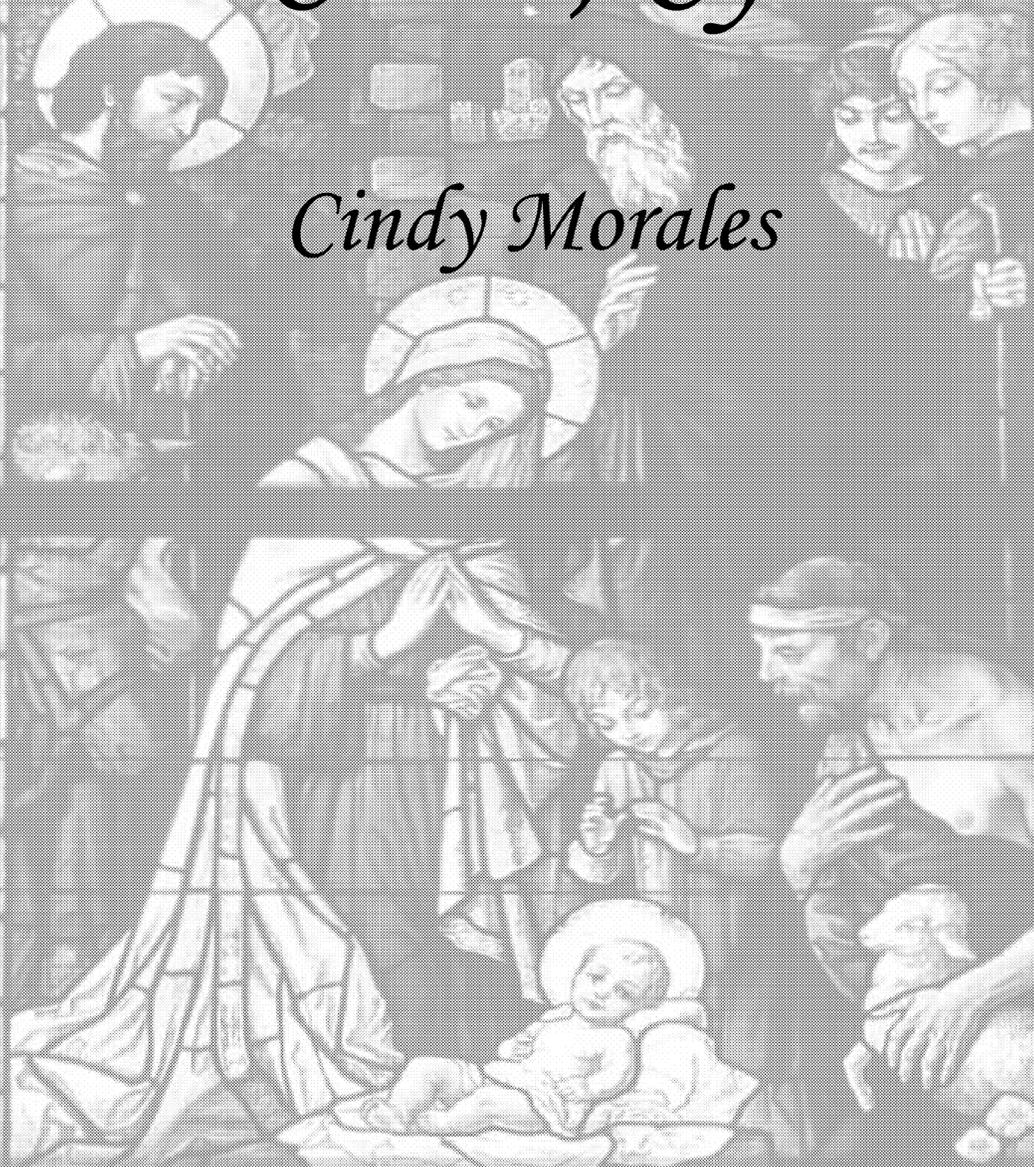


Advent: Preparing For Christ, Cycle B

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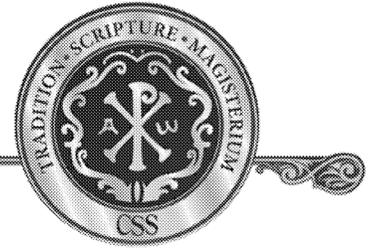
Preparing For Christ, Cycle B

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Advent



Preparing For Christ, Cycle B

Introduction

The rhythms of the liturgical year are designed to help us focus on Christ at all times but in different ways. For example, during Ordinary Time we hear different stories about Christ's life and message at Mass. However, during Advent, which begins the liturgical year, the Church asks us to reflect on Christ's assurance that he will come again and to remember his first coming. In our reflections we are led to stop and take a spiritual inventory of our relationship with Christ. Thus, Advent is a time to be more intentional in our relationship with Christ; to renew it and in turn have it renew us.

