

**READINGS
FOR
ADVENT
AND
CHRISTMAS TIME
VOLUME 1**

PRO MANUSCRIPTO
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WEEK 1

SUNDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 6: 1 – 13*

Vocation of Isaiah.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, he had in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And he said, "Go, and say to this people: `

Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without men, and the land is utterly desolate, and the LORD removes men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

Responsorial. *Ex. 4: 13; Ps. 79:2*

R: Forgive me, Lord, send whom you want, see the affliction of your people; * as you have said, come and liberate us.

V: You, shepherd of Israel, listen, you who lead Joseph like a flock, you who sit on the cherubim.

R: as you have said, come and liberate us.

Second Reading. *Disc. 1 for Advent.*

Advent is the remembrance of the double coming of the Lord.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Aelred, abbot.

This happy time that we call “Advent of the Lord”, presents for our meditation, a double motive for joy, because twofold is the gift that it brings us.

Advent reminds us of a twofold coming of the Lord: that very sweet one that for a long time was awaited and desired ardently by all the fathers, in which “the most beautiful among the sons of man” (Ps. 44: 3), “the Desired One of all the peoples” (Hag. 2: 8 vulg.), the Son of God, manifested in this world his visible presence in the flesh, when he came on the earth to save sinners; and then the coming that we still await with sure hope, when our same Lord, who before had appeared under the veil of our humanity, will appear brilliant in his glory, as the psalm sings: “ Our God comes” (Ps. 49:3).

His first coming was known by a few just men; in the second he will manifest himself with complete evidence to the just and the reprobate, as the prophet insinuates clearly: “Every man will see the salvation of God” (cfr. Is. 52: 10). The day that we will celebrate shortly in memory of his birth presents him born to us, and particularly it recalls to us the day and the hour of his coming into the world; instead this time that we are celebrating in precedence reminds us of the Desired One, that is the desire of the holy fathers who lived before his birth.

Very justly the Church has established that in this time the words and the desires of those who preceded the first coming of the Lord are read and remembered.

And we do not celebrate this waiting only for one day, but for a time that is quite long; because it is a fact of experience that the things that are

deeply desired, if they have to be awaited for a certain time, are sweeter when that which we love is made present.

It is for us, therefore, dearest brothers, to follow the examples of the holy fathers, to cultivate in ourselves their desires, and thus to alight in our souls the love and longing for Christ.

The celebrations of this time were instituted exactly to make us reflect on the fervent expectation of our fathers for the first coming of the Lord, and so that we may learn from their example to greatly desire his second coming.

Let us think again of how many goods the Lord gave us with his first advent; and how much greater ones he will give us with his second. This consideration brings us to love all the more the mystery of his birth and to desire much more his second coming. And if we do not have that good conscience that dares to desire the hour in which Christ will return, we must at least fear it, and through that fear correct ourselves of our vices. Because, if it happens that now we are unable to be without fear, at least we will not have to fear when he will come, but we can then feel tranquil.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jer. 31: 10*

R: Listen to the word of the Lord, you peoples, announce it to the extreme points of the earth, * and to the distant islands say: Our Saviour comes!

V: Carry the announcement and spread the news, speak and cry out;

R: and to the distant islands say: Our Saviour comes!

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 1: 1- 18*

God rebukes his people.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzzi'ah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezeki'ah, kings of Judah.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The

ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand."

Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be smitten, that you continue to rebel?

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they are not pressed out, or bound up, or softened with oil.

Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by aliens. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomor'rah.

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomor'rah!

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

"When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of assemblies -- I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Responsorial. *Is. 1: 16, 18, 17*

R: Wash, purify yourselves, remove from my sight the evil of your actions.

* Even if your sins were like scarlet, they will become white as snow.

V: Cease to do evil, learn to do good, search for justice:

R: even if your sins were like scarlet, they will become white as snow.

Second Reading. Cat. 15, 1. 3

The two comings of Christ.

A reading from the “Catechesis” of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop.

We preach not one advent only of Christ, but a second also, far more glorious than the former. For the former, in fact, had the seal of the suffering; but the latter brings with it the crown of divine royalty. For all things, for the most part, are twofold in our Lord Jesus Christ: a twofold generation; one, of God, before the ages; and one, of a Virgin, at the close of the ages: His descent in history is twofold; one, unobserved and in silence, like dew on a fleece; and the second time, still in the future, His coming, in splendour and clarity in front of the eyes of everyone.

In His former advent, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger; in His second, He will cover Himself with light as with a garment.

In His first coming, He endured the Cross, without refusing the dishonour; in His second, He comes in glory attended by a host of Angels.

Let us not limit ourselves to meditate only on his first coming, but let us live in expectation of His second. And as at His first coming we said, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord (Mt. 21: 9), so will we repeat the same at His second coming; that when with Angels we meet our Master, we may worship Him and say, Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.

The Saviour comes, not to be judged again, but to judge them who judged Him; He who before held His peace when judged, shall remind the transgressors who did those daring deeds at the Cross, and shall say, These things have you done, and I kept silence.

Then, He came because of a divine dispensation, teaching men with persuasion; but this time they will of necessity have Him for their King,

even though they wish it not.

The prophet Malachi pre announces the two comings of the Lord: “and he will enter immediately into his temple the Lord whom you are searching for” (Mal. 3: 1). This is the first coming. And then with regard to the second he says: “Behold the angel of the covenant, that you yearn for, look he comes... who will bear the day of his coming? Who will resist his appearing? He is like the fire of the melter and like the washers lye. He will sit down to melt and to purify” (Mal. 3: 1-3). Paul also knew these two comings, when writing to Titus and saying, The grace of God has appeared which brings salvation unto all men, instructing us that, renouncing ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and godly, and righteously in this present world; looking for the blessed hope, and appearing of the glory of the great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. You see how he spoke of a first coming, for which he gives thanks; and of a second, to which we look forward.

Hence it is that by the faith we profess, which has just been handed on to you; that we believe in him, who also ascended into the heavens, and sat down at the right hand of the Father and shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, then, comes from heaven; and He comes with glory at the end of this world, on the last day. For of this world there is to be an end, and this created world is to be remade anew.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ez. 34: 11; Ps. 79 : 2 ; 23 : 9*

R: I looked from a distance, and I saw the power of the Lord arriving, like a cloud that covers the earth; * go out to meet him and say: *are you the one we are waiting for, * the King of the house of Israel?

V: All of you, inhabitants of the land, sons of man, poor and rich together,

R: go out to meet him and say:

V: Shepherd of Israel, listen, you who lead the people like a flock,

R: are you the one we are waiting for?

V: Gates lift up your heads; rise up ancient doors: let the king of glory enter,

R: the King of the house of Israel.

Repeat:

I looked from a distance, and I saw the power of the Lord arriving, like a cloud that covers the earth. Go out to meet him and say: are you the one we are waiting for, the King of the house of Israel?

YEAR A

Gospel. *Mt. 24: 37 – 44*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man.

Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Third Reading. *Bk. 2: 24*

Keep vigil in order to be prepared.

A reading from the “Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew” of St. Pascasio Radberto, abbot.

