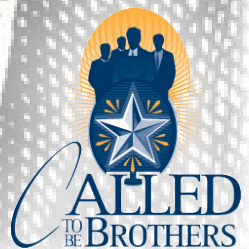




Meditations for the
Sundays of Advent

As composed by our Founder
St. John Baptist de La Salle



Dear Brother,

This collection of meditations composed by the Founder for the Sundays of Advent are offered in a single collection for your reflection through the season. Though only one Gospel reading referenced by the Founder is identical to that of this season's lectionary, the thematic elements emerge at some point during the season. We suggest you include a reading of the Gospel in concert with the meditation. You will notice this collection omits footnotes for Scriptural references and is organized in a form that encourages a paced, "*lectio divina* approach."

"Called To Be Brothers" preparatory team

1st Sunday of Advent—Luke 21. 25-33

"On the Last Judgment"—fulfill your duties with great fervor, or fear God's judgment

2nd Sunday of Advent—Matthew 11. 2-10

"You should prepare your own hearts and the hearts of those you are charged to instruct to receive Our Lord and his holy maxims" —John the Baptist as the greatest prophet prepare hearts as he did with great zeal—6 ways to open hearts to Jesus.

3rd Sunday of Advent—John 1. 19-28

"Those who teach are merely the voice which prepares hearts; it belongs to God himself to prepare them by his grace to receive him." —"Those who teach are only God's voice." "Ask him to help you embrace the perfection of your state..."

4th Sunday of Advent—Luke 3. 1-6

"By penance and freedom from sin we prepare ourselves to receive Jesus Christ"—prepare your heart through the baptism of penance...receive the Holy Spirit... "and return to the practice of your first works"



First Sunday of Advent

Meditation 1.1

Speaking of the Last Judgment in today's Gospel, Jesus Christ says that all people will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with great power and majesty. The regal aspect in which Jesus Christ will appear and the great power he will display when he comes to judge the world ought to make us fear his coming. This is what Saint Jerome says, commenting on these words of the Prophet Malachy: Who can think of the day of his coming? If no one dares think of the day of the Last Judgment, because of the majesty and power of him who will be the judge, who will be able to endure the strictness of his judgment?

This will be all the more difficult, he adds, because the One who will act as witness will also be the One who will judge; this is what ought to lead us to dread this judgment all the more.

As the same saint says elsewhere, the very severity of the Judge who will render to all of us according to our works will be such that those present will not dare to look him in the face. Then, says Saint Ephrem, there will be a minute and terrible scrutiny of our actions, and even of our thoughts, when each of us appears before this Judge's tribunal. He will make known to the whole world all the thoughts of all, their words and their deeds, all of which were entirely hidden in this life because they were performed in darkness.

So that we, says Saint Augustine, will not endure a terrible and crushing sentence when we appear before the tribunal of this inexorable Judge who will judge us for eternity, let us constantly strive to free ourselves of our defects, for we cannot know either the day or the hour when we will die. Those whose life span is so uncertain must not delay to take the steps needed to insure their salvation.

Meditation 1.2

It is not only the wicked who need to be afraid of the Last Judgment because of the evil life they have led. It will be a harrowing experience for the good as well as the wicked, says Saint Augustine. For, asserts Saint Jerome, there will be few, in fact there will be none, in that general gathering who will not deserve to be reprov'd with severity and anger by the Judge. This is why, he adds, there is no soul that does not fear God's judgment, for the stars themselves, meaning the saints, will not be pure in his presence. It will be very difficult, this holy doctor continues, to find anyone pure and irreproachable enough to appear before this Judge with assurance and dare to say, who will convict me of sin? Because of this, says Saint Ephrem, all creatures will be penetrated with fear, and all the legions of holy angels will shudder on the great day of the Lord's vengeance.

The main reason why the just themselves will fear while awaiting the Last Judgment is that we will have to give an account not only of the idle words we have spoken, as Jesus Christ says in the Gospel, but even of the good works we have performed, according to what God declares through the Royal Prophet: I will judge justices, meaning all the good that we have accomplished during our life. He will probe it to see if it was truly good and whether anything defective can be found in it. Who of us, then, will not fear God's judgment?

