out of love. It was his plan before all times as described in Genesis. The world and everything that composes it was not born out of chaos or by chance.

9. (...) As Christians, we are also called “to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.”

12. St. Francis of Assisi invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. “Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker” (Wis 13:5); indeed, “his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world” (Rom 1:20).

69. Together with our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”,^[41] and indeed, “the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31).

Food for thought

What is my relationship with nature? Am I able to marvel at the beauty of Creation, despite the cold and the snow?

Spiritual Exercise

In silence and without music take time to walk and admire the creation that God has given us. Admire the sunset, the trees, the stars in the sky, the moon.

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MEDITATION 2 – for small community faith groups

1st Sunday of Advent – December 1st

Introduction Isaiah 1 : 27 – 31; 2 : 1 – 5

This week we chose to meditate a longer text from Isaiah than the one from this Sunday's scripture. Isaiah the prophet lived between 742 and 687 BC. He is one of several major prophets of the Old Testament, like Elijah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

What is a prophet? A prophet is not someone who tells the future, but rather points out God's action! Isaiah's words were strong and challenging to the point that he made many enemies. For this, he was killed, sawed in half! He preached this text about the year 722 BC, challenging people to return to God's ways. At this time, there was taking place a terrible siege of northern Israel by the Assyrians. Israel was divided into two parts, north (Israel), and south (Juda). Isaiah was warning the northern folks to correct their ways, and if not, there would be consequences. He warned the people that to forget and ignore God, Adonai, it would be fatal to their well-being. Not only would society fall apart, but so would the whole of creation suffer. Care for human social life and care for God's creation go hand in hand. Isaiah insists on a profound return to the Lord (Isaiah 2: 3) in order to escape serious consequences. As it turns out, the people did not listen. They rebelled and ignored worship of the Creator and in so doing forgot that they were but creatures. Disaster struck. The northern kingdom was wiped out by the Assyrians, never to recover. Isaiah was right. Rebellion against the Lord's beautiful nature and against His laws has consequences.

Meditation: Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* invites us to consider the beauty and harmony in creation.

22. These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish. To cite one example, most of the paper we produce is thrown away and not recycled. It is hard for us to accept that the way natural ecosystems work is exemplary: plants synthesize nutrients which feed herbivores; these in turn become food for carnivores, which produce significant quantities of organic waste which give rise to new generations of plants. But our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse waste and by-products. We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them. A serious consideration of this issue would be one way of counteracting the throwaway culture which affects the entire planet, but it must be said that only limited progress has been made in this regard.

Food for Thought

Animals use plants for food, and plants draw sustenance from the earth. Everything is recycled perfectly. The by-products of animal and plant sustenance go right back to the earth and can be reused. Perfect recycling! Could we not learn from this?

Spiritual Exercise

Nature is such a great teacher. As we watch the changes in nature, take some time to think how nature teaches you to recycle.

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MEDITATION 3 – for small community faith groups

2nd Sunday of Advent – December 8th

The gospel of this 2nd Sunday of Advent introduces us to John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus. The Bible describes it as follows: “*John the Baptist appeared in the desert, (...) clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on grasshoppers and wild honey.*” (Mc 1, 4, 6) He was an ascetic, a man of great simplicity who was content with little and who lived soberly his faith practising what we now call voluntary simplicity. Through the ages many saints choose to leave everything they had to follow Jesus. The Encyclical *Laudato Si* is inspired by the life of such a saint: Francis of Assisi.

10. I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology. (...) He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. (...) He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

11. Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them “to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason”^[19]. (...) If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

12. What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. “Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker” (Wis 13:5); indeed, “his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world” (Rom 1:20). For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty.^[21] Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

Food for thought

How can St. Francis of Assisi inspire me to live more soberly, more simply?

What is my relationship with nature? Am I able to marvel at the beauty of Creation, despite the cold and the snow?

Spiritual Exercise

Jesus said to the rich young man of the Bible, “*If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*” Mt 19, 21

During Advent, what do I need to get rid of to get closer to God? Advent is a great time to declutter my house, simplify my activities and get back to basics.

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MEDITATION 4 – for small community faith groups

3rd Sunday of Advent – December 15th

Introduction Isaiah 35 : 1 – 10.

After the terrible crushing of the northern kingdom (Israel), by the Assyrian army (Iraq and northern Turkey), in their war against Syria (nothing new!), the violation of the women, the looting of the homes and the violent killing of the folks, Israel was devastated. The people were terrified! They had become vassals to the barbaric Assyrians. The situation was utterly hopeless. Slaves to the invaders, deprived of the basics of a decent life all was gloom! It is into this utter despair that the prophet Isaiah proclaims today's text. Such a stunning contrast!! The prophet orates of hope, of victory, a healing of the people, and a healing of nature!

“The crocus will blossom profusely. The parched land will exult. Water will burst into the wilderness, and the eyes of the blind will be opened”.

Humans and nature will be healed! The Creator does not abandon His people. In fact, the ultimate proof is that the “Creator became creature”. God became man, in Jesus. The prophecy of healing is fulfilled beyond the wildest imagination of any of the Israelites. How extraordinary! How blessed we are!

Meditation

We are all interdependent. We need each other. By this, we do not just mean people needing people, but also people needing nature, and nature needing people. The Lord has created a type of interdependence in creation such that when one aspect of creation suffers, when one person suffers, it impacts on the rest of us. And so is this vice versa. Pope Francis talks of this in *Laudato Si*.

86. The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas wisely noted that multiplicity and variety “come from the intention of the first agent” who willed that “what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another”,^[60] in as much as God's goodness “could not be represented fittingly by any one creature”.^[61] Hence we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships.^[62] We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God's plan. As the catechism teaches: “God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.”

Food for Thought

Part of the challenge of our human lives is to cooperate with the Lord in His work of creation. This means helping making this a more beautiful world. Think of those who make wonderfully beautiful flower gardens! This cooperation may involve some difficulties. Oddly, despite the devastation by the Assyrian army, creation sings a song of victory and praise to God, as our bible passage above points out.

Spiritual Exercise

Think of places in the world where you have seen great poverty of people. In these situations, what was the country side like? Or inversely. Think of places where there is great pollution. What is the human social situation like? Is the destruction of creation in any way also affecting the people?

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MEDITATION 5 – for small community faith groups

4th Sunday of Advent – December 22nd

This week we chose to meditate on a psalm. Let's see briefly what a psalm is. The word psalm from the Latin *psalma* means a song accompanied by a zither or a stringed instrument.

It is therefore a prayer song that the Jewish people addressed to God. The psalms were inspired by God Himself. These same psalms nourished the prayer of Jesus who learned them as a child on the knees of his mother, Mary. Some date from ten centuries before Christ, at the time of King David, others a few centuries before Jesus. The authors are not known, though many have been attributed to King David. The 150 Psalms are divided into three major literary forms according to the Jerusalem Bible: hymns, entreaty and thanksgivings. The "hymn" psalms praise God for his many blessings, for his creation, for his intervention in human history. The "entreaty" psalms are supplicatory psalms, a cry for help to God following a personal or communal tragedy. They are also known as psalms of suffering or of lament. Finally, the "thanksgiving" psalms are psalms of gratitude to God for having answered their request, thanking the Lord for all that he has done for them, personally, or for the Jewish people. Some psalms combine the 3 genres.

The encyclical *Laudato Si*, ends with a poem that by its form could resemble a psalm.

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.
God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.

Food for Thought

Pope Francis tells us about a world of "*justice, peace, love and beauty*". Where do you see the signs of this world around you?

Spiritual exercise

Praise God with a poem, a text, a song for all the blessings you have received from Him.