“Keep vigil, because you do not know the day nor the hour” (Mt. 25: 13). He says this to everyone, even if it seems that he is addressing only the men of that time, as it happens in many other passages of Scripture. These words regard everyone in the same way, because each one, with his death, will find his final day and the end of the world.

It is inevitable that every one goes out of this world and will be judged on that day.

Man therefore has to take care not to deviate and to never cease from vigilance, so that the day of the coming of the Lord may not find him

unprepared. And he will find unprepared he who will have been found so on the last day of his life.

I think that the apostles knew that the Lord would not have come in their days for the final judgement; yet, without doubt, they took care not to fall in deception, they kept vigil and put in practice that which had been commanded to all, so that the Lord could find them prepared

We have to always keep present the double coming of Christ: one when he will appear and we will have to give account of all our actions; the other of every day, when he visits continuously our conscience and comes to us, so that at his arrival we may find ourselves prepared.

What use is it to me to know which will be the day of judgement, while I am conscious of so many sins? To know if the Lord will come or when he will come, if he does not come first of all in my soul, and does not return in my spirit, if Christ does not live in me and speak to me?

For me his coming is a good, if already Christ lives in me, or I in him. And for me it is already almost the hour of his second coming when the values of this world are eclipsed in my eyes and in a certain way I can say: "The world for me has been crucified, and I for the world" (Gal. 6: 14).

Consider also these other words of Christ: "Many will come in my name" (Mt. 24: 5)

This falsity characterises the antichrist and his followers, who assume the name of Christ without having his works, nor his word of truth nor his wisdom.

In no place of the Scripture is it found that the Lord had used the expression: "I am the Christ". It was enough for him to demonstrate with the doctrine and miracles who he really was, because in him the work of the Father, the doctrine that he taught and his power cried out: "I am the Christ" much more than if a thousand voices were to cry out.

I don't know if it is found that He had to affirm with words, but he demonstrated that he was the Christ fulfilling the works of the Father and teaching love; the false christs, not possessing this, with words proclaimed themselves to be that which they were not.

Responsorial. *Act. 17: 30 – 31; 14, 16*

R: After having passed over to the times of ignorance, * now God orders all men of all places to mend one's ways, because he has established a day in which he has to judge the earth with justice.

V: In the past generations he left every people to follow their road.

R: now God orders all men of all places to mend one's ways, because he has established a day in which he has to judge the earth with justice

YEAR B

Gospel. *Mk. 13: 33 – 37*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Mark

Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning -- lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."

Third Reading. *Disc. 18: 1 – 2*

God does not like to condemn, but to save.

A reading from the "Discourses" of St. Augustine, bishop.

"Our God comes and he will not be silent" (Ps. 49: 3). Christ Lord, our God, Son of God, at his first advent made himself present in a veiled way, but his second coming will be manifest. When he came in a veiled form he was not recognised other than by his servants; when he will come in a clear form the good and the evil will see him.

When he came under the veil of his humanity, he came to be judged; when he will come in a way that is manifest, he will come to judge. When he was judged he kept quiet and of his silence the prophet had prophesied: "Like a lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep in front of its shearers, he did not open his mouth" (Is. 53: 7).

But "Our God comes and he will not be silent". He kept quiet while he suffered the judgement, but he will not keep quiet in the same way when it will be he who judges. And now he does not keep quiet, if there is someone who listens to him; but it is said: "he will not keep quiet", when even those who now despise him will recognise his voice. Now, when the

commandments of God are announced, someone laughs. Because the things promised by God are not visible now, and the fulfilment of his threats, cannot be touched by hand for now, we make fun of his precepts now. For now even the wicked have the so called happiness of this world: and even the good suffer the so called unhappiness.

The men who believe in the present reality and do not believe in that future one observe that the goods and the evils of this world are for both the good and the wicked, without distinction. If they desire riches, they see them possessed by very bad people and by respectable persons. And they see also, if they are horrified by the poverty and the misery of this world, that of this not only the good but also the wicked suffer. And in their hearts they say that God neither sees nor governs human things, but that he has completely abandoned us to chance in the deep abyss of this world, and does not have any care for us. And because they do not see any manifestation of his judgement, they despise his commandments.

However even now each one must reflect that, when he wants, God sees and condemns without delay, and when he wants he is patient. And for what reason? Because if at the present he does not ever manifest his judgement, we would believe that God does not exist; and if he was to always manifest himself, nothing would be reserved for the final judgement. Many things are reserved for condemnation and some are punished immediately, exactly because those to whom are conceded a deferment may fear and convert. God does not like to condemn, but wants to save, and therefore he is patient with the wicked, in order to render the wicked into good.

The Apostle says that the “anger of God is revealed against all wickedness” (Rm. 1: 18) and that “God will render to each one according to his works” (Rm. 2: 6). But he admonishes and rebukes the man who does not care about God: “You make fun of his richness and goodness and of his tolerance?” (Rm. 2: 4). Because he is good with you, he is forbearing, he is patient, because he waits for you and he will not take you away from the world, you despise him, and consider as nothing the divine judgement, and do not recognise that the “goodness of God pushes you to conversion. You with your hardness and with your unrepentant heart accumulate anger on yourself for the day of the anger and revelation of the just judgement of God, who will render to each one according to his works” (Rm. 2: 4 – 6)

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

R: The Lord waits to give you grace, for this he arises, 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 wait for their salvation.

R: Blessed are those who hope in him.

YEAR C

Gospel. *Lk. 21: 25 – 28; 34 – 36*

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." "But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man."

Third Reading. *Disc. 4 on Advent, 1: 3 – 4*

The gift of Advent.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Bernard, abbot.

Brothers, celebrate as you should, with great fervour of spirit, the Advent of the Lord, with living joy for the gift that is made to you and with profound gratitude for the love that is being shown to you.

Do not however meditate only on the first coming of the Lord, when he entered into the world to search and to save that which was lost, but also on the second, when he will return to unite us to himself forever.

Make the double visit of the Christ an object of contemplation, reflecting on how much he has given us in the first and on how much he has promised us for the second.

“The moment has arrived in fact”, brothers, “in which the judgement starting from the house of God begins” (1 Pt. 4: 17). But what will be the fate of those who now refuse this judgement? He in fact who draws himself away from the present judgement in which the prince of this world is thrown out, expects, or above all, fears the future Judge by whom he will be thrown out together with his prince. If instead we submit already now to a just judgement, we are safe, and “await the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour, who will transfigure our miserable bodies in order to conform it to his glorious body” (Phil. 3: 20 – 21). “Then the just will shine out like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mt. 13: 43).

“The Saviour will transfigure” with his coming “our miserable body in order to conform it to his glorious body” only if we have already renewed and conformed our hearts in humility to his. For this he says: “Learn from me who am meek and humble of heart” (Mt. 11: 29). Consider in these words the double species of humility, that of the conscience and that of the will.

This last one here is called humility of the heart. With the first we come to know our nothingness, as we deduce from the experience of ourselves and from our weaknesses. With the second we refuse the vainglory of the world. We learn the humility of the heart from him who “undressed himself, assuming the condition of a servant” (Phil. 2: 7), from him who when he was sought for in order to be made king, fled; and instead when he was sought for in order to be covered with insults and condemned to disgrace and to the torture of the cross, offered himself of his own spontaneous will.

