O ANTIPHONS
Do you intend to prepare for the coming of Christ in a special way? Then why not use the seven antiphons to the Magnificat in the ferial Office of the seven days preceding the Vigil of Christmas. They are called the ‘O Antiphons’ because all begin with the interjection "O". They are addressed to God and Christ under one or other of His Scriptural titles, and conclude with a distinct petition to the coming Lord. They are found in the Roman Breviary. Dom Prosper Guéranger remarks that the antiphons were appropriately assigned to the Vespers Hour (Evening Prayer of the Church), because the Saviour came in the evening hours of the world and that they were attached to the Magnificat to honour her through whom He came, Mary the Blessed Virgin. By exception to the rule for ferial days, the seven antiphons are sung in full both before and after the canticle. The reflections we offer can be used in whole or in part after the Gospel of the Evening prayer.
FIRST DAY- 17TH DECEMBER

O Wisdom, which comes out of the mouth of the Most High, and reaches from one end to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

HYMN

O come, thou Wisdom whose decree
Doth govern all this peacefully;
The Way of Prudence here below
And life hereafter deign to show.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

O come, thou wisdom from on High!
Who madest all in earth and sky
Creating man from dust and clay:
To us reveal salvation’s way.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

REFLECTION

Today, our antiphon to the Magnificat focuses on God, the creator. In this way it invites us to reflect on what happened before things came to be. Like all the other antiphons it has three parts: an invocation, an anamnesis and a Petition. Our immediate question is: What connection has Wisdom and creation? The antiphon makes it clear Wisdom comes out of the mouth of the Most High and reaches from one end to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things.
As an invocation, we start by calling on Wisdom: “O Wisdom”. Certainly, the Wisdom we are reflecting on today takes us back to the Book of Wisdom itself, an apocryphal writing which lifts up the concept of wisdom from the rhetoric personification of the wisdom writers, to a real personification, associating it in a hypostatic manner to God. In this way, Wisdom did not only come to denote the person of God, that which makes him do what he does and that fills and sustains the world, observing all human actions and is present everywhere, but in a hypostatic manner, was with God at the creation of the world, the only-begotten of God, the effulgence or brilliant radiance of eternal light, sat by or rather sharing His throne, knew His thoughts and was His associate, the origin or "mother" of all creatures, taught Solomon the Wisdom for which he prayed; all powerful, seeing all things, pervading all things, an effluence of the glory of the Almighty, continually active in penetrating, ordering, and renewing all things, Carrying inspiration to all holy souls, teaching sobriety, understanding, righteousness and courage. But we must go beyond the Old Testament notion of Wisdom. We waste no time to see that the attributes of Wisdom are already pointing to Christ, explaining why in Advent we begin with this concept. Christ before his incarnation was with the Father.

The antiphon is from the Book of Sirach. Let us reflect for a while on Sirach 24:3-24, wherein Wisdom himself speaks in God’s heavenly assembly, ‘I came forth from the mouth of the Most High.’ Coming out of the mouth of the Most High implies Wisdom is God’s utterance, his Word, which speaks through the universe and inspires the whole human race. Whoever then, will dwell in the shelter of the Most High, and abide in his shade will have the Lord for his refuge and stronghold. That is what Christmas will bring to us. This opening lines remind us of the opening verses of the Gospel of John. In the Beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. This immediately justifies our associating this Antiphon with Christ, the Word of God that proceeds from the Mouth of the Lord God himself. The Word covered the earth like a mist. This takes us back to the Old Testament times; the time of creation when the Spirit hovered over the earth and brought order out of strife, or again when the glory of the Lord continued to manifest itself in the liberating journey of Moses in the form of clouds, filling the tent of meeting, and signifying the presence of the Lord. The transfiguration was also another event which manifested the presence of Yahweh in the form of the clouds. The Word dwelt in high places, and his throne was in a pillar of cloud. Here again the theophanies during the exodus, telling of the liberation of Israel are evoked. “Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss”. Associating Wisdom with the heavens and the earth indicates the Lordship of the God we
await, that is universal and omniscient. “In the waves of the sea, in the whole earth, and in every people and nation I have gotten a possession“ Wisdom is not only omniscient but owns all. All times and all seasons belong to him, and everything in heaven and on earth were made for through him and for him. In him all things hold together, says St. Paul. “Among all these I sought a resting place; I sought in whose territory I might lodge” . Wisdom’s decision to condescend is associated with the Divine will in the choice of an Elect, the people of Israel, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, a people set apart.

"Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment. The giving of the commandment brings us back to Moses, as he was handed the Decalogue. Jesus, the New Moses, as it were, is bearer of the New Commandment, but even more, He is the Lawgiver, as we shall see in the reflection on the Last Day of our celebration. Wisdom further reports that “the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.’” This makes the choice of Jacob Divine, the choice of a tent or dwelling place, a people for his own- pointing to the incarnation, Mary, the tent of the Word made flesh. “From eternity, in the beginning, he created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist” Wisdom celebrates its immortality: pointing to Christ yesterday, today and forever: the alpha and the Omega.

“In the holy tabernacle I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion.” The Tabernacle contained the Decalogue, the Word of God spoken to Moses, the Ark of the Covenant. Hence, it was Wisdom within it, that accompanied Israel through the desert sojourning and established victories associated with the intervention of Yahweh, causing them to eventually engage in the building of the temple. He was there from of Old. “In the beloved city likewise he gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my dominion.” Yahweh’s coming must make us celebrate God coming into his city. For just as the Ark of the Covenant found a resting place in Jerusalem, so the Nativity will lead Jesus to find a dwelling among men, first in the womb of the Virgin, who today is given the title Ark of the Covenant, Tabernacle of the Most High. God’s choice of Mary and all that surrounded her: her choice of Joseph etc. makes the following link a fulfillment: “So I took root in an honored people, in the portion of the Lord, who is their inheritance.” Wisdom became known as the Root of Jesse, a Benjamenite and Father of David. We shall further reflect on this later. Wisdom continues, “I grew tall … spread out my branches, and my branches are glorious and graceful … caused loveliness to bud, and my blossoms became glorious and abundant fruit. Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my produce.” Finally, we can see the reason of Jesus’ coming. He himself says: “Come to me all you who
labour and are overburdened...” Among the trees and their produce mentioned, the following prepared the ground for Christ to compare himself with: palm tree: the leaves of which were used to hail the King; myrrh and frankincense: brought to him by the oriental Kings as a gifts to an infant king; vine: tied to himself as the holy and Fruitful vine and the people of God as the branches.

“For the remembrance of me is sweeter than honey, and my inheritance sweeter than the honeycomb.” the Messiah’s coming will eventually lead to the greatest act which will cause all to always remember Him, a request he himself made on the eve of the great event of our redemption, while they were at Supper: “Do this in remembrance of Me.” Wisdom continues with this concept of food. “Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more.” To the child to be born will be associated the idea of eating Him. We meet this in his great discourse in the Gospel of John connected with the Bread of Life. “Whoever eats this bread...” The of Christ and his living among us is an act of great obedience to the will of the Father. This same obedience he will demand of all those who are his own. So Wisdom anticipates this; “Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with my help will not sin.” It was for this reason that twice the Voice of the Lord called on the disciples to Listen to the Beloved Son: at the Baptism and the Transfiguration. Certainly, his Wisdom cannot be measured and those who listen to him and keep to his words, will win his favour: If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home in him.”

Almost every line in what Wisdom says of himself in Sirach 24:3-24 stands out as a pointer, a prefiguration of a reality about the significance of the coming of Christ, as we have demonstrated. Today, therefore, while we are reflecting on Wisdom, we are also reflecting on all those attributes of Christ that gradually helped us in understanding how his incarnation was prepared for beforehand, making him the long-awaited Messiah, the one about whom the Law and the Prophets spoke. Worth mentioning here is what in Greek is rendered Logos – The Word. We then say: O Wisdom, O Word of God, One is Substance with the Father, Creator, O Him, in whom, through whom and for whom all things were made. To complete this prayer let us consider some of the references made of Christ in the New Testament.

St. Paul’s consideration of Wisdom is of a totally different class from the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. His is that of intense religious experience. When he mentions wisdom in1Cor 1-3, it is that against which he
inveighs or fulminates or curses or about which he grumbles is not Jewish but Greek-speculation in philosophy, with studied elegance in rhetoric. It is the unity of the Church that is at stake. In this section of his writing he urges the brothers to live in unity and avoid division. “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.” Paul’s notion of wisdom is then associated with the Cross. He adds: “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the learning of the learned I will set aside." Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not come to know God through wisdom, it was the will of God through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who have faith.” Paul finds wisdom in the cross, a great contrast to what all other wisdom would seek. “For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

In this matter, Paul invites his hearers to consider their own calling as Christians, to understand the progress they have made and to attribute it to the right quarters. “Brothers! Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God. It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord." Wisdom is what we should boast in. Not that we are now wise, but that our wisdom is from Wisdom himself, the Lord.

