

WEEK 3

SUNDAY

When the III Sunday of Advent falls on the 17th of December, the first and second readings with the relative responsorial are substituted with the proper of the day 17. The Gospel, the third reading with the responsorial, and the oration, in any case is that of Sunday.

CYCLE 1

Before 17 December.

First Reading. *Ruth 4: 1 – 22*

Wedding of Boaz and Ruth.

A reading from the book of Ruth.

And Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the next of kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here"; and he turned aside and sat down.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here"; so they sat down. Then he said to the next of kin, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land which belonged to our kinsman Elim'elech. So I thought I would tell you of it, and say, buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you."

And he said, "I will redeem it." Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also buying Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the dead, in order to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance." Then the next of kin said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. So when the next of kin said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal.

Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elim'elech and all that belonged to Chil'ion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his native place; you are witnesses this day." Then all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you prosper in Eph'rathah and be renowned in Bethlehem; and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the children that the LORD will give you by this young woman."

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. And the women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Ammin'adab, Ammin'adab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

Responsorial. *Is. 55: 3; Ps. 88: 30*

R: Give ear and come to me, listen and you will live. * I will establish an eternal covenant for you, the favours assured to David.

V: I will establish his descendants forever, his throne as the days of the heavens.

R: I will establish an eternal covenant for you, the favours assured to David.

Second Reading. *Ps. 118. Disc. 20, 1*

The desire of the nations.

A reading from the “Commentary on the psalms” of St. Augustine, bishop.

“I am consumed in the expectation of your salvation” (Ps. 118: 81). This “consume oneself” is good: it reveals in fact the desire for good, certainly not reached, but passionately desired. From the origin of the human race up to the end of the ages who, among those that lived in every time, who live and who will live, can say these words if not the elected descendants, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the people of acquisition that Christ desires?

A witness of this was the holy old man Simeon who, receiving the infant Christ in his arms, said: “Now O Lord, let your servant go in peace according to your word, because my eyes have seen your salvation” (Lk. 2: 29- 30). In fact, “the Holy Spirit had already pre-announced that he would not see death without first having seen the Messiah of the Lord” (Lk. 2: 26).

Like the desire of this old man, it must be believed, that the same desire had been that of all the saints of the preceding ages. The Lord himself also says to the disciples: “Many prophets and just men desired to see that which you see and did not see it; to hear that which you hear and did not hear it” (Mt. 13: 17), because the voice of the whole of the ancient Israel is also recognised in the words: “I am consumed in the expectation of your salvation”.

Therefore never in the past was this desire of the saints quenched, nor is it placated in the present in the body of Christ, that is the Church, until the consummation of the ages, until when “the Desired One of all the nations” (Hag. 2: 8vulg.), who has been promised by the prophets, will come. For this the apostle Paul says: “Now there remains for me only the crown of justice, that the Lord the just judge will hand over to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all those who await with love his manifestation” (2 Tm. 4: 8). The desire of which we are now speaking arises from the love of the manifestation of Christ; referring exactly to this, Paul says again: “When Christ who is our life, will appear, then we also will be manifested with him in glory” (Col. 3: 4).

In the early times of the Church, that preceded the delivery of the Virgin, there were saints who desired the incarnation of the Word; in the

present times, after the Ascension, there are saints who desire the coming of Christ as judge of the living and the dead.

From the beginning until the end of time, this desire of the Church has never been placated for an instant, if not when the Word, making himself man, dwelt on the earth in the company of his disciples. Therefore, in the words of the psalm, the voice of the whole body of Christ is heard, moaning in this life: "I am consumed in the expectation of your salvation, I hope in your word". This word is a promise. And this is the hope that makes the believers await in patience for that which they still do not see.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Zec. 14: 5, 8, 9*

R: Behold, the Lord my God will come, and with him all his saints; in that day a great light will shine out, and living waters will flow out from Jerusalem: * The Lord will be king of all the earth.

V: Behold he will come with power, and he will have the kingdom, the power and the dominion in his hands.

R: The Lord will be king of all the earth.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 29: 13 – 24*

Announcement of the judgement of God.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote; therefore, behold, I will again do marvellous things with this people, wonderful and marvellous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid."

Woe to those who hide deep from the LORD their counsel, whose deeds are in the dark, and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?" You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay; that the thing made should say of its maker, "He did not make me"; or the thing

formed say of him who formed it, "He has no understanding"? Is it not yet a very little while until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest? In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. For the ruthless shall come to nought and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate, and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.

Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob: "Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. And those who err in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmur will accept instruction."

Responsorial. *Is. 29: 18, 19; cfr. Mt. 11: 4 – 5*

R: In that day the deaf will hear the words of a book; freed from the obscurity and from the darkness, the eyes of the blind will see; * the poor will rejoice in the holy One of Israel.

V: Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, and to the poor is announced the good news;

R: the poor will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Second Reading. *Disc. 293, 3*

John is the voice, Christ the Word.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Augustine, bishop.

John was a voice, but the Lord in the beginning was the Word, John was a voice for a time, Christ the eternal Word in the beginning.

Take away the word and what is a voice? When it conveys no meaning, it is just an empty sound. A wordless voice strikes the ear, but it does not make the heart grow.

However, as we engage in building up our heart, let us pay attention to the order of things. If I think of what I want to say, the word is already in

my heart. And if I want to talk to you, I look for some means whereby what is in my heart may also be in yours.

So, wanting the word, which is already in my heart, to come over to you, and make its way into your heart, I make use of my voice to talk to you. The sound of the voice brings you to understand the word. And when my voice has done this, it ceases; but the word carried to you by the sound is now already in your heart, and has not left mine.

Take this sound then. After the word has passed into your possession, does it not seem to say, 'He must increase, but I must decrease'? The sound of the voice cried out, performing its service, and then passed away, as though it said 'This joy of mine is now full'. Let us hold on to the word, and not let slip the word we have inwardly conceived.

Do you want to see a transient voice, and the abiding divinity of the Word? Where is John's baptism now? He served his purpose and left. It is Christ's baptism that is now administered. We all believe in Christ, and hope for salvation in him. This is precisely what the voice told us.