Responsorial. *Lk. 21: 34 – 35; Dt. 32: 35*

R: That day will come suddenly like a snare on all those who inhabit the face of the earth. * Keep vigil and pray in every moment, in order to have the strength to escape all that is to happen.

V: The day of ruin is close, and that time will come quickly.

R: Keep vigil and pray in every moment, in order to have the strength to escape all that is to happen.

Oration. O God, our Father, arouse in us the will to go to meet with good works your Christ who comes, so that he may call us to be near him in his glory to possess the kingdom of heaven. We ask this through Our Lord

Jesus Christ, your Son, who is God, and lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

MONDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 7: 1 – 17*

The sign of the Emmanuel.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzzi'ah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remali'ah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but they could not conquer it.

When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with E'phraim," his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go forth to meet Ahaz, you and She'ar-jash'ub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field, and say to him, 'Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smouldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remali'ah. Because Syria, with E'phraim and the son of Remali'ah, has devised evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Ta'be-el as king in the midst of it,"

Thus says the Lord GOD: It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. (Within sixty-five years E'phraim will be broken to pieces so that it will no longer be a people.) And the head of E'phraim is Sama'ria, and the head of Sama'ria is the son of Remali'ah. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.'"

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test."

And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Imman'u-el. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child

knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that E'phraim departed from Judah -- the king of Assyria."

Responsorial *Lk. 1: 31, 32*

R: Behold you will conceive and give to the light a son, * and you will call him Jesus.

V: The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,

R: and you will call him Jesus.

Second Reading *Ps. 14, 4 – 6*

The foundation of our building is Christ.

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

“Lord, who will live in your tent? Who will dwell on your holy mountain?” (Ps. 14:1). The first and most important step for the one who ascends to the heavenly things is to live in his own tent and to pass the whole life, night and day, far away from all worries and from all the affairs of this world, that never go far away from the tent.

But the greater and more sublime heavenly things have to be imagined under the figure of a mountain. And what is more sublime than Christ? What is more excellent than our God? The mountain of Christ is the humanity that he assumed, in which he now lives, sublime and excellent above every principality and power, and every name. The city that cannot remain hidden is built on this mountain, because, as the Apostle says: “No one can put a foundation different from Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

Those who are in Christ have been elected in his mystical body before the creation of the world, and the Church is the body of Christ; the foundation of our building is Christ and the city is built on top of the mountain: it follows therefore that Christ is the mountain on which it is asked who can dwell.

In another psalm we read: “Who will climb the mountain of the Lord, who will stay in his holy place?” (Ps. 23:3).

And Isaiah attests: “At the end of days the mountain of the Lord will be lifted up on the peaks of the mountains, and they will say: Come, let us go

up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob” (Is. 2:2,3).

And Paul again: “You have drawn near to the mount Sion, and to Jerusalem the city of the living God” (Heb. 12: 22).

Now, if every hope of rest for us is in the humanity of Christ, and we have to dwell on the mountain, we cannot understand for mountain anything other than the humanity that he took from us, before which he was God and in which is God, and by means of which he transfigured our poor bodies, conforming them to his glorious body: on condition however that we also have nailed to his cross the vices of our humanity, in order to rise in his. After having dwelt in the Church, we rise to the humanity of Christ and find rest on the heights of the Lord; there we will be companions of the angelic choirs, because we also are the city of God. Rest is found, because there will not be pain caused by sickness, nor any fear because of poverty: but everyone will enjoy the full stability of eternal life and outside of it they will not have any desire.

For this to the question: “Lord, who will live in your tent? Who will dwell on your holy mountain?” (Ps. 14: 1), the Holy Spirit answers through the prophet: “He who walks without blame and acts with justice” (Ps. 14: 2).

He who after baptism has not committed sin and whose conscience is without stain and tidy is the one who walks in innocence and lives free of all fault. It is certainly a great thing to abstain from evil, but it is not yet the rest that concludes in a way: the journey has had a beginning, but it is not yet finished. In fact the text continues: “And acts with justice”, because good must not only be thought of, but operated; the good will does not only begin, but brings the good to fulfilment.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Heb. 7: 4, 2, 3*

R: Consider how great is this one who comes to save the people: * He is the king of justice, without beginning of days or end of life.

V: He has entered like a forerunner for us, has become the high priest forever like Melchizedek.

R: He is the king of justice, without beginning of days or end of life.

First Reading. *Is. 1: 21- 27; 2: 1- 5*

*Judgement and salvation for Sion,
the centre of the eschatological kingdom.*

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice!
Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water.

Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Every one loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them.

Therefore the Lord says, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel:
"Ah, I will vent my wrath on my enemies, and avenge myself on my foes.

I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy.

And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city." Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 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 above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples 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 that 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 the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

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

R: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the temple of the God of Jacob: He will indicate his ways to us, * and we will walk in his paths.

V: The Messiah that is the Christ has to come: when he will come, he will announce everything to us;

R: and we will walk in his paths.

Second Reading. *Let. Above the Advent. Original text.*

The time of Advent.

A reading from the “Pastoral letters” of St. Charles Borromeo, bishop

“Here you have, beloved children, that so celebrated and solemn time. Time, as the Holy Spirit says, which is favourable. Time of health, of peace and reconciliation. The time, that was desired with many sighs by those ancient patriarchs and holy prophets, and at long last, with great happiness, was seen by that just man Simeon. And as it has always been celebrated solemnly by the holy Church, in the same way it has to be fully sanctified by us, with praise and perpetual thanks to the eternal Father for his infinite mercy in the mystery of this time, that is in the coming of his only begotten Son, who because of the unmeasured love towards us sinners, was sent to liberate us from the tyranny of the devil, in order to invite us to heaven, to communicate to us the heavenly secrets, to demonstrate to us the truth, to teach us the customs, to plant in us virtue, to enrich us with the treasures of his grace and to make us his children, heirs and possessors of eternal life.

While the Church celebrates every year this mystery, she admonishes us to keep a perpetual memory of such a great charity shown to us by the merciful God; and at the same time she teaches us that the coming of the lord was not only for those, who before or at that time were found in the world when he came, but their virtue still remains always for the benefit of all of us, if by means of their holy faith and of the divine sacraments we would want to receive the grace that he has brought to us, and according to that grace to order our lives under his obedience. He wants us to again understand, that if as he came once into the world in the flesh, so also, if for us he does not remain, it is in order to come every hour, rather in every moment, to live spiritually in our souls, with abundant gifts.

Therefore the Church, as a pious mother zealous for our welfare, in the occasion of this sacred time, with hymns, canticles and other voices of the Holy Spirit, and mysterious rites, instructs us so that we may recognise the benefits with a grateful soul and receive them fruitfully so that they may cause us to make not only a minor preparation for the coming of the Lord in

our hearts as that which we would make if he was to come in this moment into the world; not less than that however which the holy Fathers of the Old Testament already did, and that with word and their examples have taught us to continue to do.”

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jl. 2: 15; Is. 62: 11; Jer. 4:5*

R: Sound the trumpet in the city of God, convoke the solemn assembly, gather the people, and say: * Behold, God our Saviour comes.

V: Announce it, make it known, cry out with a loud voice:

R: Behold, God our Saviour comes.

