

Reflecting on the Gospel Reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

From the times of the earliest Fathers of the Church, taking the opportunity to reflect on the divine word of God set out in the scriptures, has been a common practice. This daily reading of the gospel - which came to be known as the *Lectio Divina* - became a major part of the daily prayer lives of medieval religious.

The importance of the practice was reaffirmed during the Second Vatican Council in the document *Dei Verbum - On the Word of God*. Earlier this year, our own Bishop Robert provided a reflection on the *Lectio Divina* at the start of the Day of Scripture. A recording of this is available online at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAm_WO7xNdE

This short version of the *Lectio Divina* follows the same four steps used in the medieval form of the practice. It is intended as a means of prayerful reflection and preparation for the gospels that we will hear on each of the four Sundays of Advent.

Preparing At the start of the reflection, it is usual to take short time of quiet preparation.

I am come into the presence of the Father, the creator of all,
the God is, who was, and who is yet to come.

I am come into the presence of Christ, his only begotten Son,
who died on the Cross that I may have everlasting life.

I am come into the presence of the Holy Spirit, the advocate,
who fills my heart with the fire of his love.

Have mercy on me, O most Holy Trinity: for I have sinned against you.
Let me know your mercy and grant me your salvation.

Amen.

Reading The gospel of the 4th Sunday of Advent is now read, slowly and carefully. Let the word you read become personal to you as God speaks to you.

Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself

conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

Reflecting After the gospel has been read, take some time to reflect on what it has said to you. For each day, there are a few words or a phrase to reflect on. Does something strike you about it? Why is it important to you, here and now? What might God be saying to you?

Monday	Gabriel was sent by God
Tuesday	Rejoice, so highly favoured
Wednesday	The Lord is with you
Thursday	Do not be afraid
Friday	The Holy Spirit will come upon you
Saturday	Let what you have said be done to me.

Praying Having reflected on what God has said to you, how would you like to respond? Such prayer does not need words, simple silence and an openness of heart can be prayer enough.

When ready, slowly and meditatively recite The Lord's Prayer.

Contemplating

Take the time after having prayed to contemplate once more on the reading and your response to it, what you have taken from it and how it prompted you to prayer.

These are the things which you can keep with you, as you pick up again the everyday things of life.

Concluding Prayer

May God the Father, whose word alone brought all things into being, bring joy.
May his only Son, who died that all may live, bring mercy and forgiveness.
May the Holy Spirit, who brings comfort, fill our hearts with love.

And may Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless us,
and keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.