Since it is difficult to distinguish the voice and the word, John himself was thought to be the Christ. The voice was taken to be the Word. But the voice admitted his identity, lest he might displease the Word. 'I am not the Christ,' he said, 'nor Elijah, nor the prophet.' In reply to, 'Who are you?' he said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord'. 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness', the voice of one breaking the silence. Prepare the way of the Lord', is as though he said: I cry out to lead him into your heart – but he will not condescend to come where I am leading, unless you prepare the way.

What does 'to prepare the way' mean, except to pray as you ought. What is the meaning of: Prepare the way, if not: be humble of heart? Take an example of humility from John himself. He is thought to be the Christ. How easily would he have been believed, since that was what the people were thinking before he spoke! But he did not say it. He acknowledged who he was, distinguished himself from Christ, humbled himself.

He knew where his salvation lay. He understood that he was a lamp, and he was afraid of being quenched by the wind of pride.

Responsorial. *Jn. 3: 30; 1: 27; Mk. 1: 8*

R. He has to grow, I have to diminish; he comes after me, * and he was before me, * and I am not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals.

V: I have baptised you with water; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.
R: And I am not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals.

YEAR A

Gospel. Mt. 11: 2 – 11

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare your way before you.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Third Reading. Bk. 5

Are you the one who is to come or do we have to wait for another.

A reading from the "Commentary on the gospel of St. Luke" of St. Ambrose, bishop.

John calls two of his disciples and sends them to say to the Lord: "Are you the one who is to come, or do we have to wait for another?" (Mt. 11: 3). These simple words do not enclose an obvious, literal significance, otherwise they would be in contradiction with what has already been said in the gospel. How could John, who before this had recognised Jesus through the revelation of God the Father, let it be understood here that he did not know him? If before he recognised he whom he did not know, how can he

now ignore who he is? He says: “I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptise had told me: The man on whom you will see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 1: 33). John believed these words, he recognised the one who was revealed to him, and after having baptised him he adored him, and prophesied his coming as already actual. For this he says: “I have seen and I have given testimony that this is the Son of God” (Jn. 1: 34). How was it possible therefore that such a great prophet could be so deceived as to not believe that he of whom he had said before: “Behold he who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1: 29) was not the Son of God?

For this, if the literal sense seems to be a contradiction let us search for the spiritual sense.

We have already said that John was a figure of the Law, forerunner of Christ, which was justly called law, because it was materially imprisoned in the hearts without faith, deprived of the eternal Light, and as if constrained in hearts fruitful in evils and senselessness. The law could not bring to fulfilment with that fullness his witness to the divine design, without the collaborating guarantee of the gospel. John therefore sent his disciples to Christ, in order to receive from him a supplement of knowledge, because fullness of the law is Christ.

The Lord knowing that no one can believe with fullness without the gospel, because the faith begins from the Old Testament, but has its fulfilment in the New, when they question him about his identity, demonstrates not with words, but with facts that he is the one: “Go and tell John what you see and hear; the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are healed, the deaf reacquire their hearing, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Mt. 11: 4 – 5). But these examples of the testimony of the Lord are still too little: fullness of faith is the cross of the Lord, his death, his burial. Therefore to the words said before he adds: “Blessed is he who is not scandalised of me”(Mt. 11: 6). The cross could be a scandal even for the elect, but for that which regards the divine Person there cannot exist a more valid testimony than this, there is nothing that transcends human things as much as the voluntary sacrifice of all of himself, and of himself only, for the salvation of the world: with this unique act he demonstrates fully that he is the Lord.

For this John indicates him with the words: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold he who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1: 29). Words

addressed not only to those two disciples, but also to all of us, so that we may believe in Christ on the testimony of the facts.

“But what did you go to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet” (Mt. 11: 9). How is it that they desired to see John in the desert, when he was in prison?

The Lord proposes for our imitation he who had prepared the way for him not only preceding him in birth according to the flesh and announcing him with faith, but also preceding him with his glorious martyrdom. He is truly more than a prophet, he who brings to a close the succession of prophets. More than a prophet, because many desired to see he whom he announced, he saw him with his own eyes and baptised him.

Responsorial. *Is. 35: 4 – 6; Mt. 11: 5*

R: Behold, God himself comes to save us; then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be opened. * Then the lame will leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb shall shout for joy.

V: The blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, and the deaf reacquire their hearing.

R: Then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb shall shout for joy.

YEAR B

Gospel. *Jn. 1: 6 – 8; 19 – 28*

A reading from the Gospel of St. John.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No." They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Then

why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Third Reading. Bk. III

In the midst of you is one whom you do not know.

A reading from the "Treatise on the work of the Holy Spirit" of St. Rupert of Deutz, abbot.

The baptism of John is the baptism of a servant, the baptism of Christ is the baptism of the Lord. The first is for conversion, the second is for the forgiveness of sins.

Christ was manifested by the baptism of John, but was glorified by his own baptism, that is by his passion. In fact John says of his baptism: "I did not know him, but I have come to baptise with water, so that he may be made known to Israel" (Jn. 1: 31).

But Christ, already baptised by John says: "There is a baptism that I have to receive, and how great is my anguish, until it is fulfilled!" (Lk. 12: 50). The baptism of John prepared the people for that of Christ; and the baptism of Christ opened for the people the Kingdom of God.

John exhorted those who received his baptism to believe in the Master who would have come after him; those among these who died before the passion of Christ, at his death without doubt were purified of sin, no matter how serious it was, and they entered with him into paradise, with him they saw the Kingdom of God.

But to those who, despising in themselves the divine plan and not having been baptised with the baptism of John, and left this world before Christ was baptised with his passion, did not benefit by the ancient remedy of circumcision: nor was the passion of Christ any benefit to them, nor were they drawn out of hell, because they were not among those of whom Christ said: "For them I consecrate myself" (Jn. 17: 19).

None the less you need to know that those baptised by John, who lived after the glorification of Jesus, while the Good News was being preached, if "they did not welcome" the Christ, if they did not believe that it was necessary to be baptised by him, then this baptism of John was useless.

The apostle Paul, who knew this, “found some disciples and said to them: Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you came to the faith?” and again: “Which baptism have you received?” and he was implying: If you have “not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit”. To their answer: “The baptism of John”; he says: “John administered a baptism of penitence, telling the people to believe in him who was to come after him, that is in Jesus. After having heard this he made them receive the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus and as soon as Paul had imposed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit descended on them” (Act. 19: 2 – 6).