Gospel *Mt 8: 5 – 11*

Many from east and west will come to the kingdom of heaven.

As he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralysed at home, in terrible distress." And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." When Jesus heard him, he marvelled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

TUESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 8: 1 – 18*

The son of the prophet is proposed as a sign.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Then the LORD said to me, "Take a large tablet and write upon it in common characters, `Belonging to Ma'her-shal'al-hash-baz.'"

And I got reliable witnesses, Uri'ah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechi'ah, to attest for me. And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son.

Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Ma'her-shal'al-hash-baz; for before the child knows how to cry `My father' or `My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."

The LORD spoke to me again: "Because this people have refused the waters of Shilo'ah that flow gently, and melt in fear before Rezin and the son of Remali'ah; therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks; and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck; and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel-el."

Be broken, you peoples, and be dismayed; give ear, all you far countries; gird yourselves and be dismayed; gird yourselves and be dismayed. Take counsel together, but it will come to nought; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us. For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread.

But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken." Bind up the

testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jer. 31: 10*

R: Listen to the word of the Lord, o people, announce it till the ends of the earth, * and say to the distant islands: Your Saviour is about to come.

V: Announce, make it known, speak and cry:

R: and say to the distant islands: Your Saviour is about to come.

Second Reading. *Bk. 1, or. 2*

Eschatological vision of the Church.

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

“At the end of days the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be erected on the peak of the mountains, and it will be higher than the hills; to it will flow all the peoples” (Is. 2: 2). The prophecy has been fulfilled in the last days, that is in the last times of the world, when the only begotten Son of God appeared in the flesh, born from a woman, and when he presented to himself the mystical Judah or Jerusalem, the Church as a chaste virgin, without wrinkle or anything similar, but holy and immaculate, as it is written.

“To it will flow all the peoples, many nations will come and will say: Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob, so that he may indicate his ways to us and we may be able to walk along them” (Is. 2: 3).

It is not necessary to demonstrate with many words that all the nations have united and have entered through faith into the Church: the reality itself of the things gives witness to this.

The multitude of the peoples were not called by the teaching of the law or by the prophets; but a divine mysterious grace gathered them, illuminating them in a spiritual way and infused in them the desire of salvation through Jesus Christ. First of all the people climb up the mountain, then they ask that the word of the Lord may be announced to

them and they promise to walk in his way, the way of the gospel, in which it is possible to enter only purified by faith.

But those who want to know the way of the Lord above all begin by abjuring the profane and deep-rooted error. Otherwise this search for the best without the renouncement of the past would have no sense in us.

And who was the master of the people? Who lead them to the knowledge of the truth and persuaded them to consider their previous beliefs as ridiculous and to embrace the new faith? Was it not perhaps God? He illuminated the minds and the hearts and led them to say and to believe: "From Sion comes out the law and the Word of God from Jerusalem" (Is. 2:3).

The prophet foretells the time of the calling and the conversion of the people saying: God, the King and Lord of the universe, will judge the nations, that is, he will exercise justice and judgement on all the peoples.

Injustice has prevailed, because the peoples destroy each other, introducing every type of ferocity and dissolution. Once these things have been removed, God gives justice and uprightness.

When Christ who is Peace, reigns above the peoples, dissension, quarrels, battles and every type of greed disappears; and the consequences of war and the fear that is derived from it does not exist anymore; then we have yielded to the will of the one who says to us: "I leave you peace, my peace I give to you"

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 71:3; Is. 56: 1*

R: I swear, says the Lord, I will not get angry any more against the earth: * The mountains and the hills will welcome my justice, and a covenant of peace will be established in Jerusalem.

V: My salvation is near and my justice is about to reveal itself.

R: The mountains will welcome my justice, and a covenant of peace will be established in Jerusalem.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 2: 6 – 22; 4: 2 – 6*

God judges his people.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of diviners from the east and of soothsayers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with foreigners. Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.

So man is humbled, and men are brought low -- forgive them not! Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty. The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan; against all the high mountains, and against all the lofty hills; against every high tower, and against every fortified wall; against all the ships of Tarshish, and against all the beautiful craft.

And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the pride of men shall be brought low; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. And men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

In that day men will cast forth their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

Turn away from man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.

And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of

a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion.

It will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 2: 11, 17; Mt. 24: 30*

R: On that day the eyes of the powerful will be lowered, the pride of men will be humiliated. * The Lord, he alone, will be exalted.

V: They will see the Son of Man coming above the clouds of heaven with great power and glory.

R: The Lord, he alone, will be exalted.

Second Reading. *Disc. 45, 9. 22. 26. 28*

O Marvellous exchange.

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

The Word of God Himself, he who is before time, the invisible, the incomprehensible, he who is above matter, the Beginning that has its origin from the Beginning, the light that is born from the Light, the source of life and immortality, the expression of the divine archetype, the seal that does not know change, the unvaried and authentic image of God, he who is the definition of the Father and his Word, comes to the help of his own image and is made man out of love for man. He takes a body to save the body and because of love of my soul he accepts to unite himself to a soul that is endowed with a human intelligence. In this way he purifies him to whom he has made himself similar.

This is why he became man in everything like us, except in sin. He was conceived by the Virgin, already sanctified by the Holy Spirit in soul and in body through the honour of her Son and the glory of the virginity.

God, in a certain sense, assuming humanity, completed it when he reunited in his person two realities that were distinct from one another that is the human nature and the divine nature. One he confers and the other he receives.

He who gives riches to others makes himself poor. He asks in almsgiving my human nature so that I can become rich from his divine nature. And he who is everything, undresses himself up to annihilation. He

deprives himself, in fact, even if only for a brief time, of his glory, so that I can participate of his fullness. O overabundant richness of divine goodness!

But what does this great mystery mean for us? Behold: I have received the image of God, but I did not know how to conserve it intact. So he assumed my human condition in order to save me, made in his image, and in order to give me, a mortal, his immortality.

It was certainly suitable that the human nature was sanctified through the human nature assumed by God. Thus he with his strength defeats the demoniacal power, gives freedom back to us and brings us back to the fathers house through the mediation of his Son. It was Christ who merited all these goods and who did everything for the glory of the Father.

The good Shepherd, who has given his life for his sheep, searches for the lost sheep on the mountains and on the hills on which it was offering sacrifices to the idols.

Having found it he puts this same sheep on his shoulders that carried the wood of the cross, and brings it back to the life of eternity.

After the first uncertain light of the Precursor, came the Light in person who is all radiant.

After the voice, comes the Word. After the friend of the bridegroom, the bridegroom himself comes.

The Lord comes after him who has prepared a chosen people for him and has predisposed men for the effusion of the Holy Spirit through the purification in water.

God became man and died so that we could receive life. Thus we are resurrected with him because with him we are dead, we have been glorified because with him we are resurrected.

Responsorial. *Gal. 4: 4 – 5; Ep. 2: 4; Rm. 8: 3*

R: When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, * in order to ransom those who were under the law.

V: In his great love for us, God has sent his own Son made man, similar to us sinners,

R: in order to ransom those who were under the law.

Gospel. *Lk. 10: 21 – 24*

Jesus exults in the Holy Spirit.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Luke.