To this idea of Wisdom Paul is proclaiming he now associates the spirit and power. Wisdom will now be the fruit of Divine power. “When I came to you, brothers, proclaiming the mystery of God, I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with
persuasive (words of) wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Paul, at this point begins an itinerary that takes our sentiments back to the notion of the agelessness of Wisdom. "Yet we do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him," this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms. Now the natural person does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually. The spiritual person, however, can judge everything but is not subject to judgment by anyone. For "who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to counsel him?" But we have the mind of Christ."

Paul ends with a practical advice: "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: "He catches the wise in their own deception," and again: "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."

We realize that whether Jew or Greek the moral difficulty was the same. God's message was obscured through an overvaluation of human attainments. Against this "wisdom" of the Jews and Greeks, Paul sets the doctrine of the Cross, something that outraged every human system but which, all the more, taught man his entire dependence on God. Yet, we see that Paul had a "wisdom" of his own that he taught to Christians of mature moral (not intellectual) progress.

Perhaps we should reflect a little on what this 'other wisdom' not equaled to the Wisdom of the cross could be. This brings us back to the Old Testament. Here
we find three levels of the presentation of Wisdom: The wisdom that had an irreligious connotation, that which was a rhetorical personification, and that which is divine. St. Paul is up and against the first level of wisdom. The Old testament considered this mere intellectual power without moral control and likened it to the very fruit of the forbidden tree (Gn 3,5). Isaiah considers it essentially a heathen quality (Is 10,13 Is 19,12) deserving only denunciation (Is 5,21 Is 29). He gave this kind of wisdom an unpleasant connotation of the quality of the shrewd court counselors, with their half-heathen advice (Is 28,14-22). About it, Deuteronomy says `what men call "wisdom" is really folly!' (Deut 32:6).

The second level of Wisdom is a necessity and can be envisaged as a human response to Divine wisdom when we receive it in faith. This wisdom has a universal character, and admits of no Jew or Gentile, East or West, it can even lead to the attainment of knowledge about God by all through the study of natural phenomena. But this wisdom needs God's explicit grace, and so must not be based on one's own attainments, but must be God-centered, starting from him and ending in Him. This therefore, is the religious attitude, but in spite of this we are called to pay continual attention to every department of life, and about this we never stop learning. In this regard, the wise man's character is worthy of admiration: he is intelligent, earnest, and hard-working: for him, life is worth living at the most pessimistic time. His weakness is self-consciousness and self-centeredness. This is the wisdom we have to desire for bringing righteousness and riches too, but not unrighteous riches. Those who lacked this level of wisdom, were easily grouped with sinners (Pr 1:22) – Knowledge was virtue, ignorance was vice. This Wisdom was envisaged even by the Wisdom writes as created before man, before, indeed, the creation of the world. When the world was formed she was in her childhood, and while God formed the world she engaged in childish play, under His shelter and to His delight. Even at this level "Wisdom" was regarded as a quality of man (Pr 8,31-36), not a quality of God.

Now, almost everything in the life of the time of Christ, from the lily of the field to the king on his throne, contributed its quota to the illustrations of the universal character of this wisdom as perceived by Christ himself.

It is this kind of wisdom that, to some extent, gave Christ’s teaching a form and method. He taught in parables, in concise antithetical sayings that stick in the
memory. Christ’s wisdom admitted of a cheerful outlook, despite the continual prospect of the Passion, and we must never forget that all morbid asceticism was entirely foreign to Him (Lc 7,34). However, Christ had no patience with the self-conscious, calculating product of the Wisdom method. By his own inflection there is wisdom in giving freely, giving as the Father gives, without regard to self, in no way seeking a reward. If the wisdom of Old led to religious aristocracy, Christ attacks this. Anyone who, in a continuous manner exercises worldly prudence could make himself impervious to His teaching. This was the case with those who obstinately clung to the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees, while His message was for all men on the sole basis of a desire for righteousness on their part. Christ then, gives thanks that God had seen fit to hide His mysteries from the wise and prudent and revealing them to mere children. (Lc 10,21).

Let this not discourage us, though! Why? The Antiphon of today says: ‘O Wisdom... Come and teach us the way of prudence.’ Yet Christ thanks the Father that the mysteries are not revealed to the prudent. It goes back to the same reflection regarding wisdom. For just as wisdom is earthly, human and divine, so is prudence.

In the Old Testament "prudence" is the translation of "discretion"; and "prudent" is the translation of "subtle". Other synonyms include "skillful" and "understanding". The New Testament adds concepts like “discerning”. Etymological it is a contraction of providence: seeing beforehand, yet meaning does not seem to occur in the New Testament. However, as forethought, foresight, prudence was reckoned one of the four cardinal virtues by the ancient ethical writers, the others being temperance, courage and justice. To this concept of forethought, the virtue of prudence demands carefulness, caution, cautiousness, discretion, good sense and seeks that recklessness is avoided. It is true that Prudence may convey a sense of safe investments and careful planning for the future. This is certainly not what we are praying for. We are rather asking for that quality of behavior which anyone can see as necessary and proper for human beings, whether they belief or not. Hence it is not like the theological virtues (faith, hope and love). Prudence is a necessary ingredient in all virtuous actions. When we lack it our actions have no value or are completely nullified. When we are prudent, we exercise our reason in how we act so that we yield good results. To do this effectively, we must be responsible to God in the way we use our mental faculties. We say with C.S. Lewis, Be good sweet maid and don’t forget that this involves being as clever as you can” Certainly this sounds like Christ telling us Be as cunning as a serpent, and harmless as a dove. St. Paul advices, that we be fools for Christ. This is what it takes to be prudent here below.
O Wisdom, which comes out of the mouth of the Most High, and reaches from one end to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence. For when we are prudent, we are truly wise, and in wisdom, we wait for you at Christmas.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God of Wisdom, you who fill our hearts but transcend our thoughts, give us all things in the gift of your Incarnated Word. Make us discerning persons with formed consciences and the freedom to recognize your invitations to grow. We ask this through Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us forever and ever. Amen.
SECOND DAY – 18TH DECEMBER

O Lord, Leader of the house of Israel, who appeared in the bush to Moses in a flame of fire, and gave him the Law in Sinai: Come and deliver us with an outstretched arm.

HYMN

O Come, Thou everlasting Lord,
Who once by Israel’s host adored
Thy dread commandment madest known
In majesty of glory show
Rejoice, rejoice Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel

O Come, O come, thou Lord of might
Who to thy tribes on Sinai’s heights
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel

REFLECTION

Today we meet another word that will guide our reflections on the O Antiphons: Adonai. This is a Hebrew word, a Divine name, translated "Lord," and signifying, from its derivation, "sovereignty." Generally, the most ancient traditions declare that God was then first known to Israel under the personal name
Yahweh (YHWH), Yahweh being a composite of the consonants of Yahweh and the vowels of 'adhonay, or lord. The word Adonai, or Lord was known at the time to be the proper name of God read out even when Yahweh is what was written. Yahweh was a name too holy to be pronounced. The immediate question is: why are we invoking Yahweh, the Father instead of focusing on the Son to come? This is a fair enough question since the first Antiphon could be easily seen as addressed to Christ, even though his Divine Nature is what dominates. Indeed, the prayer of today is addressed to Yahweh: The anamnesis made is about the action of God ask known in the Old Testament, for it is He who is lead the house of Israel, guiding them with outstretched arm and power in his hand. In accomplishing this guiding act, it was He, the Lord who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and assigned him to go down to Egypt. It was with Him that Moses spent time on Mount Sinai and from Him that the Decalogue was received and brought down to Israel. They will thenceforth be guided by the Law of the Lord, brought to them by Moses.

In our reflection we can consider the following: the implication for Christmas of inviting the Lord who manifested himself to Israel as leader, source of a vocation, and giver of the law. Let us try to make out the significance for the incarnation of introducing the figure of Moses, which we mentioned in passing yesterday. We equally reflect on the law and the coming of Christ. These are going to justify the title Adonai.