Of what less importance was the baptism of the servant, if it did not even make known the existence of the Holy Spirit, in comparison with the baptism of the Lord, that is conferred in the name of the Father and of the Son, but not without the Holy Spirit, and in which the Holy Spirit is given for the forgiveness of sins (cfr. Act. 2: 38).

Responsorial. *Jn. 1: 29, 27; Mt. 3: 11*

R: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Behold the one of whom I said: After me comes a man who has passed before me because he was before me, * of whom I am not worthy to untie the sandal strap.

V: I baptise you with water, he will baptise you in the Holy Spirit.

R: Of whom I am not worthy to untie the sandal strap.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 3: 10 – 18*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in

their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

Third Reading. *Hom. 26: 3 – 5*

To be a solid edifice that no hurricane can knock down.

A reading from the “Homilies on Luke” of Origen, presbyter.

The baptism of Jesus is a baptism “in the Holy Spirit and fire”. If you are holy, you will be baptised in the Holy Spirit; if you are a sinner, you will be thrown down into the fire; the same baptism will become a condemnation and fire for the unworthy sinners, while the saints who convert to the Lord with complete faith, will receive the grace of the Holy Spirit and salvation.

That is “he who baptises in the Holy Spirit and fire, has the winnowing fan in his hand to clean his barnyard and to gather the grain in his granary: but the chaff, he will burn with an unquenchable fire” (Lk. 3:16-17). I want to discover for what reason the Lord holds in his hand the winnowing fan and by which wind the light straw is carried here and there, while the grain, which is heavier, always falls in the same place; without the wind, in fact, the grain cannot be separated from the straw. I think that the wind has to be understood as the temptations, which in the confused mass of the believers demonstrates who is straw and who is grain. In fact, when your soul lets itself be dominated by some temptation, it is not because the temptation has changed you into straw, but because you were straw, that is light and unbelieving, the temptation has revealed your hidden nature. On the contrary, when you confront the temptations courageously, it is not this that makes you faithful and patient, but it makes clear the virtues of patience and strength that were in you, but hidden. Do you believe, says the Lord, that in speaking to you, I have a different aim than that of manifesting your justice?

And elsewhere he says: “I have humiliated you, and I have put you to the test in order to manifest what you have in your heart” (Dt. 8: 2).

In the same sense, the tempest does not leave a house built on sand still standing; if you want it to resist, construct it on rock (cfr. Mt. 7: 24-25). Once unleashed, the tempest cannot knock down a building constructed on the rock; it will reveal instead how weak are the foundations of those who waver on the sand.

For this reason, before the tempest breaks out, before the gusts of wind blow and the torrents become swollen, while everything is still in silence, let us dedicate every care to the foundation of the construction, let us raise up our house on the multiple and solid rocks of the commandments of God; then, when the persecution will become cruel, when the storm of misfortune will break out against the Christians, we will be able to show that our building is founded on the rock, Christ Jesus. But if someone will deny him – may such a misfortune remain far from us – know well that it was not in that instant that they saw him denying Christ that he has denied him, but he carried in himself ancient shoots and roots of denial: in that moment was revealed that which was in him, and it has been brought to the light of day.

Let us ask the Lord therefore that we may be a solid edifice, which no hurricane can knock down, founded on the rock that is our Lord Jesus Christ, “to whom belongs the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pt. 4: 11)

Responsorial. *Mt. 3: 11*

R: He who comes after me is more powerful than me, and I am not even worthy to carry his sandals. * He will baptise you in the Holy Spirit and fire.

V: John gave witness saying:

R: He will baptise you in the Holy Spirit and fire.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *1 Chr. 17: 1 – 15*

Oracle of the prophet Nathan.

A reading from the First book of Chronicles.

Now when David dwelt in his house, David said to Nathan the prophet, "Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent." And Nathan said to David, "Do all that is in your heart, for God is with you."

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, `Thus says the LORD: You shall not build me a house to dwell in. For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I led up Israel to this day, but I have gone from tent to tent and from dwelling to dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'

Now therefore thus shall you say to my servant David, `Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall waste them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover I declare to you that the LORD will build you a house. When your days are fulfilled to go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son; I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever and his throne shall be established for ever.'"

In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Responsorial. *Cfr. 1 Chr. 17: 7, 12; Ps. 88: 5*

R: I took you from the pastures, while you followed the flock, in order to constitute you prince over my people Israel; I have been with you wherever you went. * I will make your kingdom stable forever.

V: I will establish forever your descendants, I will give you a throne that will last forever.

R: I will make your kingdom stable forever.

Second Reading. *C. 7, 72*

Those who have faith will receive the blessing, as Abraham believed.

A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Micah” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

Truly the mystery of Christ fills us with amazement, and the greatness of his goodness towards us surpasses every capacity of admiration. For this the blessed Habakkuk amazed for the manner of the Incarnation, exclaims with clear words: “Lord, I listened to your announcement; Lord, I was afraid of your work” (Hab. 3: 2). Because the Only Begotten, equal in nature to God the Father, though as God he was rich, made himself poor for our sake, so that we could become rich by means of his poverty (cfr. 2 Cor. 8: 9); and this in order to save that which was lost, to give strength to that which was weak, to bind up the wounds, to give back life to that which was dead and whiteness to that which was stained; in order to elevate to adoption as children those who by nature were servants. To him therefore give all praise: “Who is like you, O Lord?” So good as to forget offences, pardon the sins to the remainder of his people, Israel who had believed; the multitude of the others instead were completely lost, because they refused to believe.

But he did not close his anger in an everlasting testimony. They were repulsed in Adam, but welcomed back again in Christ. In the first they had the curse, in the second the blessing. As in fact because of the fall of only one man the multitude of men died, so also through the justice of only one man many will live. (Cfr. Rm. 5: 15)

He desisted from anger, because he wants mercy. In the time of conversion, which is of the Incarnation, he assumed human nature, Christ cast into the depths of the sea the sins of everyone. And because he had

promised to the holy fathers Abraham and Jacob that he would multiply their descendants as the stars of heaven, he gave them that which he had promised. They will be called the fathers of many nations: not only therefore of the descendants of Israel, but also of those who are called sons of the promise. All those, be it those who come from the faith – those converted, that is, from paganism – be it those who come from the circumcision, form only one spiritual unity.