It is always easy to fall away, to become lax in prayer and other spiritual practices, not merely because we can get lazy but because of life's distractions. These distractions particularly pull at us during Advent! The liturgy of the Church urges us to prioritize properly: refocus on Christ and his imminent return. For Christ surely will return and when he does woe to any who are not prepared! It is in the light of his Second Coming that we celebrate his First Coming. It is because of his First Coming that we can hope in the Second Coming and trust in his mercy and his love.

“Praying the Scriptures”: Using *Lectio Divina*

While this study will follow the Catholic Scripture Study format, it will be a little different, because we are going to look at the Advent Sunday lectionary readings instead of a particular book. To prepare for the session, you are encouraged to use the ancient method of *Lectio Divina*:

First, you will read the readings and meditate and reflect on them. The reflection questions are intended to be a guide for this part of the study. But your meditation might lead you to ponder different questions. Please plan to share your reflections with the larger group. From out of your meditation you are asked to spend time in prayer. To learn about the context of the passages, which are short and often taken from larger passages in the Bible, you will read the “Points to Ponder” and answer the study questions. In the group sessions the passages will be read out loud, discussion questions will be answered and reflections will be shared.

Lectio Divina, or “sacred reading,” is a way to “pray the scriptures.” It was advocated by St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Benedict, among others. St. Dominic included it in his “nine ways of prayer” (it is the eighth way). Very popular among medieval mystics, it was described by a Carthusian monk named Guigo in his work entitled “The Letter of Dom Guigo to Brother Gervase,” and is also found in the anonymous *Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of Julian of Norwich, among others. It is the method employed in monasteries even today.

On September 16, 2005, Pope Benedict gave a lecture at Castel Gondolfo to participants in the International Congress on “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church.” In his remarks he encouraged the use of *Lectio Divina* while discussing the document *Dei Verbum* and the Church's love for and veneration of the Scriptures:

“In this context I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of “*Lectio divina*”: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him

with trusting openness of heart” (cf. “*Dei Verbum*,” n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church -- I am convinced of it -- a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, “*Lectio divina*” should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times. It should never be forgotten that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path.”

How to use *Lectio Divina* to Pray the Scriptures

Lectio Divina consists of four stages: *Lectio*, or reading, *meditatio*, or meditation, *oratio*, prayer, and *contemplatio*, contemplation. These are not rigid steps, followed in strict order, because the divisions between them, especially the last three, are somewhat artificial. When using *lectio*, in other words, you may find yourself reading, meditating, re-reading, contemplating, rereading, praying, meditating, etc.

Reading

When you are reading by yourself or in a group, read the passage to be studied aloud. Through *hearing* the word, our hearts can be transformed. As you read out loud, simply listen to the words. Read more than once if you need to, to let the words penetrate your heart.

Meditation

The word “meditate” can be intimidating, but it just means, “think about.” St. Ignatius called this “savoring.” Savor the text. What does the text say to you? Think about the texts as a whole. Within this study, ask yourself why the Church might have used these particular Old Testament and New Testament readings. What particular words or phrases struck you? Did any word, phrase, or theme leap out at you in a new way? In what direction is the text pointing you? Reflection questions provided may help you, but since you are approaching the text within the context of your own life, your current circumstances will also help you with your meditation.

Prayer

Meditation naturally leads to prayer. What do you want to say to God? What response does the text call forth from you? And what does God say to you?

Contemplation

Some have suggested that one thinks of contemplation as “resting” in God. Perhaps an analogy can be made: two old friends, or spouses, can be together in comfortable silence. They love each other, and enjoy each other. Silence is not threatening or intimidating and one does not rush to fill it with banter and noise. “Resting” in God is simply enjoying Him and enjoying the love that He wants to pour out onto you. This does not involve words. The best description of contemplation I ever heard was when someone described their experience with Eucharistic Adoration: “I look at Him and He looks at me.” A trip to the Blessed Sacrament may indeed help you to be “restful” and quietly silent in the Lord. Be thankful that God has redeemed you through Christ, that you are part of Christ through baptism, that God’s love envelops you. Through contemplation allow that Love to permeate you so that it can flow from you when you leave Adoration.

Action

Some have suggested that a fifth stage be included, that of action. The Dominicans say, *contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere* (to contemplate and hand on to others the fruits of contemplation). After reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating, we can ask: how does the text call us to transformation, to *metanoia*, to repentance? How does it help us be Christ to others?



A Brief Note on the Lectionary

The lectionary is divided into 3 years: In Year A, the Gospel readings on Sunday are drawn from The Gospel of Matthew, in Year B, they are drawn from the Gospel of Mark, and Year C's readings are drawn primarily from the Gospel of Luke.

This study will focus on the readings from Year B.

Note: to prepare for this week's Bible study, read the passages using *Lectio Divina*:

Read each reading (out loud!)

Think about what the text is saying to you.

Allow your meditation to lead you to prayer. Listen for the Word of God to speak to you as well.

Contemplate the text by "resting" with God. . If the reflection questions are helpful, use them in your contemplation, and also write down any reflection you may have on your own.

Be prepared to share your reflections in the larger group.

To understand the context of the passages:

Read the Points to Ponder.