In normal parlance, the Lord expresses all grades of dignity, honor, and majesty. It is not always possible to be sure of the sense in which the term is to be taken. At times it is used for the divine person and for an angel of the Lord. (Gn 18,3; 19,18,). Israel had placed on Lv 24,16 an interpretation that aroused such a dread that they seldom dared use the name at all. But we know that the title Lord is also applied to Christ. We are not talking here of the general notion of Lord which is common to Kings and such persons of honour and majesty. The fact however, that the term used lacks precision, it helps us to reflect on God and Christ, whom we both adore in prayers. This is the nature of all the Antiphons anyway.

It is the Lord whom we await. This antiphon does not make the distinction between Yahweh and Christ, when it makes the invitation. The God who led Israel into freedom, who acted in and through Moses, the God of the Law of Sinai, is the same God we are petitioning to come and deliver us with outstretched arm.

But we know that the definitive act of our deliverance is Christ’s paschal mystery which he accomplished on the cross. The Antiphon of today invites us to look at the coming of Christ’s in the light of the mission of salvation, of liberation.
he has to come and accomplish for us. Christ is our new leader, but he is the definitive revelation of God. As new leader, Christ becomes the head of the Mystical body. He is going to constitute the new Israel, a universal constitution: for all the ends of the earth will see the salvation he will bring. The image of God’s leadership is often that of his pastoral care over his flock. He was envisaged as a Shepherd. (Ps 23) In the New Testament this same figure is applied to Christ, He is the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and the One Shepherd. It is remarkable that at his birth, the angels bring news of glad tidings to Shepherds. But the Lordship of God indicates his sovereignty. We shall still return to this idea of Divine sovereignty when we meet the antiphon designating the Lord as King.

Evoking the story of the burning bush and Moses highlights the mission God has for his chosen one. God, to lead his people out of Egypt called Moses. To lead the new people of God out of the bondage of sin, he designates his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He will lead the new people using a New Covenant and a New Law. The Mountain shall no longer be Sinai, but Calvary, but eventually he will lead them to Mount Zion, the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, true pole of the universe. The way Yahweh will liberate Israel, will be beyond our grasp. The burning bush experience is indicative of this. So too, the way Jesus’ death will work our liberation will equally be beyond our grasp. The crucifixion will be the sign. In the revelation of God in and through Moses at the burning bush and at Sinai, the Lord accompanied this with Theophanies. Such occurrences are repeated so often by Matthew and Luke in their gospel writings to underscore that Jesus was the New Moses, but something greater: as expressed in the Transfiguration event. Here, Moses and Elijah confirm Jesus as the one the Law and the Prophets had been talking about. He has come to accomplish the paschal mystery, the subject of their discussion. When Adonai comes again, this is what we will get, liberation through the cross.

About the Law, we know that Yahweh gave the Decalogue. This is the Law that guided and led Israel through till the coming of Christ. Christ says: *I give you a new commandment, love one another as I have loved you.* The greatest act of Divine love is summarized thus: *For God so loved the world, that in the fullness of time his sent his only Son to be our savior.*” It is this sending, this act of Divine love that we now call the incarnation. Christ then adds: *a man has no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.* And we know that God did not spare his own Son, but allowed him to embrace the cross to manifest this greatest act of love. It is to Christ and consequently to God, that we are petitioning: *Come and redeem us with your outstretched arm.*
The use of outstretched arm abounds in the Old Testament literature. It is used to assure the chosen people of the need to remain trusting and obedient to Yahweh. It is used to describe the great acts of Yahweh, done to liberate his people. We find this in the Psalms, in the Prophets, especially Jeremiah who uses it to retell creation and the liberation of Israel. Ezekiel uses it to indicate how Yahweh will bring back the scattered children of Israel. Though it is not used of Christ, we must realize that Christ did actually had his hands stretched out on the cross on Calvary. It is this outstretched arm of Christ that brought the liberation of the new people of God about. It is this outstretched arm of his that made him Lord over the entire universe, because by it he conquered death his last enemy. Indeed, during Lent we say: Lord, by your cross you redeemed the world. We therefore, pray that the infant Jesus, whose birth foreshadowed this great event of liberation, may truly deliver us from the cross with outstretched arm.

**Concluding Prayer**

O God of the Universe, your vastness is beyond our power to imagine, but you have come among us and revealed yourself in Christ. As we celebrate this coming, may we recognize again our dignity and serve one another with respect for the diversity of your gifts to us. We ask this for all creation in union with Christ who radiates in all and through all to your honour and glory forever and ever. Amen
O Root of Jesse, which stands for an ensign of the people, at whom kings shall shut their mouths, to whom the Gentiles shall seek: come and deliver us, and do not delay.

HYMN

O Rod of Jesse, mystic bough,
From Satan’s cruel snares do Thou,
From death’s grim dungeon, we implore.
And hell’s abyss Thine own restore.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee Israel.

O Come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan’s tyranny
From depth of hell thy people save
And give them victory o’er the grave
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee Israel.

REFLECTION

Today’s reflection introduces us to the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, the one who is to come. We learn of his great ancestor Jesse. The name in itself seems to have referred to several thing including ‘wealthy’ and ‘Yahweh exists’. In Scripture we learn he is the son of Obed, grandson of Boaz, and father of King
David. When talking about Jesse, Samuel associates him with the David and Saul narratives. There seem to be three main veins in the narrative, so far as Jesse is concerned. In the First place, we read about Jesse in 1S 16,1-13, where he is called the Bethlehemite, among whose sons Samuel must seek the successor of Saul. Both Samuel and Jesse fail to discern at first Yahweh's choice, Samuel thinking that it would be the eldest son (IS 16,6), while Jesse had not thought it worthwhile to call the youngest to the feast (IS 16,11).

Secondly, 1S 16,14-23 records the mental disturbance of Saul, and the advise that he gets a harpist. Upon the recommendation of David by one his nobles, Saul is said to have sent to Jesse for David. In reply, Jesse took ten loaves, an ass laden with bread", and a (skin) bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them" to Saul as a present with David, who becomes a courtier of Saul's with his father's consent.

We meet Jesse again in three contemptuous references by Saul to David as "the son of Jesse" in 1S 20,27,30,31, part of the quarrel-scene between Saul and Jonathan (IS 16,14-23.) In answer to the first reference, Jonathan calls his friend "David," and Saul repeats the phrase "the son of Jesse," abusing Jonathan personally (1S 20,30). The reference to David as "the son of Jesse" here and in the following verse is contemptuous, not because of any reproach that might attach itself to Jesse, but, because an insignificant person or a nonentity is always contemptuously referred to under his father's name" in courts and society. This is even true of our society today. We often hear remarks like: Whose son are you? When referring to one considered as a misfit.

In another incident found in 1S 25,10, Nabal sarcastically asks "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?"

Jesse is said to have eight sons, David being the last of them while the three eldest had followed Saul to the war (1S.17,13). Jesse sends David, the shepherd, to his brothers with provisions (1S 17,17). Afterward David, on being brought to Saul and asked who he is, answers, "I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite" (IS 17,58). Jesse is also described (IS 17,12) as being "in the days of Saul an old man, advanced in years". 1Ch 2,13-15, controversially give the number of Jesse’s sons as 7 and two sisters. According to all these narratives in 1 Samuel, whether all 3 be entirely independent of one another or not, Jesse had land in Bethlehem, probably outside the town wall, like Boaz his grandfather (Ruth 4,17). In 1S 22,3,1 David entrusts his father and mother to the care of the king of Moab, but from 20,29 some have inferred that Jesse was dead.

Jesse must have been a respecter of tradition. Jonathan tells Saul that David
wanted to attend a family sacrificial feast at Bethlehem (1S 20,29).

About Jesse Isaiah prophecies: "There shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit," (Is 11:1) i.e., out of Jesse's roots. We may be wondering why Jesse and not David when it would have been easier and more understandable to associate the Messiah with David in accordance with Scripture. Perhaps we may want to see Christ as a David who was to come again, thus making David a type of Christ. In this regard Saul might pour contempt upon "the son of Jesse," but Isaiah has given Jesse here a name above all Hebrew names. David is Son, Christ will be Son. David is King of Israel; Christ will be King of Kings, King over the New Israel. As root of Jesse, then, the Messianic king was to be of the family of Jesse the father of David. Jesus is a branch or descendant of the family of Jesse, as well as of David.

In the parlance of Saul, then, Jesus springs from a man whose family roots had nothing of nobility. If it meant the greatness of tribes, then Jesse is from the least tribe of Israel, a Benjamenite. Benjamin being the very last of the sons of Jacob. Hence, the Root of Jesse represents this choice of God from a poor background, the lowliest, yet a family of integrity, respectable, belonging to the faithful remnant. The Coming of the Messiah, it is our hope will be one that will ensure the reversal of status in favor of those whom society abhors and rejects. As an antiphon to the Magnificat, then, we can understand when Our Lady sings: He has cast the mighty from their thrones, and raised up the lowly. We must remember that she sang this in events leading up to the incarnation, what God was about to accomplish through the Son she was now bearing.