It is written in fact: “not all the descendants of Israel are Israel... but only the children of the promise are considered as descendants” (Rm. 9: 6, 8). All those who have faith receive the blessing like Abraham who believed. And for blessing is understood the grace in Christ, through whom and in whom be glory to God the Father with the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Responsorial. *Gal. 3: 8 – 9; Jn. 17: 4*

R: The Scripture, foreseeing that God would have justified the pagans through the faith, pre announced to Abraham: In you all the nations will be blessed. * As a consequence those who have faith are blessed together with Abraham who believed.

V: God said to Abraham: Here I am, my Covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of peoples.

R: As a consequence those who have faith are blessed together with Abraham who believed.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 30: 18 – 26*

Promise of the eschatological happiness.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Yes, O people in Zion who dwell at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you.

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Then you will defile your silver-covered graven images and your gold-plated molten images. You will scatter them as unclean things; you will say to them, "Be gone!" And he will give rain for the seed with which you sow the ground, and grain, the produce of the ground, which will be rich and plenteous. In that day your cattle will graze in large pastures; and the oxen and the asses that till the ground will eat salted provender, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork.

And upon every lofty mountain and every high hill there will be brooks running with water, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the LORD binds up the hurt of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.

Responsorial. *Is. 30: 26, 18; Ps. 26: 14*

R: In that day the Lord will cure the wound of his people, the just God will heal the bruises of his blows: * blessed are those who hope in him!

V: Hope in the Lord, be strong, and reassure your heart.

R: blessed are those who hope in him!

Second Reading. *Nm. 9 – 11*

The Lord has loved us first.

A reading from the treatise “The contemplation of God” of William of Saint-Thierry, abbot.

You alone are the Lord. To be ruled by you is our salvation. For us to serve you is nothing else but to be saved by you!

Now how is it we are saved by you, O Lord, from whom salvation comes and whose blessing is upon your people, if it is not in receiving from you the gift of loving you and being loved by you? That, Lord, is why you willed that the Son of your right hand, the Man whom you made strong for your own self, should be called Jesus, that is to say, Saviour, for he will

save his people from their sins. In no other there is salvation except him. He taught us to love him when he first loved us, even to death on the cross. By loving us and holding us so dear he stirred us up to love himself, he who first loved us to the end.

You who first loved us did this, precisely this. You first loved us so that we might love you. And that was not because you needed to be loved by us, but because we could not be what you created us to be, except by loving you. Having then in many ways and on various occasions spoken to the fathers by the prophets, now in these last days you have spoken to us in the Son, your Word, by whom the heavens were established, and all the power of them by the breath of his mouth. For you to speak thus in your Son was an open declaration, a 'setting in the sun' as it were, of how much and in what sort of way you loved us, in that you spared not your own Son, but delivered him up for us all. Yes, and he himself loved us and gave himself for us.

This, Lord, is your word to us, this is your all-powerful message: he who, while all things kept silent (that is, were in the depths of error), came from the royal throne, the stern opponent of error and the gentle apostle of love. And everything he did and everything he said on earth, even the insults, the spitting, the buffeting, the cross and the grave, all that was nothing but yourself speaking in the Son, appealing to us by your love, and stirring up our love for you.

For you, O God, our soul's creator, knew that this affection cannot be forced in the souls of the sons of men, but has to be evoked. And this is for the obvious reason that there is no freedom where there is compulsion, and, where freedom is lacking, so too is righteousness.

We could not with justice have been saved, had we not loved you, nor could we have loved you, save by your gift. You willed, therefore, that we should love you. So, Lord, as the Apostle of your love tells us, and as we ourselves have said before, you 'first loved us'; and you love all your lovers first.

Now we on our part hold you dear by the affection of love that you have implanted in us. But, O you who are the One supremely good and the ultimate Goodness, your love is your goodness, the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son! From the beginning of creation he has been borne upon the waters – on the tossing souls of men, that is – offering himself to all, drawing all to himself. And by breathing into and upon them,

by warding off things harmful and supplying things useful, he unites God to us and us to God.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 54: 10, 13; 48: 17*

R: My love for you will never leave you, my covenant of peace will not be shaken, * all your children will be disciples of the Lord; their prosperity will be great.

V: I am the Lord your God: I instruct you for your own good, I will lead you in the way that you must go.

R: All your children will be disciples of the Lord; their prosperity will be great.

Gospel. *Mt: 21: 23 – 27*

The baptism of John, from where did it come?

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you a question; and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from men?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' we are afraid of the multitude; for all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Mic. 4: 1 – 7*

The going up of the Gentiles to the mountain of the Lord.

A reading from the prophet Micah.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

In that day, says the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant; and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and for evermore.

Responsorial. *Mic. 4: 2; Jn. 4: 25*

R: Many people will come and they will say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, * he will show us his ways and we will walk in his paths".

V: The Messiah will come, that is the Christ: when he comes he will announce everything.

R: he will show us his ways and we will walk in his paths.

Second Reading. *C. 3, 32*

The Lord will come and His teachings will surpass the Law.

A reading from the “Commentary on the prophet Malachi” of St. Cyril of Alexandria, bishop.

“Behold, I will send my messenger to prepare the way before me” (Mal. 3: 1). These prophetic words were attributed very opportunely to the mystery of Christ. God the Father has made him the Emmanuel for us: justice, sanctification and redemption, purification from every stain, liberation from sin, victory over evil, the way to a more holy and worthy way of living, and door of eternal life; through him everything was straightened, the powers of the devil were overturned, justice was found again.

“Behold, I will send my messenger to prepare the way before me”. These words seem to pre- announce the Baptist. In fact Christ himself says: “He is the one of whom it is written: Behold I send my messenger before you, who will prepare the way before you” (Mt. 11: 10). John also confirms this, saying to those who hasten to him in order to receive the baptism of conversion: “I baptise you with water, but after me comes one of whom I am not worthy to bend down in order to untie the straps of his sandals: he will baptise in the Holy Spirit and fire” (cfr. Mk. 1: 7; Mt. 3: 11).

“And the Lord, who you are searching for, will enter immediately into his temple; the angel of the covenant whom you hope for” (Mal. 3:1).

Do you see how the Christ came after his precursor, suddenly: he was kept hidden from all the Jews, and he appeared among them in a sudden and unexpected way. John here is called an angel, not intending this by nature, because he was a man born of a woman like us, but because he was entrusted with the mission of preaching and announcing Christ. The term is used to indicate his office, not to attribute to him the angelic nature.