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

WEDNESDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 9: 1 – 6*

The prince of peace.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naph'tali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Mid'ian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Great will be his dominion and peace will have no end on the throne of David and his kingdom, which he comes to consolidate and strengthen with justice and right, now and forever, this will the zeal of the Lord of hosts do.

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 32, 33; is. 9: 5*

R: The Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father, * and he will reign forever over the house of Jacob.

V: He will be called powerful God, Father forever, Prince of peace.

R: and he will reign forever over the house of Jacob.

Second Reading. Disc. 3 for Advent.

Behold, I am coming soon, and I will bring with me my salary,

To give to each one according to his work.

A reading from the “Discourses” of Peter of Blois, presbyter.

“We live”, according to the counsel of the Apostle, “with soberness, justice and piety in this world, in expectation of the blessed hope and of the manifestation of the glory of our great God” (Tit. 2: 12 – 13).

The piety of man is exercised towards the Lord, justice towards the neighbour, soberness with oneself. The coming of the Lord is a danger for us if we do not await it with piety, justice and soberness. Three are the comings of the Lord: the first in the flesh, the second in the soul, the third for the judgement. The first happens at midnight, the second in the morning, the third at midday. To the first we apply the words of truth of the Gospel: “At midnight a cry was raised: Behold the bridegroom” (Mt. 25: 6). By midnight I mean the slow course of the hours of the night in complete silence. It was night for the Jews, whose eyes had been veiled by malice so that they could not see. In the same way even the pagan peoples walked in darkness. The bridegroom arrived and a cry was heard.

The silence of the night was broken. He who brought the light into the depths of darkness came: the night fled and it became day. And which is the cry that is given in the night? In the silence of all things, while the night followed its course and the omnipotent Word had decided to descend from his royal dwelling, the prophets, knowing about the coming of Christ, send out a cry of joy and break the silence. The clamour was great, because every single prophet cried out because of his own mandate, and everyone simultaneously.

If we want the coming of Christ to be redemption for us, let us prepare ourselves for his arrival. The prophet, addressing himself to Israel, teaches us: “Prepare yourself for the meeting with your God, O Israel!” (Am. 4: 12). “And you, brothers, be ready, because in the hour that you do not imagine the Son of man will come” (Mt. 24: 44).

The first coming has already passed. The Christ among men “has appeared and has lived with men” (Bar. 3: 38).

The Christ has come to fulfil the law in himself in our favour; because, according to the Apostle, a testament has value only after the death of the one who has written it, Christ ratified on the Cross the testament of our redemption with the word, the Spirit and the work.

We are in his second coming, if we are still those to whom he deigns to come; we are sure that, if we love him, he will come to dwell with us. This coming however is subordinate to conditions.

With regard to the third coming it is certain that it will happen, but when is absolutely uncertain. And what is more certain than death? But nothing is more uncertain as much as the hour of death. In this life we can be sure only of having no security. Now we are healthy now sick: now happy events give us joy, now we are afflicted by those adversities; now we are and now we are not: death does not pay attention either to age or sex.

Oh, how blessed is he who can say with certainty: “My heart is firm, O God, my heart is firm!” (Ps. 107: 2). He it is that gathers the fruit of grace from the first coming of the Lord, and he will gather from the second coming the fruit of salvation and glory. The first advent opens the way to the second, the second prepares the final. The first was hidden and humble, the second is secret and marvellous, the third will be manifest and terrible. In the first he descended to us in order to come in us in the second; in the second he comes in us in order not to come in the third against us. In the first he operates with his mercy, in the second he gives the grace, in the third he will give the glory, because “the Lord concedes grace and glory” (Ps. 83: 12).

The Lord will give to the saints the prize for their toil. Of this coming he says: “Behold, I am coming soon and I will bring with me my salary, to give to each one according to his work” (Ap. 22: 12). The Christ Jesus, whom we have welcomed as Saviour and await as Judge, will save us not according to the wicked works done by us, but according to his great mercy!

Responsorial. *Cfr. Wis. 10: 17*

R: Behold, our king will come, with all his saints, * to reward their toil.

V: Behold the Lord, the king of kings will come

R: to reward their toil.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 5: 1 – 7*

Song of the vineyard:

The love of the Lord for his unfaithful people.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between my vineyard and me. What more was there to do for my vineyard, which I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 79: 14, 3, 16, 15*

R: Your vineyard is devastated: look. O God, awaken your power, * do not let that which your hand has planted to die.

V: All-powerful God, look from heaven and visit this vineyard:

R: do not let that which your hand has planted to die.

Second Reading. *Disc. 5 on Advent 1 – 3*

The Word of God will come in us.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Bernard, abbot.

We have come to know a threefold coming of the Lord. The third coming takes place between the other two. They are clearly manifest but the third is not. In the first coming the Lord was seen on earth and lived among men in the days when, as he himself bears witness, they saw him and hated him. In his last coming ‘all flesh shall see the salvation of our God’, and ‘they shall look on him whom they have pierced.’ The other coming is hidden. In it, only the chosen see him within themselves and their souls are saved. In brief, his first coming was in the flesh and in weakness, this intermediary coming is in the spirit and in power, the last coming will be in glory and majesty.

This intermediary coming is like a road leading from the first to the last coming. In the first coming Christ was our redemption, in the last he will appear as our life, in this intermediary coming he is our rest and consolation.

Do not imagine that what we are saying about the intermediary coming is simply our own fabrication. Listen to Christ himself, ‘If a man loves me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him.’ I have read elsewhere, ‘The man who fears the Lord will do good,’ but it is my opinion that more was said of the one who loves, namely that he will keep the words. Where, then, are they to be kept? Without any doubt they are to be kept in the heart, as the prophet says, ‘I have kept your words in my heart, lest I sin against you.’

Keep the word of God in that way for ‘blessed are those who keep it’. Let it pierce deep into your inmost soul and penetrate your feelings and actions. Eat well and your soul will delight and grow. Do not forget to eat your bread or your heart will wither, but let your soul feast richly.

If you keep the word of God in this way without a doubt you will be kept by it. The Son with the Father will come to you. The great prophet who will renew Jerusalem will come and he will make everything new. The effect of this coming will be that just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. Just as the old Adam was poured out throughout the whole man and filled him completely,

so now let Christ take possession of the whole man, for he created the whole man, he redeemed the whole man and he will glorify the whole man.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Ps. 28: 11; Is. 40: 10*

R: Behold, the Lord comes, vested in splendour and strength; He will visit his people with peace, * and gives a life without end.

V: Behold, our God comes with power.

R: and gives a life without end.

Gospel. *Mt. 15: 29 – 37*

Jesus cures many sick people and multiplies the bread.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

And Jesus went on from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain, and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the throng wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." And commanding the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they all ate and were satisfied; and they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

THURSDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 10: 5 – 21*

The day of the Lord.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But he does not so intend, and his mind does not so think; but it is in his mind to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few; for he says: "Are not my commanders all kings? Is not Calno like Car'chemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols as I have done to Samaria and her images?"

When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.

For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones.

My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as men gather eggs that have been forsaken so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped."

Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood! Therefore the Lord, the God of hosts, will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire.