Meditation 1.3

How could we not fear God's judgments, since the greatest saints, despite their eminent holiness, did not fail to dread them? Job, whom God defended against those who reproached him falsely, says to God: I trembled at every action I performed, knowing that you do not pardon the one who sins; and again, what will I do when God will arise to judge me, and when he demands an account of my life, what will I answer him? After relating in considerable detail his manner of living, so upright and so free from sin, he adds that he always dreaded the judgment of God and that this fear had always penetrated him like a heavy burden.

Saint Hilarion, bowed down beneath the weight of years and austerities, was seized with terror at the hour of his death. Saint Jerome, who had grown grey in solitude and in all sorts of penitential exercises, declares

that he had restricted himself in this way and had condemned himself to a sort of prison out of fear of the Last Judgment. He tells us elsewhere that being, as he was, completely filled with sin, he hid himself day and night, fearing that he might hear the words, “Jerome, come forth!” and that he would then be forced to pay the last penny.

Saint Ephrem, who led a solitary life from his childhood and who was so pure, so penitent, and so filled with the Spirit of God, says that his heart trembled and his whole body shook every time he reflected that all our thoughts, words, and actions will be made manifest on Judgment Day. Acknowledging that he was still guilty, he constantly feared to be judged in strict rigor, knowing that he had no excuse for his negligence.

If such great saints felt so much fear when considering this terrible day, what feelings of dread ought we not to experience, we who show such little fervor in God’s service and who fulfill our duties so negligently?





Second Sunday of Advent

Meditation 2.1

Today's Gospel informs us that Saint John the Baptist, while in prison where he had been thrown by Herod's command, sent two of his disciples to Jesus Christ to ask him whether he is the Messiah. This gave Jesus Christ the opportunity to praise Saint John before the people; he ended by saying that John is the man of whom it was written: I am sending my angel before you, to prepare for you the path where you will walk. You too, as well as Saint John, are angels sent by God to prepare a path for him, so that he can enter your heart and the hearts of your disciples. For this purpose you need to do two things: first, you must resemble the angels by your interior and exterior purity. Like the angels, you must be entirely detached from your body and from the pleasures of the senses, so that nothing seems to be left in you but your soul, which you are concerned about exclusively and which is the only object of your care.

For you are destined by God to apply yourselves, like the holy angels, only to what refers to his service and to the care of souls. In you, as Saint Paul says, the outer man must decay, so that the inner man may be renewed day by day. You must become like the angels and like them, as the same Apostle says, not consider things that are visible but only those that are invisible, for, he continues, the former are temporary and pass away, whereas the latter are eternal and will be forever the object of our affection.

Meditation 2.2

Jesus Christ highly praises Saint John in the Gospel of this day. He says that John lived in the desert and was no reed shaken by the wind, because he always continued the life of penance he had begun. He says that John wore no soft garments, for as we read in Saint Matthew, he was clothed in camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist. Jesus Christ further adds that Saint John ate no bread and drank no wine; in fact, as we learn from Saint Matthew, he lived only on locusts and wild honey. Jesus Christ

then declared that there has never been a Prophet greater than John the Baptist.

Why, do you think, did Jesus Christ praise Saint John so highly? It was to lead the people to accept his teaching and to make them understand that what John had said about himself was true: that Saint John had been sent to prepare their hearts to receive Jesus Christ and to profit by his teachings. This saint, who was Christ's precursor, began by living a life of seclusion, prayer, and penance to practice what he wanted to teach others and thus to dispose his own heart to receive the fullness of the Spirit of God in order to make himself fit to carry out his ministry properly.

Because you have to prepare the hearts of others for the coming of Jesus Christ, you must first of all dispose your own hearts to be entirely filled with zeal in order to render your words effective in those whom you instruct.

Meditation 2.3

After having prepared himself interiorly to preach to the Jewish people and in order to make them ready to receive Jesus Christ, Saint John proposed to them six ways to prepare a path and an entry into their hearts for Jesus Christ. First, he required of them a true horror for sin, reproaching them with being a generation of vipers. Second, he urged them to fear the Last Judgment, assuring them that at that moment their sins would be closely scrutinized and strictly judged. Flee, he urged them, from the wrath to come. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Third, to help them escape the rigor of that judgment, he incited them to do penance by the words: Bring forth worthy fruits of penance. Fourth, he did not want them to be satisfied with lamenting their sins and doing penance for them; he wanted them to do good works, without which their penances would be of no avail. This he pointed out to them by these words: Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Fifth, he declared that it was not enough for them to claim Abraham as their father, that they had no right to glorify themselves on that account unless they acted as Abraham did. Do not say, he told them, we have Abraham for our father. Sixth, he gave them to understand that they could not be saved, whatever good deeds they might perform, unless they practiced the good works proper and becoming

to their state of life. For this reason he pointed out to the wealthy their obligation of giving alms; he told the publicans not to exact anything beyond what was due, and he enjoined on the soldiers to be content with their pay.

Take these counsels to heart, and follow them carefully; pass them on to your disciples and see to it that they practice them.





Third Sunday of Advent

Meditation 3.1

The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask Saint John who he was: the Christ, Elijah, or a Prophet. Saint John told them he was none of these, but he declared, I am the voice of one crying in the desert: make straight the way of the Lord. Saint John wished to leave to Jesus Christ all the honor of converting souls, the task at which he labored so constantly. He said, therefore, that he was only a voice crying out in the desert. He thus showed that the substance of the doctrine he taught was not his own and that it was indeed the word of God which he preached; as for himself, he was only the voice which proclaimed it. In the same way that a voice is a sound that strikes the ear and makes it possible for a word to be heard, so it was that Saint John prepared the Jews to receive Jesus Christ.

The same thing is true of those who instruct others. They are only the voice of the One who disposes hearts to accept Jesus Christ and his holy teaching. The one who disposes them, according to Saint Paul, can only be God, who imparts to human beings the gift of speaking of him. According to the same Apostle, when you speak all the tongues, both angelic and human, if you lack charity, or rather, if it is not God who makes you speak and who uses your voice to reveal himself and his sacred mysteries, you are nothing but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. All you say will produce no good effect and will not be capable of bringing about any good results.

Let us, then, humble ourselves by considering that we are nothing but a voice and that of ourselves we cannot say anything that will do the least good for souls or make any impression on them. For we are a mere voice, only a sound, which becomes nothing once it has echoed through the air.

Meditation 3.2

Those who teach are only God's voice. The word that makes God known to those whom they instruct must come from him; it is God who speaks in teachers when they explain him and what is related to him. This is why Saint Peter says, If any speak, let it always be clear that God is speaking by their mouth; if any fulfill a ministry, let them do so as acting only by the power God communicates to them, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

Saint Peter also says on the subject of the truth he was preaching, I will never give up warning you of these things, even though you already know the truth about them, and it is established in you. He adds, We have the word of the Prophets, which is firmly established and to which you do well to be attached, for it is like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. It was not through human will that in times past prophecy was uttered; rather, it was by the movement of the Holy Spirit that these prophets of God spoke.

It is also by the movement of the Spirit of God that all those who today proclaim his kingdom continue to speak. But if God makes use of people to announce the truths of Christianity to others and to prepare their hearts to be docile to these truths, it is God alone, as the Wise Man says, who must guide their steps and impart to their hearts the docility they need in order to welcome these holy truths that he is making known to them.

Do not be content, therefore, to read and to learn from others what you must teach your students. Pray God to impress all these truths so firmly in you that you will have no occasion to be or to consider that you are anything, as Saint Paul says, but the ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries.

Meditation 3.3

Saint Zechariah, the father of Saint John the Baptist, says in the canticle he sang at the birth of his son, that the reason why Saint John is to walk before Jesus Christ and to prepare the way for him is to bring to his people the knowledge of salvation. But this knowledge is not enough; it is necessary for God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to show us the path we must

follow and to inspire us to walk in the footsteps of his Son.

Although in this life we sigh under the weight of our bodies and long to be free of this burden, it is God who created us for this very purpose and who gave us his Holy Spirit as a pledge. It is, then, up to God to direct our path straight toward heaven, so that we may surely arrive there. For this reason, it was as the Son of God that Jesus Christ became the Author of our eternal salvation. Salvation, as the Prophet says, comes from God; perfection likewise comes from him. As Saint James assures us, every excellent grace and perfect gift come from on high and descend from the Father of lights.

Beg God, therefore, to lead you on the way to heaven by the path he has traced out for you. Ask him to help you embrace the perfection of your state, because he is the one who brought you into it and who consequently desired, and still desires, that you find in it the way and the means to be sanctified.



R. Buccina, FSC



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Meditation 4.1

According to today's Gospel, Saint John went about all the country adjoining the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins, in order to prepare the Jews for the coming of our Lord. By doing this, Saint John makes known to us that the principal dispositions we must bring to the reception of our Lord are penance and separation from all sin. We must, then, give our greatest effort to this, because penance washes and purifies a soul of the sins that sully it.

Saint Leo calls penance simply a baptism; Saint Gregory of Nazianzen calls it a painful baptism; Saint Ambrose says that David spoke of this baptism when he tells us that he wore himself out sighing and wailing, drenched his couch nightly with his tears, and soaked his pillow with his weeping.

We too ought to be able to say the same thing as David, because we need penance no less than he did if we wish to draw Jesus Christ to us. This is why, as the Gloss says, each of you must expiate the sins of your past by penance, so that you may once again draw near to the salvation you have lost and recover the facility of returning to God, from whom you have strayed. This is why God declared, by one of the Prophets, be converted to me by fasting, weeping, and mourning. For they are the surest means of finding God when we have lost him, the means that contribute most to obtaining for us that purity of heart which David so ardently begged from the Lord. It was also with this in mind that he asked God, wash me yet more from my iniquities, and purify me from my sins.

This penitent king was fully persuaded that the stains of a sinful soul will not be washed away except by the tears that flow from a humble and contrite heart. Let us frequently beg God for the grace to cleanse ourselves so perfectly that no trace of our sins will remain, and on our part, let us contribute to this by the penance we perform for our sins.

Meditation 4.2

It is said of Saint John that he preached penance for the remission of sins, because it is penance that procures the remission of sins for those who have offended God. Saint Peter said to the Jews in the Acts of the Apostles, Do penance, and be converted, so that your sins may be forgiven. For such is the specific end of this virtue; it alone can appease the heart of God irritated against sinners. God tells us this in Ezekiel, saying that if the wicked man does penance for all the sins he has committed, keeps all my precepts, and acts according to equity and justice, I will no longer remember all his iniquities, and they will no more be imputed to him. Saint Peter, preaching to the Jewish people to make known to them the truths of the Gospel, told them, Do penance to obtain the remission of your sins.

It was also by means of this same virtue that the Ninevites, who had outraged heaven by their disorderly conduct, induced God to revoke the sentence he had pronounced against them to destroy their city. This they could not do except by a conversion of their hearts, following the preaching of Jonas and the invitation of their king. To avert the calamity that threatened them, there was no other recourse for them, says Saint Ambrose, than to fast continually and cover themselves with sackcloth and ashes to appease the anger of God.

By the same method, you too will obtain the remission of all the sins you committed in the world and all those you still commit every day in God's house. For, as Saint Jerome observes, every day God still addresses to people the same threats he addressed to the Ninevites, so that just as these menaces frightened those sinful people, they may in the same way convince people who are living now to do penance. Let us, then, profit by such an admirable example.

Meditation 4.3

As the Prophet Ezekiel informs us, penance not only obtains for us the remission of our sins but also preserves us from sin, which is the greatest blessing we can enjoy in this world. For after saying that if the wicked man does penance for all his sins, God will no longer remember them, he adds that man will live by practicing the works of justice, and he will not die. This is why Saint Peter comforts us so much when he tells us that the

Lord, on the day of his coming, will find in peace of soul those who have brought forth a worthy harvest of penance, because he will find them free from sin. By this means, remarks Theodoret, they will have made their salvation certain. As the Church sings, it was by this means that Saint John the Baptist was able to preserve himself free from the slightest sins. In the same way you will return to the grace of our Lord and, according to Saint Peter, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who will make you firm in goodness, thanks to his dwelling in you. This Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Beg him to establish your heart so firmly in good that on the day of his coming, as Saint Peter says, you may be found pure and irreproachable in his eyes. Take care that when he comes, he will not address to you the same reproach that Saint John in the Apocalypse made to a bishop, telling you that you have fallen away from your first charity. If he upbraids you with this now, remember the state from which you have fallen, as this bishop was enjoined to do. Do penance, and return to the practice of your first works.



Notes

DeSafalle

The Brothers of the Christian Schools