It is said that the Lord will enter into his temple, because “The Word became flesh” (Jn. 1: 14) and in it he lives as in a temple, assumed from the most chaste body of the holy Virgin; or also because he was a perfect man, composed immediately, body and soul, by the divine Providence; or here is understood simply, for temple, Jerusalem, holy city consecrated to God, or the Church of which Jerusalem is a type.

Christ manifested his coming and his presence with many marvellous works: “preaching the good news of the Kingdom and curing every type of sickness and infirmity in the people”, as it is written (Mt. 4: 23). Therefore

will the Lord come, whom you are searching for, saying in your cowardice: where is the God of justice? He will come, and he will teach things that are superior to the law, to the symbols and to the figures. He will be the angel of the covenant that was pre-announced by the voice of God the Father. In a passage of the sacred books it is said to Moses: “I will raise up for them a prophet in the midst of their brothers and I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them all that I will command him” (Dt. 18: 18).

That the angel of the new covenant is Christ, Isaiah also attests saying of him: “Every shoe of the soldier in battle, and every cloak stained with blood will be burnt, will be tinder for the fire. Because a child is born for us, a son has been given to us. On his shoulder is the sign of his sovereignty and he will be called: admirable Counsellor” (Is. 9: 4 – 5). Certainly councillor of God the Father.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 2: 3; Ps. 49: 2*

R: The Lord will indicate his ways to us and we will be able to walk in his paths. * Because the law will go out from Sion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

V: From Sion, splendour of beauty, God shines.

R: Because the law will go out from Sion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 30: 27 – 33; 31: 4 – 9*

The Lord comes with power, to liberate Jerusalem.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Behold, the name of the LORD comes from far, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue is like a devouring fire; his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck; to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray.

You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one sets out to the sound of the flute to go to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel. And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and tempest and hailstones.

The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he smites with his rod. And every stroke of the staff of punishment that the LORD lays upon them will be to the sound of timbrels and lyres; battling with brandished arm he will fight with them. For a burning place has long been prepared; yes, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.

For thus the LORD said to me, As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called forth against him is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the LORD of hosts will come down to fight upon Mount Zion and upon its hill. Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it, he will spare and rescue it.

Turn to him from whom you have deeply revolted, O people of Israel. For in that day every one shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you. "And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labour. His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic," says the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.

Responsorial. *Is. 31: 4, 5; 30: 29*

R: The Lord of the universe will descend on mount Sion: * as the birds protect their young, so the Lord will protect Jerusalem.

V: You will lift up your hearts as on a night of feast; you will have joy in your hearts:

R: as the birds protect their young, so the Lord will protect Jerusalem.

Second Reading. *Bk. 2, cc. 2-3*

The humble and peaceful man.

A reading from the “Imitation of Christ”

Make no account of what man is for you or against you, but mind and take care of this, that God be with you in everything you do.

Have a good conscience, and God shall defend you well; for no man’s malice can hurt him whom God wills to help.

If you know how to be silent and to suffer, you shall without doubt see the help of the Lord.

He himself knows the time and the manner of your deliverance; and therefore it is your part to resign yourself into his hands.

It belongs to God to help us and deliver us from all trouble.

Many a time it is of much advantage towards keeping us in greater humility that others know and rebuke our faults.

When a man humbles himself for his faults, then he readily pacifies others, and easily satisfies those who are angry with him.

God protects the humble man and delivers him; the humble he loves and consoles; to the humble he inclines himself; on the humble he bestows abundant grace; and, after he has brought him low, he raises him up to glory.

To the humble man he reveals his secrets, and sweetly draws and invites him to himself.

The humble man though he suffers shame, remains in great peace; for he relies upon God and not upon the world.

Never think that you have made any progress, unless you esteem yourself inferior to all.

First keep yourself in peace, and then shall you be able to bring others to peace.

The peaceable man does more good than one that is very learned.

The passionate man turns even good to evil, and readily believes evil. But the good peaceable man turns all things to good.

He that is in perfect peace suspects no man. But he that is discontented and troubled is agitated by various suspicions; he neither has rest himself, nor suffers others to rest.

Many a time he says what he ought not to say, and leaves undone what it was better for him to do.

He considers what others ought to do, and neglects what he is bound to do himself.

Therefore, be zealous first of all regarding yourself, and then may you justly exercise zeal towards your neighbour also.

You know well how to excuse and gloss over your own deeds, but you are not willing to accept the excuses of others.

It was more just for you to accuse yourself and excuse your brother.

If you wish to be borne with, bear also with others.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 24: 9 – 10; Zec. 7: 9*

R: The Lord guides the humble according to justice, he teaches the poor his ways. * All the paths of God are truth and grace, for those who observe his covenant and precepts.

V: Practise justice and faithfulness, use kindness and mercy towards the brothers.

R: All the paths of God are truth and grace, for those who observe his covenant and precepts.

Gospel. *Mt. 21: 28 – 32*

John came and the sinners believed in him.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; and he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Mic. 5: 1 – 8*

The Messiah will be peace.

A reading from the prophet Micah.

Now you are walled about with a wall; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike upon the cheek the ruler of Israel. But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And this shall be peace, when the Assyrian comes into our land and treads upon our soil, that we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men; they shall rule the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod with the drawn sword; and they shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border.

Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers upon the grass, which tarry not for men nor wait for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep, which, when it goes through, treads down and tears in pieces, and there is none to deliver.

Responsorial. *Mic. 5: 1 – 3; Zec. 9: 10*

R: Bethlehem, from you will come out He who is to be the dominator in Israel; his origins are from antiquity, from the most remote days; he will be great up to the extreme ends of the earth. * When he will come, he will be peace.

V: He will announce peace to the nations and his dominion will be from sea to sea.

R: When he will come, he will be peace.

Second Reading. Ps. 60: 5 – 6

*When he has handed over the kingdom to the Father,
Christ will reign together with the elect.*

A reading from the “Treatise on the psalms” of St. Hillary, bishop.

“You have given me the inheritance of those who fear your name. To the days of the king you add other days, may his years be for many generations. May he reign always under the eyes of God” (Ps. 60: 6 – 8).

He who is holy will have as his inheritance life, incorruptibility, the kingdom, and eternal communion with God. This inheritance is not promised only to Israel, but to all those who fear the name of God.