The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day. The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it

will be as when a sick man wastes away. The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down.

In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean upon him that smote them, but will lean upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jl. 2: 1, 2; 2 Pt. 3: 10*

R: All the inhabitants of the region will tremble, because the day of the Lord comes, because it is close. * Day of darkness and of fog, day of cloud and obscurity.

V: The day of the Lord will come like a thief, then the heavens with a roar will pass away, the elements consumed by heat will dissolve and the land with all that is in it will be destroyed.

R: Day of darkness and of fog, day of cloud and obscurity.

Second Reading. *Disc. 10 on John the Baptist.*

Behold, I will send my messenger before me.

A reading from the “Discourses” of St. Odilone of Cluny, abbot.

In order to defeat and dissipate the dark mist of death and ignorance, that the author of all obscurity had spread everywhere, the light that illuminates the entire world had to come. But it was necessary that that ineffable and eternal light was preceded by a great number of temporal and human lamps; the patriarchs of the ancient covenant. Illuminated and taught by their examples, virtue and teachings, the faithful people, removing the darkness of their deep rooted blindness, were made capable of recognising at least partly, if not totally, that great light at his coming.

Those fathers drew light not from themselves, nor from other sources, but from that super light that illuminated them; they were cultivators of the divine precepts, those who were before the law and those who were under the law; others lived in the time of the judges, of the kings and of the prophets, and foretold the mysteries of the birth, the passion and the resurrection and ascension of the Lord.

After them John shone out, the Precursor of the Lord who placed in full light, in front of the people the predictions of all the patriarchs and the prophecies of the prophets.

This holy man was not only just, but also descendant of a family of just men. Just in preaching, just in all his conduct, just in martyrdom. The archangel Gabriel announced his birth, his justice and holiness; and the gospel describes them fully.

A eulogy interwoven with human science is not worthy to be said as much as were the gifts of holiness and heavenly grace conceded to the Precursor of the Lord; but we must not keep quiet about what was said about him and to him. What can the word of a poor man add to such a great man? What can human littleness say, when the most high and ineffable Trinity speaks of that great man?

Of him God the Father speaks in a psalm, and in the gospel also. In the psalm: "I will prepare a lamp for my consecrated" (Ps. 131: 17). And of him the evangelist says: "He was a lamp that glowed and shone" (Jn. 5: 35). In the gospel it is said (to him): "The man on whom you see the Holy Spirit descend and remain, is he who will baptise" (Jn. 1: 33).

Some testimonies that the Holy Spirit makes resound in Isaiah and Jeremiah alluding primarily to the person of the Saviour, can be suitably attributed, according to the teaching of the prophets and the catholic sense, also to the Precursor.

To him the Holy Spirit bears witness much more clearly, with whom he was filled from the womb of his mother: at the arrival of the Mother of the Lord, as the gospel affirms, he exulted in a marvellous way, not by natural instinct but through an impulse of grace.

The same Lord and Christ, whom the Baptist revealed to the disciples exclaiming: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1: 29), in the time of his preaching he said of him: "Among those born of woman there has not been one greater than John the Baptist" (Mt. 11: 11). And saying that among those born of woman he was the greatest, he demonstrated that in him there was no vice of thoughtlessness and love of pleasures, he affirmed that he was a prophet, and more than a prophet, because with the power of his divinity he had enriched him with privileges, virtue and such great grace in order to surpass the merits of every other man. And with the oracle of the prophet Malachi,

he had called him his messenger, sent before him to prepare the way of salvation.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jn. 5: 35; Mal. 3: 1; Mk. 1: 4*

R: This is the immediate Precursor and the lamp shining before the Lord, * it is John who prepared the way to the Lord in the desert, and indicated the Lamb of God, illuminating the minds of men.

V: John appeared in the desert, preaching a baptism of conversion.

R: it is John who prepared the way to the Lord in the desert, and indicated the Lamb of God, illuminating the minds of men.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 16: 1 – 5; 17: 4 – 8*

The Moabites take refuge in the kingdom of Judah.

Ephraim converts.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

They have sent lambs to the ruler of the land, from Sela, by way of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Zion.

Like fluttering birds, like scattered nestlings, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.

"Give counsel, grant justice; make your shade like night at the height of noon; hide the outcasts, betray not the fugitive; let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you; be a refuge to them from the destroyer.

When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and he who tramples under foot has vanished from the land, then a throne will be established in steadfast love and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness."

And in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low, and the fat of his flesh will grow lean. And it shall be as when the reaper gathers standing grain and his arm harvests the ears, and as when one gleans the ears of grain in the Valley of Reph'aim.

Gleanings will be left in it, as when an olive tree is beaten -- two or three berries in the top of the highest bough, four or five on the branches of a fruit tree, says the LORD God of Israel.

In that day men will regard their Maker, and their eyes will look to the Holy One of Israel; they will not have regard for the altars, the work of their hands, and they will not look to what their own fingers have made, either the Ashe'rim or the altars of incense.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jer. 33: 15, 16; Is. 16: 5*

R: From David I will make a shoot of justice be born: he will bring justice and right back to the earth. * They will call him: Lord-our-justice.

V: He will found his kingdom on love and faithfulness, just judge, defender of the poor.

R: They will call him: Lord-our-justice.

Second Reading. *C. 18, 15 – 17*

Keep vigil: He will come again.

A reading from the “Commentary on the Diatessaron” of St. Ephraim, deacon.

To prevent his disciples from questioning him about the time of his coming Christ said, “Of that hour no one knows, neither the angels nor the Son. It is not for you know the times or the moments.” He hid the time from us so that we would be on the watch and so that each of us might think that the coming will happen in his own lifetime. If he had revealed when he was to come again, his coming would have been made pointless and the peoples and ages in which it will take place would no longer yearn for it. He said that he will come again but he did not say exactly when. Hence, all generations and ages live in eager expectation of him.

The Lord pointed out the signs of his coming but we have no knowledge of when they will be completed. In many varied ways they have happened and passed away and are still happening. His last coming is, in fact, like his first.

The just and the prophets longed for him, thinking that he was to appear in their day. So, today, each of the faithful wants to receive him in his own lifetime, just because he did not reveal the day of his coming. His chief reason for this was so that no one might think that he who has power and authority over numbers and times is subject himself to a command and an hour. How could that have been hidden from him that he himself had determined, and for which he had given signs?

He gave prominence to those signs so that, from that day onwards, all generations and all ages might think his coming would happen in their own time.

Be on the watch. When the body sleeps, nature gets the better of us. Then, our actions do not come from our will but by force from the impulse of nature. When the soul is overcome by a heavy sleep of timidity or sadness, the enemy takes control of it and works through it what it does not want to do. Force dominates nature and the enemy dominates the soul.

The Lord's command about vigilance holds good for both parts of man. The body must avoid overpowering sleep and the soul must guard against the sluggishness and timidity. In the words of scripture, 'Awake you just,' and 'I rose up and am still with you,' and 'Do not lose heart. That is why we do not lose heart in the ministry that is entrusted to us.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Is. 55: 3 – 4, cfr. At. 28: 28*

R: I will re-establish with you an eternal covenant, faithful to my love for David. I have constituted him as a witness among the people, * a guide and master of the nations.