**O Root of Jesse, which stands for an ensign of the people, at whom kings shall shut their mouths, to whom the Gentiles shall seek: come and deliver us, and do not delay.**

The Root of Jesse bears the fruit which will shut the mouths of kings of the likes of Saul. This language is typical again of the liberating act of God who at the time of the exile was going to raise an ensign, someone like a signpost, a flag that would guide the captives out into freedom, overpowering kings and emerging victorious. Certainly, the only example of such a King is none other than David. This prayer is then a cry that the Lord coming should be for us today what David was in the days of old. We are the nations, we are seeking this liberator faced with all that enslaves us. We need to be delivered and we need that this deliverance be a matter of urgency. *Come and deliver us, and do not delay.* The coming of Christ, will surely do this. He will bring us into fellowship with God, reconcile us to the Father, and make us a people of the Covenant again which we have abandoned.
due to our waywardness. Paul in Romans even invite the Gentiles to hope in the root of Jesse. Hence, he will be liberator of all, a universal King.

Notice that the hymn associated with this antiphon speaks of deliverance from Satan’s tyranny, from the depths of hell and from the grave. It was certainly the cross of Christ that brought this kind of victory. Today, we must pray that we are freed from all ills, from alienation, from hopelessness, from despair, from presumption, for God, through Christ has won the battle over the forces of evil. Whatever be the influence evil seem to be having on us, today, we invite the Root of Jesse to come quickly and deliver us. Come and do not delay, deliver us from evil. This is how Jesus ends the Our Father.

Concluding Prayer

O God, your Holy Word became enfleshed in the Virgin Mary. With her this Advent we have reflected on the angel’s promises. We know you are always coming into our lives and that we bring you forth in works of mercy and love. Help us today to live by this faith. We ask this through the intercession of all who revealed your compassionate love and now live with you in eternal joy. Amen,
FOURTH DAY – 20TH DECEMBER

O Key of David, and Scepter of the house of Israel; You open and no one shuts. You close and no one opens. Come and deliver us from the prisons that hold us, for we are seated in darkness, oppressed by the shadows of death.

HYMN

O come, Thou Key of David’s store.  
Unlock thy heavenly gates once more  
Safe journey to Thy courts bestow,  
And shut the way that leads below.  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel  
Is born to save thee, Israel

O Come, thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heavenly home:  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel

REFLECTION

Today, our antiphon opens by invoking the Key of David and the Scepter of the house of Israel. The anamnesis is God’s ability to open and no one shuts and
to shut and no one opens. His decisions are final and none is supreme over him. In the Book of the Apocalypse we read: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens. (Revelation 3:7) While Is 22:22 uses the term key figuratively for power, because the key was sometimes worn on the shoulder as a sign of official authority. The Scepter, on the other hand, was a rod or mace used by a sovereign as a symbol of royal authority. The Hebrews however used it as an ordinary rod (2S 7:14) or as the shepherd’s crook (Ps 23:4), or a scribes baton or marshal’s staff (Jg 5:14), but the idea of a royal symbol was also present. While the Scepter was associated with protection or punishment, the royal line used it figuratively of sovereignty in general and possibly of conquest. If the one holding the scepter disappeared, it was a sign that the nation had lost their independence. The word Scepter has also been used to describe the Kingship of Yahweh (Ps 45:6). King Ahasuerus is said to have held out a golden Scepter to Esther as a mark of favor. Hence, we can quickly see that the kingly symbolisms of the infant Jesus are being invoked here.

The Key, we must be familiar, is widely considered as a symbol of authority. It has even been observed that when people reach the age of maturity a birthday card is given them having a door-key. They have reached a stage when they are free to open and go out of the door of the house without permission from the parents. Jesus, in the Gospels uses the key in connection with Peter. He tells Peter, ‘I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven’ (Mt 16,19). The Apocalypes speaks of Christ as having the ‘keys of death and of Hades’ (Ap 1,18), also having ‘the key of David’(Ap 3,7). Still in Revelation, an angel was given ‘the key of the pit of the abyss’ (Ap 9,1 Ap 20,1). In Jesus’ conflicts with the Scribes, he accused them of taking away ‘the key of knowledge’ from men. By this he meant that they were shutting the doors of the truth against people. (Lk 11,52; Mt 23,13). Today, the Church is certainly facing plenty of opposition from outsiders regarding what is now termed the Power of the Keys. It is an issue stubbornly contested in Christian terminology. We know that it is provoked by Mt 16:19, but originates from the conflict of forces inherent in the institutional development of religion and of society.

As we reflect on the coming of the Key of David, such issues regarding power which now sets the Christian Churches apart need to be brought before God in prayer. The problems involved include the Binding and Loosening power of the Keys, the meaning of the statement, Meaning of the Statements, How Peter is Related to these Powers and issues the power of the keys accommodate: position and authority. We shall not go deep into these matters here, but suffice it to say
that when Jesus made Peter bearer of the keys he was certainly empowering him, be it legislative authorities, be it powers, obligations, responsibilities and privileges exclusively Petrine and the ability of having these powers handed over within the context of the Papacy. This makes the Key significant in the sphere of authority.

When Ap 3,7 presents Christ as key of David, the idea is a mastery over all things in the Messianic Kingdom, its own operations and all forms of opposition. St. Augustine says Jesus’ having the key implies he knows all the secrets of the Davidic dynasty. He is not the first to have been associated with the house of David in Scriptures. In Is 22:22, Eliakim is to have absolute power, holding the key of the house of David. He is the son of Hilkiah who succeeded Shebna as governor of the palace under Hezekiah (Is 22,20). The functions of his office are seen from this oracle of Isaiah. In it, Shebna is deposed and Eliakim set in his place (Is 22,15 ff). He is the "treasurer" or "steward", and is "over the house" (Is 22,15). At his installation he is clothed with a robe and girdle, the insignia of his office and having the government committed into his hand. He is designated the "father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah" (Is 22,21). The key of the house of David is laid on his shoulder, and he alone has power to open and shut, this being symbolic of his absolute authority as the king's representative. With Jesus therefore, we are talking of absolute sovereignty. The Psalms described the absolute sovereignty of God in these terms; Our God is in heaven, he has power to do whatever he wills (Ps 115:3). No one will challenge the Divine authority of the child to be born. Notice that he has the Key of the pit of the abyss. He controls life and death. Jesus will be the new David, with absolute sovereignty. He will hold the scepter, in favor of the house of Israel. Then Israel will be liberated.

Our petition is that the Key of David should come and deliver us from the prisons that hold us, for we are seated in darkness, oppressed by the shadows of death. The Hail Holy Queen we say often describes our life here as being in a vale of tears. This prayer evokes the other side of Divine authority and control, the key of the abyss, of the pit. He has this key and he can open to let us out so that we share again our full sonship in the house of David, in the kingdom of the messiah.

It is this great desire to be one again with the Lord, to return to the covenant, to be a people again, that moves us to wait in hope and expectation. We expect the Messiah to liberate us. He had this in his program when he appeared for the first time in the Synagogue of Nazareth: The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me.... He has sent me to... set prisoners free. The prayer talks of an oppressor, the shadows of death. The shadows are many
including the shadow of despair, the shadow of discouragement, defeat, difficulty, doubt, division and even death. These cause us to be sunken in darkness. The expression shadow of death features in Psalm 23:4. Being the Psalm of David he must have composed it when thinking of his experiences as pastor of the flock in the Valley of Shadow. He fed his flocks in the wilderness below Bethlehem, where many a silent and dreadful "Valley of Shadows" might make the stoutest heart fail. The lion crept up from the Jordan valley, and on another occasion the bear came down from the rugged mountains above (1S 17,34). These familiar words of the Psalmist today truly bring comfort to many of us, especially when we are faced with grief, sorrow, loss, turmoil, or tragedy. We often choose this Psalm at funerals and other such occasions. We are assured of the wonderful way God's comfort and grace reach us.

The infant Jesus will surround us, will be our companion, for the assuring Psalm says You are with me... God is going to be with us on this earth, this place of darkness, thanks to the incarnation. At his coming, we shall fear no evil. Let us ask the Lord to come and truly shed his clear light into the darkness of our being, of our world and save us before we sink into the deep. He will use his key and shut the abyss, the pit of death, and will point out the way, guarantee our journey and open the gates of heaven to his faithful people, so that between earth and heaven there would be free communication. The heavens would drop down dew, the earth will open up and the Saviour will spring forth. In this manner, heaven will be wedded to earth and we shall have free access as true sons of the Most High.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, source of all peace, we have heard again your promises of old and your vision for all humankind. In the coming of Christ, we recognize the one who can free us from all that prevents their fulfillment. Help us to respond wholeheartedly to this liberating presence. This we ask through Jesus, the Eternal Word, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen
FIFTH DAY – 21ST DECEMBER


HYMN

O Come, Thou Day star seen on high
With healing for our hearts draw nigh
Do Thou the mists of night dispel.
And death’s foreboding darkness quell.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel

O Come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine Advent here:
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death’s dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to save thee, Israel.

REFLECTION
In the Book of Revelation, Jesus says, *I am the root of Jesse, and David’s Son, the Radiant Star of Morning*... Today we come across a word: O Oriens. It has been rendered differently. Some refer to it as Dawn, others as The Rising Sun, or Morning Star, or Radiant Star, or Day-spring. In the East, the first Star to be seen before the breaking of day was the planet Jupiter. However, it is not the planet we are celebrating, but Jesus as light. In John 8:12, Jesus calls himself the Light of the World: "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." We are invoking him as Light that dispels darkness. It is interesting to experience the dawning of the morning, how darkness fades and the gradual brightness of day brings hope and joy in our hearts.

God has been called by many titles. At times he is Love, He is Spirit, but he is also Light: (1Jn 1,5). To say that God is light means that the Divine nature is by inward necessity self-revealing. The essential property of light is to shine. God, by his very essence shines. The one who shines is righteous, and is love, and always reveals himself to be what he is. He is transparent, and there is no deceit and no hypocrisy about him. God is light. As light he is Truth, the object of spiritual perception. He is the source of spiritual illumination to everyone capable of receiving the revelation. God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all, no shadows, no alterations, no change. In Him nothing hides and nothing can be hidden, for darkness is not dark for Him. (Ps 139). Jesus, we know is the definitive self-revelation of God, a perfect form of Divine self-communication. In ancient times he spoke through prophets and in various ways, now he speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, who is the light of men (Jn 1,4), the light of the world (Jn 8,12 Jn 9,5), the true light (Jn 1,9 1Jn 2,8). Thanks to this Light, we are illumined and we can come out of our sinfulness and share in the light of Christ. Christ himself invites us to "come to the light" (Jn 3,19-21) to "walk in the light" (1Jn 1,7). Thanks to the incarnation, the Light will come to the world, to his own and will, invite us to partake in his illumination process. He tells his apostles: You are the light of the world, a city built on a hill top cannot be hidden. He invites us to let our light shine before men, so that they may see and be converted.

When we consider the entire journey of God’s creation of the world, it is remarkable that Light is the first thing he created: *Let there be Light (Gn 1,3)*. It was created out of the Word that came from the Mouth of God, the first word of God spoken after His creative Spirit "moved" upon the primary material out of which He created the heavens and the earth, and which lay, until the utterance of that word, in the chaos of darkness and desolation. John is therefore, in order
when he defines God not only as the Author of light but, in an all-inclusive sense, as light itself: "God is light" (1Jn 1,5). The origin of light thus finds its explanation in the purpose and very nature of God.

Throughout the Scriptures the light has acquired a comprehensive and rich meaning. Since materially it is of splendor or brilliance, Scriptures uses this quality as the symbol and synonym of all that is luminous and radiant in the mental, moral and spiritual life of men and angels. Whereas God, perfect, eternal and Holy is pictured always as ‘dwelling in light unapproachable’ (1Tm 6,16). Every phase of the word, from the original light in the natural world to the spiritual glory of the celestial, is found in Holy Scripture.

In our meditation today, we rejoice that the Light is coming. He will make us begin a journey of illumination that will lead us to appreciate the Divine light down to Natural light.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Darkness is the universal symbol and condition of sin and death; light the symbol and expression of holiness. “The light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame” (Is 10,17). God, by His presence and grace, is to us a "marvellous light" (IP 2,9). The glory of His holiness and presence is the "everlasting light" of the redeemed in heaven (Is 60,19,20; Ap 21,23,14; 22,5).

Christ is light, the "effulgence of God's glory" (He 1,3), "the light which illumines every man, coming into the world" (Jn 1,9), the light to enlighten the Gentiles(Lk 2,32). As light He was "God .... manifest in the flesh (1Tm 3,16). When the disciples saw his glory it showed itself in and through light. In revealing and giving life, Christ becomes "the light of men" (Jn 1,4). God gives "the light of the knowledge of (his) glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4,6), and this salvation is called "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2Co 4,4). Christ is thus the Teacher, Enlightener (Ep 5,14), Guide, Saviour of men.

Today we celebrate the fact that Christ’s coming will make us radiate his light. Since all who catch and reflect the light of God and of Christ are called "light," or "lights." This is the case with John the Baptist: "a burning and a shining light" (Jn 5,35). It is significant that this pre-Christian prophet was termed light, while the disciples of the new dispensation are called "Ye are the light of the world." (Mt 5,14). Henceforth Christians and saints were called "children of light" (Lc 16,8 Jn 12,36 Ep 5,8), and were expected to be "seen as lights in the world" (Ph 2,15). But we must also realize that there was the mistaken light. The Jew who possessed the law mistakenly supposed he was "a light of them that are in
darkness" (Rom 2,19).

When Christ was establishing his Church, he said the gates of the underworld would not overcome it. Hence, the Church was designed to oppose darkness in the world. Zion was to "shine" because her 'light had come' (Is 60,1). The Gentiles were to come to her light (Is 60,3). Her mission as the enlightener of the world was symbolized in the ornamentations of her priesthood. The Urim of the high priest's breastplate signified light. It stood for revelation, and thummim for truth. The church of the Christian dispensation was to be even more radiant with the light of God and of Christ. The seven churches of Asia were revealed to John, by the Spirit, as seven golden candlesticks, and her ministers as seven stars, both luminous with the light of the Gospel revelation. In Ephesians, Christ, who is the Light of the world, is the Head of the church, the latter being His body through which His glory is to be manifested to the world, "to make all men see," (Ep 3,9,10).

In Scripture we also know that light symbolizes: the eye, "The light of the body is the eye" (Mt 6,22); watchfulness, "Let your lights or "lamps" be burning," (see the parable of the Virgins); protection, "armor (Rom 13,12), the garment of a holy and Christ-like life; the sphere of the Christian's daily walk, "inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1,12); heaven, for the inheritance just referred to includes the world above in which "the Lamb is the light thereof"; prosperity, relief (Est 8,16 Job), in contrast with the calamities of the wicked whose "light .... shall be put out" (Jb 18,5); joy and gladness (Jb 3,20 Ps 97,11); God's favor, the light of thy countenance (Ps 4,6 Ps 44,3), and a king's favor (Pr 16,15); life (Ps 13,3 Ps 49,19 Jn 1,4).

The coming of Christ today must make us give thanks for such enlightenment but also we thank God who helps us to appreciate the natural lights, and always associate them with Him, for he made them all on the Fourth day. We are talking about the light of day (Gn 1,5); of sun, moon and stars; "lights in the firmament" (Gn 1,14-18 Ps 74,), characterized by beauty, radiance, utility. Seeing them give joy to the heart (Pr 15,30). About this Qohelet says, "Truly the light is sweet" (Qo 11,7). John thinks without it men stumble and are helpless (Jn 11,9,10). Job sees it as something for which they wait with inexpressible longing (Jb 30,26). On light depends life, joy, activity and all blessings.

We thank God too this evening for the discovery of artificial light. It is true that when Natural light fails, man provides himself with some temporary substitute, however dim and inadequate. The ancient Hebrews had "oil for the light" (Ex 25,6 Ex 35,8 Lv 24,2) and lamps (Ex 35,14 Mt 5,15). "There were many lights.
(lampas) in the upper chamber" at Troas, where Paul preached until midnight (Ac 20,8). What about "candle."

Today, we also thank the Lord for miraculous lights. They occurred on several occasions in the history of the chosen people. When the appalling plague of "thick darkness," for three days, enveloped the Egyptians, terrified and rendered them helpless, "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Ex 10,23). Whether the darkness was due to a Divinely-ordered natural cause or the light was the natural light of day, the process that preserved the interspersed Israelites from the encompassing darkness was supernatural. Miraculous, also, even though through natural agency, was the "pillar of fire" that gave light to the Israelites escaping from Pharaoh (Ex 13,21 Ex 14,20 Ps 78,14), "He led them .... all the night with a light of fire." Supernatural was the effulgence at Christ's transfiguration that made "his garments .... white as the light" (Mt 17,2). Under the same category Paul classifies 'the great light' that 'suddenly shone round about him from heaven' on the way to Damascus (Ac 22,6 compare Ac 9,3). In these rare instances the supernatural light was not only symbolic of an inner spiritual light, but instrumental, in part at least, in revealing or preparing the way for it.

We celebrate that which we call Mental, Moral, Spiritual Light. Truly natural lights have their counterpart in the inner life of man. Few words lend themselves with such beauty and appropriateness to the experiences, conditions, and radiance of the spiritual life. For this reason the Scriptures use "light" largely in the figurative sense. Borrowed from the natural world, it is, nevertheless, inherently suited to portray spiritual realities. In secular life a distinct line of demarcation is drawn between intellectual and spiritual knowledge and illumination. Education that enlightens the mind may leave the moral man untouched. This distinction rarely obtains in the Bible, which deals with man as a spiritual being and looks upon his faculties as interdependent in their action. A few passages, however, refer to the light that comes chiefly to the intellect or mind through Divine instruction, e.g. Ps 119,130, "The opening of thy words gives light"; Pr 6,23, "The law is light." Even here the instruction includes moral as well as mental enlightenment. Job 24,13,16 has to do exclusively with man's moral attitude to truth: "rebel against the light"; "know not the light." Is 5,20 describes a moral confusion and blindness, which cannot distinguish light from darkness. For the most part, however, light and life go together. It is the product of salvation: "Yahweh is my light and my salvation" (Ps 27,1). "Light," figuratively used, has to do preeminently with spiritual life, including also the illumination that floods all the faculties of the soul: intellect, conscience, reason, will. In the moral realm
the enlightenment of these faculties is dependent wholly on the renewal of the spirit. "In thy light .... we see light" (Ps 36,9); "The life was the light of men" (Jn 1,4). Light is an attribute of holiness, and thus a personal quality. It is the outshining of Deity. Let us call on the Spendour of Light, the Sun of righteousness to come and illumine our darkness.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

O God, source of all good, you constantly broke through our history, calling us to love, peace and justice. Your Word made flesh in Jesus is a new call and a new beginning. This Advent we as to renew this vision and our fidelity to Jesus who is the way. We ask this in the name of the self-same Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.
O King of the nations and the desire thereof, the Cornerstone who makes both one: Come and save mankind whom You have made from clay.

HYMN

O Come, Desire of nations! Show
Thy Kingly reign on earth below;
Thou Corner-stone, uniting all,
Restore the ruin of our fall.
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to Thee, O Israel.

O Come, of Gentile hearts the King,
A world that needs Thee ransoming.
And save Thy servants, who confess
With humbled hearts their faithlessness
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee Israel

REFLECTION

The Antiphon of today contains allusions to Rev. 15:3 which reads “Just and true are your ways, O King of the ages (variations: nations)…” We also read in Haggai 2:7, “The desire of all nations shall come.” The Letter to the Ephesians 2:20 refers to Jesus as the Cornerstone. Shortly before this the same letter refers to Jesus as our peace who has made us both one. It is in the story of creation in Genesis 2:7, that we first come across the idea that the Lord formed man of dust
or clay from the ground. Hence, we can identify these highlights as area of our reflection: the coming Lord, as King of the nations, the concept of His being the nations’ desire, that of his being the cornerstone, his ability to make unity out of division and the significance of forming us out of clay.

That Christ is set before us as King is not an issue to be disputed. Scriptures testify to this. His title as Messiah or Christ implies this. He is anointed as the Kings were from the time Israel began having Kings. Eventually we discover that he assumes a threefold office of King, prophet and priest. In the Old Testament, his Kingship is foreshadowed remarkably by the prophecy of Balaam, where he predicts kingly dignity and dominion suggested by the star and scepter (Nb 24,15-17). Israel had always wanted a King, not until then, Yahweh had been their King. In the Psalms and the Prophets, there are many royal predictions. Above all the tumult of earth, Yahweh’s voice declares, "Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." (Ps2). In Psalms 24; 45; 72; 89 and 110 we meet predictions regarding the Messianic king: Isaiah sees a virgin conceiving a “Prince of Peace” (Is 9,6,7), his government shall continue to increase for eternity, He shall reign in righteousness (Is 32,1). Even Jeremiah, the prophet of doom, has vivid visions of the coming King. He says: "Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land" (23,5). Daniel sees the rise and progress, the decline and fall of many mighty empires, but beyond all he sees the Son of man inheriting an everlasting kingdom (7,13). Micah’s prophecy begins to echo the universal character of the Divine King. He sees the everlasting Ruler coming out of Bethlehem clothed in the strength and majesty of God. He says he shall "be great unto the ends of the earth" (5,4). The coming of the King should cause the daughter of Zion to rejoice (Zech 9,9). The course of this King will be traced until he shall be King over all the earth (14,9).

The Gospels present Christ as king. It is evident in the genealogy they trace of Him as coming from the royal lineage: Son of David. It is evident in the visit of the Magi with their gifts, these being pagan kings. We meet this in the declaration of the angel that the child to be born and named Jesus would sit on the throne of David and rule over Jacob’s house forever (Lc 1,32,33). Christ Himself claimed kingship, directly and by implication: by implication, when he declared himself Messiah and in all his teaching regarding the kingdom. When the Sons of Zebedee or rather their mother made her demands on behalf of the sons, Jesus does not deny his being king, but denies apportioning seats (Mt 20,21-23). As he enters Jerusalem he fulfills the prediction of Zechariah: "Behold, thy king comes," and He accepts, approves and justifies the hosannas and the homage of the multitude
(Mt 21,1-16 Mc 11 Lc 19 Jn 12). He envisages the day of judgement, the king taking his seat and separating the goats from the sheep. (Mt 25). The dying thief prays, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Lc 23,42), and Jesus gives His royal response which implies full acceptance of the position. When he was charged and condemned one of the issues at stake was the idea of his Kingship. Before Pilate he declared himself King and defined his domain. (Jn 18,37). He came to bear witness to the Truth. Pilate paradoxically declares him King of the Jews on a slate nailed over the cross. (Jn 19,21).

His presence before the court of Pilate marked the moment when the bitterness of his opponents indicated how much he was rejected by his own Jewish people. He himself had predicted this when he talked of the Stone rejected by the builders, becoming the corner stone. What is a corner-stone? A corner-stone is a part of the public or imposing buildings, to which importance has been attached in all ages and in many nations, both on account of its actual service and its figurative meaning. The Canaanites had a very sacred and colourful ceremony to lay the corner-stone. Later, it was not uncommon to have the corner-stone of temples, within the context of a consecratory ceremony which at times took the form of a human sacrifice. This was one of many hideous rites and practices which Israel was to stamp out. (Jos 6,26)

The Bible uses it figuratively and symbolically. Herein, there appear to be two ways of considering the idea of the corners-stone: (a) the first stone or foundation-stone upon which the structure rested (Job 38,6); or (b) the topmost or cap-stone, which linked the last tier together (Ps 118,22). We are talking about the beginning and the end. Hence, figuratively the stone is applied to Christ, the Messiah, who is the alpha and the omega. In Zec 10,4 the leader or ruler in the Messianic age is represented by the corner-stone. In a number of New Testament passages, Christ is shown as the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the corner-stone. (Cf. Mt 21,42 Mc 12,10 Lc 20,17 Ac 4,11 and 1P 2,7, Ep 2,20 Ep 2,28,16, Rm 9,33)

Jesus is the desire of the nations. The Epistles declared him "Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom 14,9), one who is risen "to rule over the Gentiles" (Rom 15,12), who must reign, “till he hath put all his enemies under his feet" (1Co 15,25), one who is at the right hand of God "above all rule, and authority," etc. (Ep 1,20-22). In his Kingdom, evil has no inheritance (Ep 5,5). Before the name of this King, every knee should bow (Ph 2,9-11). Those who suffer with Christ are to "reign with him" (2Tm 2,12), at "his appearing and his kingdom" (2Tm 4,1), and He will save them (2Tm 4,18).
In the Apocalypse, appropriately, the predominant aspect of Christ is that of a king. He is the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (Ap 1,5), "King of the ages" (Ap 15,3), "King of kings" (Ap 17,14 Ap 19,16), "and he shall reign forever and ever" (Ap 11,15).

We must remember that he assumes this title by birth into the family of David; by Divine Choice, for God highly exalted him, and gave him the name which is above every name" (Ph 2,9); by subjugation, as he proved superior to the kingdom of the evil one, but also by the Free choice of the People of God, whose voices confirmed and ratified that he is King and besides him there is no other. Our prayer today, holds all these dimensions in view, yet stresses his kingship over the nations. By this we may want to comment a bit on the universal nature of the Kingship of Christ. In the Scriptures, a Jewish religious historical record, the Jewish idea of the Messiah's reign as a narrow national one dominates. It meant the glorification of the sons of Abraham. Judaism was to reign supreme over all forms of faith and all systems of philosophy, subjection to Jewish sway of the haughty Roman, the cultured Greek and the rude barbarian. The Messiah was to accomplish this for them. This was their expectation. However, the prophetic ideal was a universal kingdom. Christ endorsed this and stressed it in his teaching. In his Kingdom, all barriers are to be broken down. Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freedmen alike are to belong to the new order. "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 8,11). He even dared to add, "The sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness" (Mt 8,12). These are the ideas behind some of his parables of the kingdom (Mt 13). In John’s Gospel he talks of some "Other sheep" he has which are not of “this fold” (Jn 10,16). He envisages his crucifixion as a moment to “draw all men unto myself”(Jn 12,32). His sovereignty is universal. Even when he commissions his disciples, he bids them go to all nations, indicating to them how all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to him. (Mt 28,19). He makes them his witnesses to the “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Ac 1,8). He designates Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles.

If this is what Christ’s Kingship is, then it is thanks to the nature of the Kingdom he has come to establish: a Kingdom of Grace, of Power, a Kingdom of Glory, an eternal reign. He himself then stand out as King of truth, of salvation (Mt 21,5 Zec Mt 9,9), of grace, of peace (Lc 19,38 He 7,2), of righteousness (He 1,8 He 7,2), of glory (Mt 25,31-34); of eternity, of saints, of the ages; king of kings (Ap 19,16), upon whose head are many diadems (Ap 19,12).

If the Lord is King of both the Jews and Gentiles, this speaks of his ability
to make out of a divided peoples one nation, one race. With his there is One Lord, One faith, One baptism, One God, who is Father of all. The idea of making all into one was very present in Jesus’ vision and showed itself to be one of his major preoccupations as he was departing. It is contained in the priestly prayer he offered shortly before he left this world. Jn 17. *Father, may they be one, as you and I are one.* It is possible for him to achieve this because of the kind of people he has fashioned. He made us out of clay. He has been referred to as the potter. The Potter moulds and fashions the clay to whatever object of his liking. Yahweh is capable of fashioning us into new peoples that reflect, that accept his principles of unity. Indeed, the shaping of clay into pottery typified the molding of the characters of individuals or nations by a master mind (*Jr* 18,1-6 *Is* 29,16 *Is* 45,9 *Is 64,8 Rm 9,20 ff). Clay is common placed, so it represents our common humanity, regardless of race, nation, tongue, tribe, etc. This must take away all human divisions, quarrels etc. We are dust and unto dust we shall all return. Jesus’ coming must mould us and fashion us into the image of Himself, since that is the image we are created in, so that we too will become sons of the Most High. Our response should be that of humility, as we wait.

**CONCLUDING PRAYER**

O God of tender mercy, your love for us has drawn you to be one with us in Christ. You are breaking down the barriers between nations by the force of that love in our hearts. Help us always to be persons of peace in union with those who actively build it in society. Grant this through your Son Jesus Christ, whose gift is the blessing of peace in the midst of chaos. Amen.
O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the expectations of all nations and their Savior: come and save us, O Lord our God.

HYMN

O Come, O Come, Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O Come, O come, Immanuel,
Redeem Thy captive Israel.
That doth in exile homeless mourn,
Until her Savior Christ be born
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.
REFLECTION

Two New Testament texts stand out as we reflect today: His name shall be called Emmanuel (which means God with us) (Mt 1:23 – also Cf Is 7:14) and For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God (Rm 8:19). In a second antiphon the idea of Emmanuel being the desire of every nation comes up again. The nations desired him as King, now they desire him as God, to come and be with them, to save them.

All the Antiphons were leading to this reality: Emmanuel, a word that describes the implication of the incarnation, or of Christmas. God descends from on High and makes his dwelling, pitches his tent among men. He comes to be with us. John says he comes to his own. Remarkably, the name Emmanuel comes up only three times in the entire Scriptures. We find it twice in the Old Testament (Is 7,14 and Is 8,8), and once in the New Testament (Mt 1,23). It is a Hebrew word signifying "God is with us."

When it is mentions in Isaiah Is 7,14, it is in connection with the prophet’s predictions during the reign of Ahaz. In 735 BC Ahaz was king of Judah. The kingdom of Israel was already tributary to Assyria (2R 15,19,20). Ahaz was forced to cooperate in a coalition formed between Pekah, king of Israel and Rezin, king of Syria, which was originally intended to resist Assyria. Ahaz’s refusal would have led to his being deposed in favour of a king of their own choice on the throne of David. Unfortunately Ahaz never sought the help of Yahweh in this crisis of his. The two kings to this end, waged war against Judah, advancing as far as Jerusalem itself, but without complete success (Is 7,1). Ahaz was not a very strong king. He panicked, and became determined to seek the help of the King of Assyria Tiglath-pileser. (2R 16,7). When he eventually did this, it became tantamount to Judah loosing its national sovereignty and they ended up paying huge tributes to Assyria. Certainly, this was not good news. For this reason, Isaiah gathers his disciples around him (Is 8,16) and delivers a message to King Ahaz. Isaiah tries to calm his fears, to invite him invoke the Lord for a sign, and to depend on the courage of his people. Ahaz offered resistance. Isaiah then offers him a sign. The sign of the conception of a virgin, the sign of "Emmanuel" (Is 7,14).

At the time, the sign was at once favorable but also presented many difficulties. It is evident that the prophet had first intended an omen of deliverance and blessing (Is 7,4,7). But probably due to the King’s manifestation of lack of faith, it came across as a threat, referring to the overthrow of Judah rather than that of her enemies. However, the notion of a promise remained. It is certain also
that Isaiah looked for the destruction of Syria and Ephraim, and that, subsequent to the Assyrian invasion, salvation should come to Judah through the remnant that had been faithful (11,11).

The text, was also applied to the Messianic expectations as Israel knew it in general. In this regard, three elements are present: reference to "a virgin," “the son” and “the name: Emmanuel”. In the first case, and going by traditional interpretation the sign lay in the virgin birth. The young mother has been identified as Zion personified, and the "son" as the future generation. The name Immanuel has also been interpreted as referring to a messiah figure, as anticipated by Isaiah and his contemporaries, for Judah had this Messianic hope of a national saviour (2S 7,12). Isaiah is expecting the arrival of one whose character and work shall entitle him to the great names. In him should dwell all the fullness of God. He was to be "of the stem of Jesse," the bringer of the Golden Age. The house of David is now beset by enemies, and its reigning representative is weak in faith. The prophet therefore announces the immediate coming of the deliverer. If he had intended the virgin-conception of Christ in the distant future, the sign of "Immanuel" would have possessed no immediate significance, nor would it have been an omen to Ahaz. All these considerations make Isaiah’s prophecy Messianic.

It is against this background that it is taken up in the New Testament and attributed to Christ. Typologically, Isaiah’s passage becomes a prefiguration of the virgin-birth, and the coming of a Son of David, Emmanuel, God-with-us, the incarnation. Matthew follows the universal Christian tradition and sees in the prophecy of Isaiah the promise of a much more wonderful presence of God with us in the birth of our Saviour. When Scriptures talks of God-with-us what could this imply? On several occasions the Lord has assured those he has chosen: Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, etc. that He will be with them. Both from a generally religious and from a specifically point of view of salvation, the omnipresence of God is of great practical importance for the religious life. It guarantees the actual nearness of God and a real communion with Him even apart from the places hallowed for such purpose by a specific gracious self-manifestation (Ps 139,5-10). The divine omnipresence also assures the believer that God is at hand to save in every place where from any danger or foe His people need salvation (Is 43,2: when you pass through the waters I’ll be with you, you will never sink beneath the waves). During the Exodus experience, Yahweh, without disclosing who he really is, stoops down to appear and work for the redemption of His people. He was a God whose presence manifested itself in his actions, in his long-suffering with the people, in his covenant, etc. It was a
redemptive and revelatory presence which at times was tied to definite localities, without taking away the fact of his being everywhere. This divine presence was occasion for building of altars and doing liturgy. It marked the beginning of that gradual restoration of the gracious presence of God to fallen humanity, the completion of which forms the goal of redemption. Thus, God is said to dwell in the ark, in the tabernacle, on Mt. Zion (Nb 10,35; 2S 6,2); in the temple (1R 8 Ps 20,2); in the Holy Land (1S 26,19); in Christ (Jn 1,14; Jn 2,19); in the church (Jn 14,23; Rm 8,9,11); in the eschatological assembly of His people (Ap 21,3).

The Title Emmanuel bears with it this soteriological value or the idea of salvation. Christ assures his disciples: *I will be with you, Yes, until the end of time.* In this way, the disciples are not to fear, for he will be their stronghold, their refuge, their strength.

The hymn today prays that Emmanuel should come and ransom captive Israel that mourns in exile. God’s coming is an assurance of this saving presence, redemptive. The O Antiphon invokes him as King and Lawgiver. We have reflected on the Kingship of Christ. But what would the presence of a Lawgiver imply for Israel and for us too?

In the history of the chosen people, Moses has been the greatest figure, whose law Israel claimed to be following. Moses was The Lawgiver, though this title was never bestowed on him.

In Old Testament passages where the term lawgiver is used, God is the "lawgiver," and in the New Testament He is so called because He has the power to **rule and judge, to save and destroy.** As man, we do not have the authority to judge, because we are not the one who established the law. God, the lawgiver possesses the right to pronounce judgment. Hence, being a Lawgiver implies more than just being a legislator. It carries with it absolute sovereignty. That is why our Antiphon includes the kingship of Christ again. The one who gives laws is the ruler. He is not only ruler, but he is judge. The kingship and Lawgiving are historically inseparable, for it is founded on the concept of the monarchy, where one person has legislative, judicial and administrative authority. James letter uses the terms "lawgiver and judge" to express the idea that God is an absolute sovereign.

Applying this title to Christ, is not just making him a new Moses, for it was not really Moses who gave the Law, but received it and transmitted it to the people. Jesus is The Lawgiver. He himself is the Law. Moses and Elijah during the Transfiguration, as it were, pointed to him as the one about whom all the Law
and Prophets bore testimony to. Christ himself says he did not come to abolish it, but to bring it to fulfillment. (Mt 5:17). It is clear that God could not abolish the law which he himself had given. He can, however, as Jesus Christ did, make clear its full significance. He explained its correct meaning, and corrected false interpretations and arbitrary applications, to which the people and even their teachers and rulers had subjected it, yielding to the weaknesses and limitations of the human condition. For this reason Jesus announced, proclaimed and called for a righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Mt 5:20), the righteousness which God himself proposed and demanded by the faithful observance of the law for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The Son of Man acted as a God who re-establishes what God had willed and laid down once for all.

He is the fulfillment of the Law. But the fulfillment of the law meant the accomplishment of the mystery of the Pasch. It was during this event that Jesus declared: I give you a new commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you. As supreme lawgiver, he revises all the other legislation.

About Jesus’ being the Lawgiver, Pope John Paul II had this to say: “Jesus did not at all follow the method of a teacher or commentator of the old law, but he conducted himself as a lawgiver and, in the last analysis, as one who had authority over the law. It is to be noted that the hearers well knew that it was a matter of divine law, given by Moses in virtue of a power which God himself had granted him as his representative and mediator with the people of Israel. The evangelists and the first Christian community who reflected on that remark of the hearers about Jesus’ teaching, had a better realization of its full significance, because they could set it alongside Christ's entire later ministry. For the Synoptics and their readers the passage from the affirmation of a power over the Mosaic law and the entire Old Testament to the affirmation of a divine authority in Christ was therefore a logical step. It was not merely the authority of a divine envoy or legate as in the case of Moses. In claiming the power to complete and interpret authoritatively or even to propose the law of God in a new way, Christ showed his awareness of being "equal to God" (cf. Phil 2:6).” Jesus, the Lawgiver: What kind of Law is he bringing to us and what should we expect. What must be are reaction to the Law of Christ be? At this point we need to turn to the Gospel of Matthew. There we read Jesus’ attitude to the Law, which Israel had received through Moses as a foundation of the Covenant. Jesus declares how perpetually valid this law is. It must be observed. But he goes on to indicate a righteousness that is deeper and the surpasses the way the Scribes and Pharisees interpreted and applied the Law of Moses. His own way of application is going to be animated by
a spirit of charity and sincerity: in spirit and in truth. (Mt 5:18-19),

Let us consider the concrete examples Jesus puts forth to show how he brings the law to fulfillment. Jesus tackles the law regarding reactions in a state of anger. The new law must overcome anger, resentment, bitterness, antipathy, animosity, unfriendliness, rancor, spite, malice, acrimony, offense and ill will, ill-feeling, which we easily nestle in our hearts, even when at the same time we observe ritual prescriptions. We often say: “I have killed no one.” The point is not just about not-killing. Jesus goes deeper. "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:21-22).

As a reciprocal movement, there is on the one hand, the one who is angry and the one who has offended. The latter too would not have done so if he did not feel provoked. He must cease promoting any form of hurtful exchange of words, mockery, scorn, disdain, contempt, ridicule, disrespect and derision. As we wait for the Messiah, we must fight against the outcomes of the instincts of aversion and hatred, for these are acts of injury and killing in potency. Christmas must be a feast of charity. "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you; leave your gift there at the altar. Go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5:23-24). Of what use would the Christmas gifts we deliver be if we give out of the context of this New Law of love?

Consider the sixth commandment of the Law of Moses, prohibiting adultery. "You have heard what was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you..." (Mt 5:27). Jesus goes on to apply this law in a very broad sense. He includes impure looks and desires, recommending flight from occasions of sin, the courage of mortification, the subordination of all acts and behavior to the demands of the salvation of the soul and of the whole person (cf. Mt 5:29-30). He associates the issues regarding divorce to this law. "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.' But I say to you...." The concession made by the old law to the people of Israel "because of the hardness of their hearts" is no longer valid (cf. Mt 19:8). Marriage is indissoluble. Worthy waiting must make our way of life be conformed to this new law.

The Lawgiver opposed the ancient proscription of perjury, lying under oath or false swearing. He introduced the precept of not swearing at all (cf. Mt 5:33-38). He bases this new precept on the law of love. "Let your 'yes' mean 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more is from the evil one" (Mt 5:37).

Another element worth considering that makes Jesus’ new standard high
than the old is the declaration on revenge. "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer the wicked man no resistance..." (Mt 5:38-39). In a modus loquendi, a metaphor, Jesus asks that we turn the other cheek, hand over not only a tunic but the cloak too, to offer a non-violent respond to the vexations of others, and to "Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow" (Mt 5:42). Retaliation does not constitute a positive reaction in the face of the Jesus-Lawgiver scheme, whatever be the right of society to defend its members from evildoers and to punish those guilty of violating the rights of citizens and of the state itself.

Then comes one of the most distinguishing precept of the realm of Laws: the law on love of enemies. Pope John Paul II refers to this law as “the ultimate step in the process of bringing to perfection, that in which all the others find their dynamic center”. Jesus formulates the Law in this manner, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust..." (Mt 5:43-45). The neighbour must not be anymore my country-man, my immediate brother or those I am familiar with or in good terms with. The Law of Christ adds a religious dimension to this neighbourliness as understood by humankind, when he refers to the gentle and compassionate heavenly Father who does good to all and is therefore the supreme exemplar of universal love. Christmas is a time to make amends, to extend our love even to our enemies. He concluded, "Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). In the expression repeated six times, "I say this to you," there resounds the echo of God's self-definition, which Jesus also attributes to himself. He is the Lawgiver, the “I Am” (cf. Gen 8:58). It is the same implication, when we consider the Sabbath controversies and his attitude towards the Pharisaic understanding of this day. "The Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath" (Mt 12:6-8; cf. Mk 2:27-28).

As we long for the coming of Christ, as we are eager to have Christ live with us, we rejoice because we know he will be our redeemer, our salvation. He will free us from Pharisaic righteousness and make us live his new law, the law of Love, the Law over which the Son of Man is master. He will establish his kingdom and his rule that lasts from age to age will become our rule too. Come, quickly, King and Lawgiver, and do not delay. Come with your salvation, and bring us to share in your throne of glory. We long for you.

CONCLUDING PRAYER
O God of Life, Mary became the mother of Jesus by embracing your will with a full heart. Help us to enter into the mystery of salvation by an active and responsible obedience. Free us from the attitudes that limit our responses to your inspirations. We ask this in union with all who journey with Jesus to fullness of life. Amen.