The days of the king are eternal under various aspects. Either because the saints who are not enslaved to sin have a divine royalty, according to the words of the Apostle: “Without us you have already become kings. If only you had become kings! In this way we also could reign with you!” (1 Cor. 4: 8). Or, according to the text, the prophet himself is king. Finally, He who sits at the right hand of the Father in the eternal kingdom has to reign, until he puts all his enemies under his feet. It is not that now he is not king, but when he will have handed over the kingdom to the Father, he will reign in fullness together with his own, who have been made consorts of the kingdom. All this seems to me to explain how to the days of the king can be added other days, “for many generations” while he reigns forever under the eyes of God. In fact, the time in which he has to reign until he has put all the enemies under his feet, goes from one generation to another, because to the earthly generation follows the generation of a spiritual birth from among the dead; but the psalm affirms also the eternity of the king, who will reign forever under the eyes of God. He is in fact the first born from among the dead.

But the Lord in this way reminds the apostles of this second generation: “Truly I say to you, you who have followed me, in the new creation, when the Son of Man will be seated on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt. 19: 28). He shows therefore the time of this new creation, and until it arrives, to the days of the king always will be added days and years. But the eternal king will remain under the eyes of God in all his redeemed, who are made kings of the

heavens, his co-heirs of eternity, and he will hand them over as a kingdom to the Father.

And because they have become co-participants and co- corporeal and configured with him, and rescued from the devil from corruption and death, and full of the fullness of God, the spirit of the prophet adds: “Which of them will search for his grace and faithfulness?” (cfr. Ps. 60: 8 vulg.). These elect will not need any more grace and faithfulness, because Christ in himself has regenerated them from death to life, and they have persevered in hope of the glory of God; for this, handed over by him as a kingdom to the Father, they will be received as kings, totally perfect in the grace and faithfulness of Christ, happy to have been re-conquered by him for life and admitted to the encounter with the Father. After this, grace and faithfulness will not be asked anymore of the Lord, because everyone will be full of the fullness of God.

Responsorial. *Is. 30: 18; Heb. 9: 28*

R: The Lord waits to show you his favour; for this he rises to have pity on you, because the Lord is a just God; * blessed are those who hope in him.

V: He will appear to those who await their salvation from him.

R: Blessed are those who hope in him.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 31: 1 – 3; 32: 1 – 8*

There will be a kingdom of justice.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD! And yet he is wise and brings disaster, he does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the helpers of those who work iniquity.

The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.

Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.

Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears of those who hear will hearken. The mind of the rash will have good judgment, and the tongue of the stammerers will speak readily and distinctly.

The fool will no more be called noble, nor the knave said to be honourable. For the fool speaks folly, and his mind plots iniquity: to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the LORD, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink.

The knaveries of the knave are evil; he devises wicked devices to ruin the poor with lying words, even when the plea of the needy is right. But he who is noble devises noble things, and by noble things he stands.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 32: 3, 4; Jer. 23: 5*

R: The eyes of those who see will not be closed anymore, and the ears of those who hear will be attentive; * the hearts of the fools will learn wisdom.

V: I will make a just shoot to be born from David: he will reign and will be wise;

R: the hearts of the fools will learn wisdom.

Second Reading. *Bk. 4, 20. 4 – 5*

At the coming of Christ, God will be seen by men.

A reading from the Treatise “Against the heresies” of St. Irenaeus, bishop.

There is one God, who by his Word and Wisdom made and ordered all things. His Word is our Lord Jesus Christ who in these last times became man among men, that he might unite the end with the beginning, that is, Man with God. Therefore the prophets who received from this same Word their prophetic gift, proclaimed his advent in the flesh, by which was effected the mingling and uniting of God and man according to the Father’s pleasure. For the Word of God foretold from the beginning that God would be seen by men and would live with them on earth and converse with them; that he would be present with his creatures to bring salvation to them and to

be perceived by them; that he would free us from the hands of those who hate us, that is, from the whole spirit of transgression; and would make us serve him all our days in holiness and righteousness; that man, taking to himself the Spirit of God, would pass to the glory of the Father.

The prophets therefore indicated beforehand that men would see God; as the Lord also says: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God".

I grant that in respect of his greatness and marvellous glory, no man shall see God and live, for the Father is incomprehensible. But in respect of his love and kindly mercy, and of his infinite power, he grants even this to such as love him, I mean, to see God, as the prophets also foretold. Because the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

Man does not see God by his own powers; but God of his own will appears to men, to whom he wills, and when he wills, and as he wills. For God can do all things: he was seen in former times prophetically through the Spirit, he is seen in the Son, giving us adoption as children, and he will be seen in the kingdom of heaven fully as Father. The Spirit prepares man for the Son of God, the Son brings him to the Father, and the Father bestows on him incorruptibility for eternal life, which comes to everyone from his beholding God.

As those who see the light are in the light, and partake of its splendour, so those who see God are in God, partaking of his splendour. But God's splendour gives life; those therefore who see God will partake of life.

Responsorial. *Dt. 18: 18; Lk. 20: 13; Jn. 6: 14*

R: I will raise up a prophet for them from the midst of their brothers, and I will put my words in his mouth * and he will tell them all that I will command him.

V: I will send my most beloved son; this is truly the prophet who is to come into the world.

R: and he will tell them all that I will command him.

Gospel. *Lk. 7: 19 – 23*

Go tell John what you have seen and heard.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

And John, calling to him two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, `Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?'"

In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me."

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Mic. 7: 7 – 13*

The city of God awaits salvation.

A reading from the prophet Micah.

But as for me, I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I shall behold his deliverance.

Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?" My eyes will gloat over her; now she will be trodden down like the mire of the streets. A day for the building of your walls! In that day the boundary shall be far extended. In that day they will come to you, from Assyria to Egypt, and from Egypt to the River, from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain. But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their doings.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Mic. 7: 7; Gn. 49: 18*

R: I turn my gaze to the Lord, * I await the God of my salvation.

V: I hope in your salvation, Lord.

R: I await the God of my salvation.

Second Reading. *Disc. 11: 4 – 6*

For he who searches for God, the way is Christ.

A reading from the “Commentary on Psalm 118” of St. Ambrose, bishop.

The just man who fears the Lord does not desire anything else other than the salvation of God, Christ Jesus. For him he yearns, he desires him, to him he stretches out with all his strength; he keeps with ardour his memory, he opens himself to him with effusion, and fears only one thing:

the possibility of losing him. For this, the greater the desire of the avid soul to unite itself to its Saviour, the more it languishes. But this languor diminishes its fragility and makes its virtue grow.

For this the just man, after having said in another text: “My soul thirsts for you” adds: “To you my soul draws near, and the strength of your right hand sustains me” (Ps. 62: 2, 9).

He who thirsts desires to remain attached to the source and seems to search avidly and feels nothing else than the water, in order to feed himself only of its contact. When your right hand sustains my soul and communicates to it its strength, it makes it become what it was not, so that it can say: “It is not anymore I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2: 20).

But then to learn also from an example that this languishing is derived from the intensity of the desire: “My soul languishes and yearns for the courts of the Lord”(Ps. 83: 3). Jeremiah teaches us in what way the soul languishes because of the desire of salvation: “In my heart there was something like a burning fire, enclosed in my bones; I forced myself to contain it, but could not” (Jer. 20: 9). And David, enflamed by this desire: “I am consumed in waiting for your salvation, I hope in your word” (Ps. 118: 81).

He hoped in the word, announced as coming soon, which can be said of the Word of God. Either he hoped because he believed in the heavenly word that foretold the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, or that proclaimed his glory. The prophet reflected on the things that were written and recognised that, as long as he was restrained in the body and tied by the chains of this present life, he was far away from the Salvation of God; and for this he desired, yearned, languished, and consumed himself in order to become totally the possession of Him for whom he yearned, as he himself says: “In front of him I pour forth my lament” (Ps. 141: 3). His spirit languishes, or better becomes faint, in that he denies himself in order to unite himself to Christ. To him who searches for God, the way is Christ. Let us also desire with ardour that eternal Salvation of God: Let us not desire money, like the avaricious. Let our soul elevate itself, become faint to its personal vitality in order to adhere to the Salvation of God who is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Salvation, the Truth, the Strength, and the Wisdom. He, who becomes faint to himself in order to unite himself to the Strength, loses that which belongs to himself in order to receive that which is eternal.

Responsorial. *Lam. 3: 40 – 41; Is. 55: 6*

R: Let us examine and scrutinise our conduct, let us return to the Lord. *
Let us raise up our hearts above our hands, towards God who is in the heavens.

V: Search for the Lord while he is still to be found, invoke him while he is still near.

R: Let us raise up our hearts above our hands, towards God who is in the heavens

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 32: 15 – 33: 6*

He who hopes in the Lord will see the salvation.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

On that day the Spirit will be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. And the forest will utterly go down, and the city will be utterly laid low. Happy are you who sow beside all waters, who let the feet of the ox and the ass range free.

Woe to you, destroyer, who yourself have not been destroyed; you treacherous one, with whom none has dealt treacherously! When you have ceased to destroy, you will be destroyed; and when you have made an end of dealing treacherously, you will be dealt with treacherously.

O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble. At the thunderous noise peoples flee, at the lifting up of yourself nations are scattered; and spoil is gathered as the caterpillar gathers; as locusts leap, men leap upon it.

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness; and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is his treasure.

Responsorial. *Is. 32: 18, 17; Jn. 14: 27*

R: My people will live in a serene dwelling, in tranquil inhabitation: * the fruit of justice will be peace.

V: My peace I give to you: let your hearts not be troubled and do not fear.

R: the fruit of justice will be peace.

Second Reading. *Nm. 3 – 4*

Christ completes the revelation.

A reading from the dogmatic Constitution “Dei Verbum” of the second Vatican Council on Divine Revelation.

God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see Rom. 2:6-7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Saviour promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, "now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as "a man to men." (3) He "speaks the words of God" (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; 17:4). To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover

He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.

The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1Tim. 6:14&Tit. 2:13).

Responsorial. *Is. 30: 20 – 21; Dt. 18: 15*

R: Your eyes will see your master, * your ears will hear the word: This is the way, walk along it.

V: The Lord your God will raise up a prophet for you from your people, from among your brothers;

R: your ears will hear the word: This is the way, walk along it.

Gospel. *Lk. 7: 24 – 30*

John is the messenger who prepares the way of the Lord.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

When the messengers of John had gone, he began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are gorgeously appavelled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." When they heard this all the people and the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John; but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Mic. 7: 14 – 20*

The salvation is in the forgiveness of faults.

A reading from the prophet Micah.

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old.

As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt I will show them marvellous things. The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; they shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds, they shall turn in dread to the LORD our God, and they shall fear because of you.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Responsorial. *Mic. 7: 19*

R: Our God will return to have pity on us * he will tread underfoot our faults and throw all our sins to the bottom of the sea.

V: All the prophets render this witness to him: whoever believes in him will obtain the remission of sins through his name.

R: He will tread underfoot our faults and throw all our sins to the bottom of the sea.

Second Reading. *Nm. 8 – 9*

The Word of God has come because of his goodness towards us.

A reading from the treatise “On the Incarnation of the Word” of St. Athanasius, bishop.

For being Word of the Father, he transcends everything: He alone was able to recreate everything; he alone was worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father.

The Word, then, visited that earth in which He was yet always present; and saw all these evils. He takes a body of our Nature, and that of a spotless Virgin, in whose womb He makes it His own, wherein to reveal Himself, conquer death, and restore life. For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes to our realm, though he was not far from us before. For no part of Creation is left void of Him: He has filled all things everywhere, remaining present with His own Father. But He comes in condescension to show loving-kindness upon us, and to visit us. And seeing the race of rational creatures on the way to perish, and death reigning over them by corruption; seeing, too, that the threat against transgression gave a firm hold to the corruption which was upon us, and that it was monstrous that before the law was fulfilled it should fall through: seeing, once more, the unseemliness of what was come to pass: that the things whereof He Himself was Artificer were passing away: seeing, further, the exceeding wickedness of men, and how by little and little they had increased it to an intolerable pitch against themselves: and seeing, lastly, how all men were under penalty of death: He took pity on our race, and had mercy on our infirmity, and condescended to our corruption, and, unable to bear that death should have the mastery — lest the creature should perish, and His Father's handiwork in men be spent for nought — He takes unto Himself a body, and that of no different sort from ours. For He did not simply will to become embodied, or will merely to appear. For if He willed merely to appear, He was able to affect His divine appearance by some other and higher means as well. But He takes a body of our kind, and not merely so, but from a spotless and stainless virgin, knowing not a man, a body clean and in very truth pure from intercourse of men.