V: Christ the salvation of God has been sent also to the pagans, and they will welcome him,

R: a guide and master of the nations.

Gospel. *Mt. 7: 21, 24 – 27*

He who does the will of my Father, will enter into the kingdom of heaven.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his

house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds
blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."

FRIDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 11: 10 – 16*

Return of the remnant of the people of God.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.

In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

He will raise an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. But they shall swoop down upon the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put forth their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them.

And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt; and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching wind, and smite it into seven channels that men may cross dry shod. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that is left of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

Responsorial. *Is. 5: 26; 56: 8; 55:13*

R: The Lord will raise up a signal to a people far away, * and he will gather the dispersed of Israel.

V: This will be for the glory of the Lord: an eternal sign that will not disappear.

R: and he will gather the dispersed of Israel.

Second Reading. *Bk. 3, 5*

We are called Christians, and all our hope is in Christ.

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

The Word born of the Virgin was and is always the King, the Lord of the universe. But after his incarnation he assumed the form that is proper of the human nature, and we can believe with truth and without any doubt that he became similar to us. For this, when it is said that he has received the dominion over all things, it is intended in reference to his nature of man, not to his divine pre-eminence through which we know that he is already the Lord of all creation. To him is attributed also the name of Jacob and Israel in so much as he is born according to the flesh from the descendants of Jacob, also called Israel. It is said in fact of Jacob: “Behold my servant whom I sustain”, Israel, “my elected one in whom I am well pleased” (Is. 42: 1).

The Father in fact co-operates with the Son, who fulfilled marvellous things almost coming from a power that is his own. He is truly the elected one, because he is the most beautiful among the sons of men; he is the object of the kindness and love of the Father, he in whom God the Father finds his rest: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3: 17).

The Son has received the anointing in the human way, for which it is said that he participates of the Holy Spirit, even if he himself communicates the Spirit and sanctifies the creation: in reality it is written: “I have placed my spirit on him” (Is. 42: 1). After the baptism of Christ the Spirit descended on him from heaven in the form of a dove and it rested on him. Then if he received the Spirit in his humanity at the baptism, this could have come about also in every other moment of his life. Not in so much as he is God does he receive the spirit and is sanctified, since it is he himself who sanctifies, but as man, because of his human condition.

He has received the anointing of the Spirit in order to exercise the judgement on the people. The judgement to which these words allude is a just judgement: condemning Satan who tyrannized the peoples, he made them just. The Lord himself says: “Now is the judgement of this world; now the prince of this world will be thrown out. And I, when I will be lifted up from the earth, will draw everyone to me” (Jn. 12: 31 – 32).

The Lord condemns he who had invaded the earth, and reserves for his holy judgement those who had let themselves be deceived by him. But “he will not cry out” it is written, “nor raise his tone, nor let his voice be heard in the squares” (Is. 42: 2). The Saviour and Lord of the universe will behave with a lot of discretion and humility and almost without noise, but silently and tranquilly in order not to break the crushed reed and not put out the light of the dull flame (cfr. Is. 42: 3). And what will he do and what will he give to the peoples? He will proclaim justice with truth. Here for judgement I think he means law. Because it is written of God, Lord of Israel and of the world: “Uprightness and justice you exercise in Jacob” (Ps. 98: 4). He proclaims in his complete truth the uprightiness, that is the law shadowed in the figure: with the divine words of the gospel he shows the way for a style of life that is pleasing to him and transforms the cult of the law founded on the letter, into a spiritual cult established on the truth.

The gospel was preached in all the earth and it introduced into the reality the prophecies that they announce, because it is written: “Your justice is eternal justice and truth is your law” (Ps. 118: 142). “And in his name the people will hope” (Mt. 12: 21). After having recognised that he is truly God, they will hope in him, even though he has appeared as a man; according to the word of the psalmist: Your people “exult all day long in your name” (Ps. 88: 17). We call ourselves Christians, and all our hope is in Christ.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Mic. 4: 9; Is. 40: 27*

R: Jerusalem, your salvation will come soon. Why do you cry like this? * Your councillors have perhaps perished, that you let yourselves be taken by grief? Do not fear, I will save you and free you.

V: Why do you say, Jacob, and you, Israel, repeat: My fate is hidden to the Lord, and my rights are neglected by my God?

R: Your councillors have perhaps perished, that you let yourselves be taken by grief? Do not fear, I will save you and free you.

CYCLE 2

First Reading. *Is. 19: 16 – 25*

The Egyptians and the Assyrians will know the Lord and they will serve him.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

In that day the Egyptians will be like women, and tremble with fear before the hand that the LORD of hosts shakes over them. And the land of Judah will become a terror to the Egyptians; every one to whom it is mentioned will fear because of the purpose which the LORD of hosts has purposed against them.

In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts. One of these will be called the City of the Sun. In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the LORD because of oppressors he will send them a saviour, and will defend and deliver them. And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians; and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and burnt offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. And the LORD will smite Egypt, smiting and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will heed their supplications and heal them.

In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage."

Responsorial. *Is. 19: 21; Lk. 13: 29*

R: In that day the inhabitants of Israel will recognise the Lord, * they will serve him with offerings and sacrifices.

V: They will come from east and west, from north and south and they will sit at the table of the kingdom of God.

R: they will serve him with offerings and sacrifices.

Second Reading. *C. 1*

The desire of the contemplation of God.

A reading from the "Proslògion" of St. Anselm, bishop.

Come now, insignificant man, fly for a moment from your affairs, escape for a little while from the tumult of your thoughts. Put aside now your weighty cares and leave your wearisome toils. Abandon yourself for a little to God and rest for a little in him.

Enter into the inner chamber of your soul, shut out everything save God and what can be of help in your quest for him and having locked the door seek him out. Speak now, my whole heart, speak now to God: 'I seek your countenance, O Lord, your countenance I seek.'

Come the, Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you.

Lord, if you are not present here, where, since you are not absent, shall I look for you? On the other hand, if you are everywhere why then, since you are present, do I not see you? But surely you dwell in light inaccessible. And where is this inaccessible light, or how can I approach the inaccessible light? Or who shall lead me and take me into it that I may see you in it? Again, by what signs, under what aspect, shall I seek you? Never have I seen you, Lord my God, I do not know your face.

What shall he do, most high Lord, what shall this exile do, far away from you as he is? What shall your servant do, tormented by love of you and yet cast off far from your face? He yearns to see you and your countenance is too far away from him. He desires to come close to you, and your dwelling place is inaccessible; he longs to find you and does not know where you are; he is eager to seek you out and he does not know your countenance.

Lord, you are my God and my Lord, and never have I seen you. You have created me and re-created me and you have given me all the good things that I possess, and still I do not know you. In the end, I was made in order to see you, and I have not yet accomplished what I was made for.

And you, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, will you be unmindful of us? How long will you turn your countenance from us? When will you look upon us and hear us? When will you enlighten our eyes and show your countenance to us? When will you give yourself again to us?

Look upon us, Lord; hear us, enlighten us, show yourself to us. Give yourself to us that it may be well with us, for without you it goes so ill for us. Have pity upon our efforts and our strivings towards you, for we can avail nothing without you.

Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek you if you do not teach me how, nor find you unless you reveal yourself. Let me seek you in desiring you; let me desire you in seeking you; let me find you in loving you; let me love you in finding you.

Responsorial. *Ps. 79: 19, 20; 105: 4*

R: From you, Lord, we will not go far away, you will make us live, and we will invoke your name. * Make your face shine, and we will be saved.

V: Remember us, Lord, out of love for your people; visit us with your salvation.

R: Make your face shine, and we will be saved.

Gospel. *Mt. 9: 27 – 31*

Jesus cures two blind men who believe in him.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." But they went away and spread his fame through that entire district.

SATURDAY

CYCLE 1

First Reading. *Is. 13: 1 – 22*

The day of the Lord.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw. On a bare hill raise a signal, cry aloud to them; wave the hand for them to enter the gates of the nobles. I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones. Hark, a tumult on the mountains as of a great multitude! Hark, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth.

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every man's heart will melt, and they will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in travail. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame.

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light.

I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless.

I will make men more rare than fine gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir.

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.

And like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with none to gather them, every man will turn to his own people, and every man will flee to his own land.

Whoever is found will be thrust through, and whoever is caught will fall by the sword.

Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.

Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children.

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendour and pride of the Chalde'ans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. It will never be inhabited or dwelt in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. But wild beasts will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there satyrs will dance. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Jl. 2: 11, 12, 13; Ap. 6: 17*

R: The day of the Lord is great and terrible, who can sustain it? * Now therefore return to the Lord your God because he is merciful and kind.

V: The great day of the anger of He who sits on the throne and of the Lamb has come, and who can resist it.

R: Now therefore return to the Lord your God because he is merciful and kind.

Second Reading. *Disc. 88, 1- 3*

Today also the voice of John cries out to us.

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

The divine Scripture always speaks and cries out, as it is written of John: “I am the voice of one who cries in the desert” (Jn. 1: 23).

John does not only cry in the time in which he announced to the Pharisees the Lord and his salvation: today also he cries in the midst of us, and his voice like thunder stirs the desert of our sins. He has slept in the holy death of martyrdom, but his voice is still alive. He says to us also today: “Prepare the way to the Lord, make straight his road” (Is. 40:3). Always, therefore, the Sacred Scripture cries and speaks.

John repeats today the same cry and commands us to prepare the way to the Lord. This way is not marked out on the earth, but is in the pureness of the faith. The Lord does not want to open a way on the paths of the earth, but in the intimacy of the soul.

Let us see what way to the Lord did John himself open, he who says to us to prepare for the Lord a road! He has disposed and directed all the course of his way in order to Christ who was coming: long fasts, humility, poverty, and virginity. The evangelist describing all these virtues says: “John was dressed in camel skin, with a belt of skin around his waist; he ate locusts and wild honey” (Mk. 1: 6).

What humility was there in the prophet than to go covered with coarse skin, despising the soft clothes? What faithfulness more devout than to be always ready, with the loins girded, to render any type of service? Is there abstinence more admirable than not taking into account the comforts of life while contenting oneself with locusts and wild honey?

I think that these things, of habitual usage for the prophet, were they themselves a prophecy. The Precursor of Christ used a bristling garment of camel skin almost to signify that Christ himself, coming, would have redressed himself of the human body, in a material of all the bitterness of our sins. And the belt of skin is none other than a figure of our fragile flesh, which before the coming of Christ was dominated by vices, while after it has been curbed by the exercise of virtue?

Responsorial. *Lk. 1: 17, 76*

R: He will walk before the Lord with the spirit and strength of Elijah, * to bring back the hearts of the fathers towards the sons and rebels to the wisdom of the just, and to prepare for the Lord a people who are well disposed.

V: You, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, because you will go before to prepare the way to the Lord.

R: to bring back the hearts of the fathers towards the sons and rebels to the wisdom of the just, and to prepare for the Lord a people who are well disposed.

First Reading. *Is. 21: 6 – 12*

The watchman who scrutinizes in the night announces the fall of Babylon.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

For thus the Lord said to me: "Go, set a watchman, let him announce what he sees. When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on asses, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently."

Then he who saw cried:

"Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord, continually by day, and at my post I am stationed whole nights. And, behold, here come riders, horsemen in pairs!" And he answered, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods he has shattered to the ground."

O my threshed and winnowed one, what I have heard from the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, I announce to you. The oracle concerning Dumah. One is calling to me from Se'ir, "Watchman, what of the night?

Watchman, what of the night?" The watchman says: "Morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; come back again."

Responsorial. *Ap. 18: 2- 4-5*

R: The angel cried out in a powerful voice: Babylon the great has fallen! Then I heard another voice from heaven: * Come out from Babylon, my people, and you will not be involved in her faults.

V: Her sins are as high as the heavens; God has remembered her injustice.

R: Come out from Babylon, my people, and you will not be involved in her faults.

Second Reading. *Nm. 13 – 15*

We hope for that which we do not see.

A reading from the treatise “On the advantage of patience” of St. Cyprian, bishop and martyr.

It is the wholesome precept of our Lord and Master: “He who endures says He, “unto the end, the same shall be saved;” and again, “If you continue” says He “in my word you shall be truly my disciples and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”. We must endure and persevere, beloved brethren, in order that, being admitted to the hope of truth and liberty, we may attain to the truth and liberty itself; for that very

fact that we are Christians is the substance of faith and hope. But so that hope and faith may attain to their result, there is need of patience. For we are not following after present glory, but future, according to what Paul the apostle also warns us, and says, “We are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope: for if a man sees, what does he hope for? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we by patience wait for it.” Therefore, waiting and patience are needful, that we may fulfil that which we have begun to be, and may receive that which we believe and hope for, according to God’s own revelation. Moreover, in another place, the same apostle instructs the righteous and those, who with good works, and by making fruitful the gifts received procure for themselves treasures in heaven, teaches them that they also should be patient saying, “Therefore, while we have time, let us labour in that which is good unto all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith. But let us not be weary of doing good for in due season we shall reap. He urges us not to give up this labour through impatience, that no one should be either turned aside or overcome by temptations and desist in the midst of the way of praise and of glory, and ruin in this way the actions accomplished in the past, because he does not bring to fulfilment those actions begun.

The apostle, finally, when speaking of charity, joined to it endurance and patience. “Charity,” he says, “is patient; charity is kind; charity is not envious, is not boastful, does not get angry; it does not take account of evil received. It covers everything, believes everything, hopes in everything, endures all things.” Thence he shows that it can tenaciously persevere, because it knows how to endure all things. And in another place: “Forbearing one another,” he says, “in love, using every effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” He proved that neither unity nor peace could be kept unless brethren should sustain one another with mutual forbearance, and should keep the bond of concord by the intervention of patience.

Responsorial. *Cfr. Hab. 2: 3; Heb. 10: 37*

R: The Lord will appear, he will not contradict the expectation; * wait for him, he will certainly come, he cannot be late.

V: Only a little while, just a little: and the one who is to come will come.

R: wait for him, he will certainly come, he cannot be late.

Gospel. Mt. 9: 35 – 10: 1, 6 – 8

Seeing the crowds he felt compassion.

A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity. He said to them "But go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, `The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay.