

Advent¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Tuesday, December 10, 1861

Here we are, my Sisters, in the season of Advent. Let us enter into the sentiments of the Church. The best of all pieties is that which is in relation to the spirit of the Church, because each liturgical feast has its own grace and virtue. The object of the Church's cult is to honor our Lord in his various mysteries, then the Blessed Virgin and the saints. That is why each season has its grace, each day has its mystery. Pious souls follow the devotion of the Church.

[...]

My poor Sisters, if you could only appreciate the beauty of the Office (Prayer of the Church) during Advent! There we see the Church gathering all the prophecies referring to the Messiah, the writings of all the scholars and saints who waited for him and desired him. How they described his glory, his majesty, his reign, glorifying him in advance. The Church puts all that into its Office. When we have the happiness to understand it, truly this prayer elevates us to God and seems to make the mystery come alive again. And there's more! There's something so joyful that it feels like receiving good news.

Advent and Christmas, followed by Lent with its sadness, then Easter! [...] Do what the Church does; better still, what the Blessed Virgin did. What was that? She prepared herself for the birth of her divine Son. We don't know how she prepared, but we can presume it when we consider her treasure, her grace. In her virginal womb was the Son of God made man. While he was in her, she prayed and reflected. She was interiorly with him in all his virtues, in all his states. He was in her what he would later be exteriorly; he was with his mother [...]

The Blessed Virgin contemplated our Lord, as you contemplate him in the Eucharist, as he is contemplated in Paradise, as when you have had the happiness to receive Communion. She contemplated him; this was her meditation. You understand that she would not seek an exterior subject, her glance was inward. Our Lord was her master, her light, her truth; she focused on him. What was happening? As truth is accompanied by fire, so her lamp was burning, since God is light, truth and love. Our Lord was inflaming her heart with love, those two hearts were speaking to each other. Hearts speak without words, and understand each other. Two flames together, my Sisters, do not speak, but they understand, the heart speaks through love. The heart of Jesus united with the heart of the most Blessed Virgin in conversations of love. Our Lord spoke, the Blessed Virgin answered; she spoke, praising God. Our Lord truly was united with the most Blessed Virgin; He could not have anyone better.

Sacred Scripture says: *I sleep, but my heart watches* (Song 5:2). Clearly, even when she slept a bit, her heart was not sleeping, but watching in continual prayer. As St. Ambrose said: The heart does not sleep. Our Lord had his court: it was the Blessed Virgin. She was worth more than all the angels and saints. For nine months he was hers alone. St. Joseph adored from a distance, but the Blessed Virgin possessed him, he was her treasure.

What can we say about what happened during this time of Advent? As the day approached, the love of our Lord became stronger. Like a flame that wants to leap up and out, he prepared himself more perfectly to suffer, to glorify his Father, and the Blessed Virgin accomplished the same acts in her heart, it was a union of love. As Bethlehem approached, she would, so to speak, lose her treasure. Once our Lord left by penetrating her virginal womb, she would have him now outside her body, not within. She would

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have him in her arms, but not for long. When he would grow into adulthood, he would go out to preach. Even then, she would value her treasure; she would maintain in her heart his every idea, his every word. How happy our Lord must have been! I believe that, although our Lord wanted to be born to save humanity, it must have cost him to leave this holy paradise.

[...]

The spirit of Advent has an echo in Communion. The Blessed Virgin, with the Word made flesh in her womb, is a clear image of Communion. Jesus – he was not yet called “Jesus” – the Incarnate Word had come into the Blessed Virgin in an invisible manner. No one saw him come; he was not yet born as a man. He came with his spiritual and invisible substance as God. It was when he entered her womb that the Holy Spirit took the blood of the Holy Virgin, and created a soul and then united the two substances. The Blessed Virgin really felt then that she was bearing our Lord. He was man, God-Man, the Blessed Virgin was to be his cloud. In the Bible, the prophets use striking words when they speak of the Messiah. They describe him coming in a cloud, in a small cloud: *nebula*, a small cloud completely white. The Blessed Virgin is that small white cloud, which hides the Sun of justice, the Incarnate Word. Her body becomes that cloud, which is his cloak, his prison. The prophet Isaiah says that he sees the Almighty descend on a light cloud.

See, my Sisters, how Communion can be compared to the incarnation. Communion is no longer the Word incarnate in Mary. It is Jesus Christ who descends into the communicant by the hands of the priest, not only with his divinity, but with his humanity. He came invisibly into Mary, no one saw him in his body and in his soul. He comes also to us in Communion substantially, invisibly, the same as in Mary. You see him as in a cloud. He *could* show himself to you as a favor, but his ordinary state is in a cloud. He continues as in his incarnation. The incarnation was only a way to come to us, we receive him whole and entire, glorious and triumphant. The cloud is the sacred species. Let us share the happiness of the most Blessed Virgin, as our body becomes like his clothing, the body of his body. We possess him as the Blessed Virgin possessed him with the difference that with her he became visible, material, tangible. In us he communicates his graces, all that he is. We do not see him, we do not feel him. Our body becomes his body, our soul becomes his soul. No one sees this; we alone can experience it.

What should be happening? Just as the most Blessed Virgin carried him and offered herself to serve him, we should do the same and with the same joy. There’s even more! As a newly born child, he had not yet suffered, nor completed the work of redemption. But when he comes into us, he is richer in a sense than when he came into the Blessed Virgin. What is our response? He does not come into us like he came into the most Blessed Virgin in order to come out. Rather, he comes to remain with us forever, providing we do not cast him out by sin. We have this additional honor: we become his goal. He went through Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Calvary, so as to remain in us permanently.

What was the most Blessed Virgin Mary doing? She was recollected. Therefore, recollect yourselves fully in the Lord, since you are his living tabernacle. Recollect yourselves in him. Since he loves, you should love. Since he works, you should work. He is invisible, but find a way to be with him. This is how to live Advent.

We can no longer expect the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem. That happened once, 18 centuries ago, and it’s finished. We do celebrate the feast as a commemoration. In Bethlehem there was much love, divine caresses. Briefly, the child Jesus was so loveable, that this gives new life to this mystery. It’s as though this beautiful mystery comes back to life. We can relive it in faith and love, not in the past, but in the grace and virtue of the mystery. **The basic idea, the purpose of Advent, is the birth of our Lord, in the [present] world, the manifestation of it to everyone. His dwelling place is no longer the stable, but human bodies.** While preparing for Advent, let us give him new birth in ourselves and experience Jesus coming to us as at Bethlehem, with this difference that there was more suffering and poverty there, while here there will be more love.

If he loved poverty, I must tell him that I will embrace it. If there was a stable with straw, I will accept that also, so that I can give him – what shall I give? – the kingdom of my heart, to let him reign in me. My poor Sisters, remember this. Rejoice with the most Blessed Virgin, with St. Joseph who knew all these things, and was so very happy to be his first adorer. You might say that these things are so beautiful, and I would like to experience them. So then, sprinkle the tree with plenty of water, light a fire. Love is not in our feelings, it is in our will; it is in action.; it is the gift of oneself.

Points for reflection :

The meditation on Advent gives us some principles for a liturgical spirituality. It helps us to discover the spirit of the Church during this season, to honor its graces and its specific virtues. St. Peter Julian invites us to contemplate Jesus with Mary, and to establish a link between the incarnation and Holy Communion. What concrete practice does this meditation suggest for you?