For being Himself mighty, and Artificer of everything, He prepares the body in the Virgin as a temple unto Himself, and makes it His very own as an instrument, in it manifested, and in it dwelling.

And thus taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave 'it over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father — doing this, moreover, of His loving-kindness, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power

was fully spent in the Lord's body, and had no longer holding-ground against men, his peers), and that, secondly, whereas men had turned toward corruption, He might turn them again toward incorruption, and quicken them from death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw is consumed in fire .

The Word, since death alone could stay the plague, took a mortal body which, united with Him, should avail for all, and by partaking of this immortality stay the corruption of the Race. By being above all, He made His Flesh an offering for our souls; by being one with us all, He clothed us with immortality. Similar to illustrate this. For the Word, perceiving that no otherwise could the corruption of men be undone save by death as a necessary condition, while it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, and Son of the Father; to this end He takes to Himself a body capable of death, that it, by partaking of the Word Who is above all, might be worthy to die in the stead of all, and might, because of the Word which was come to dwell in it, remain incorruptible, and that thenceforth corruption might be stayed from all by the Grace of the Resurrection. Whence, by offering unto death the body He Himself had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from any stain, straightway He put away death from all His peers by the offering of an equivalent.

For being over all, the Word of God naturally by offering His own temple and corporeal instrument for the life of all satisfied the debt by His death. And thus He, the incorruptible Son of God, being conjoined with all by a like nature, naturally clothed all with incorruptibility, by the promise of the resurrection.

Responsorial. *Phil. 2: 6 – 7; 1 Jn. 4: 10*

R: Christ, even though he was of divine nature did not consider his equality with God as a jealous treasure. * He undressed himself assuming the condition of a servant.

V: God sent his son as a victim of expiation for our sins.

R: He undressed himself assuming the condition of a servant.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 33: 7 – 24*

The future salvation.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Behold, the valiant ones cry without; the envoys of peace weep bitterly. The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceases.

Covenants are broken, witnesses are despised, there is no regard for man. The land mourns and languishes; Lebanon is confounded and withers away; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.

"Now I will arise," says the LORD, "now I will lift myself up; now I will be exalted. You conceive chaff, you bring forth stubble; your breath is a fire that will consume you. And the peoples will be as if burned to lime, like thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire." Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might.

The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?"

He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil, he will dwell on the heights; his place of defence will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him, his water will be sure.

Your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches afar. Your mind will muse on the terror: "Where is he who counted, where is he who weighed the tribute? Where is he who counted the towers?" You will see no more the insolent people, the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a tongue that you cannot understand.

Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts! Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken. But there the LORD in majesty will be for us a place of broad rivers and streams, where no galley with oars can go, nor stately ship can pass. For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our ruler, the LORD is our king; he will save us. Your tackle hangs loose; it cannot hold the mast firm in its place, or keep the sail spread out.

Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided; even the lame will take the prey. And no inhabitant will say, "I am sick"; the people who dwell

there will be forgiven their iniquity.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 33: 22; Ps. 96: 1*

R: The Lord is our law, king and our judge: *he will come and save us.

V: The Lord reigns, the earth exults, all the islands rejoice.

R: He will come and save us.

Second Reading. *Ps. 37, 13 – 14*

Your desire is your prayer.

A reading from the “Commentary on the psalms” of St. Augustine, bishop.

‘I cried aloud with the groaning of my heart’. There is a hidden groaning that human ears cannot catch. However, if a man’s heart is so obsessed with the thought of some longed-for object that his inward suffering is expressed very audibly, somebody will want to know the reason, and will say to himself: ‘Perhaps such and such a thing has caused his grief; perhaps this or that is the matter with him’. Who can know, except he in whose sight and hearing the suppliant groans? The reason why the psalmist says: ‘I cried aloud with the groaning of my heart’ is that when men hear another man groaning, what they hear is often the groaning of the flesh, they do not hear the groaning of the heart.

Now who has understood why he cried aloud? He goes on: ‘And all my desire is before you’. Not indeed before men, who cannot see into the heart: but ‘before you is all my desire’. Set your desire on him, and the Father who sees in secret will repay you. This very desire of yours is your prayer. If your desire is continual, your prayer is continual too. It was not for nothing that the Apostle said: ‘Pray without ceasing’. Was it so that we should be continuously on our knees, or prostrating our bodies or raising our hands that he says: ‘Pray without ceasing’? If that is how we say our prayers, then my opinion is that we cannot do that without ceasing.

But there is another and interior way of praying without ceasing, and that is the way of desire. Whatever else you are doing, if you long for that Sabbath, you are not ceasing to pray. If you do not want to cease praying, do not cease longing. Your unceasing desire is your unceasing voice. You will lapse into silence if you lose your longing. Who did lapse into silence? Those of whom it was said: ‘Because wickedness is multiplied, the charity

of many will grow cold'. The coldness of charity is the heart's silence; its glowing ardour, the heart's outcry. If charity is always present, you are ever crying out; if always crying out, you are ever longing; if longing, you have not forgotten repose.

'And all my desire is before you'. What if the desire is before him and the actual groaning is not? Would it be possible, since the groaning is merely the expression of the desire? Therefore the psalmist continues: 'And my groaning is not hidden from you'. From you it is not hidden; from many a human being it is. Sometimes one hears a lowly servant of God crying: 'And my groaning is not hidden from you'. And sometimes one sees the same servant of God with a cheerful face: has that desire perished from his heart? No, if the desire is always within, so too is the groaning: it does not always come to the ears of men, but it is never absent from the ears of God.

Responsorial. *St. Augustine, comm. to Ps. 86: 1*

R: While we are yet pilgrims and living in Christ, let us sing to the Lord that we may long for him until we come into his presence, * for the man who desires God sings to him in his heart even though his tongue be silent.

V. He who has no desire for God is like a dumb man before him, even though he cries as much as he wants.

R: for the man who desires God sings to him in his heart even though his tongue be silent.

Gospel. *Jn. 5: 33 – 36*

John is the burning and shining lamp.

A reading from the Gospel of St. John.

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me.

SATURDAY

Saturday of the III week of Advent falls always on a day that follows 16 December: therefore the readings, the responsorial and the orations are found with respect to the date.