

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**December 1, 2013**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**O Antiphons**

As we enter into this Advent Season, I would like to look at a beautiful Advent devotion that is not as well known as the Jesse Tree or the Advent wreath. I wish to ponder what the Church calls the O Antiphons. Most of you are probably familiar with the O Antiphons because they make up the basis of the Christmas Carol "O Come, O Come, Emanuel".

Where do the O Antiphons come from? They are a part of the Evening Prayer (also known as Vespers) part of the Liturgy of the Hours. The high point of the official Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours is praying the Magnificat (the joyful song of praise Mary song while visiting her cousin Elizabeth). While the Magnificat never changes the antiphons (the sentence said before the Magnificat and repeated after it) changes daily. The O Antiphons come from the antiphons of the last seven days before Christmas and so there is a sense of excitement in regards to them because they signify the Christ is near.

For our reflections on the O Antiphons, I will use the following format. I will give you first the date of the O Antiphon followed by O Antiphon itself, and then some personal reflections on the O Antiphon. I will then conclude with some Scripture verses that the O Antiphon may be drawn from. One last note the particular translation of the O Antiphons, I am using comes from the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* published by United States Bishops Conference.

**December 17**

**O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!**

One of the things that strikes me about other nations religions during Biblical time was how human (and not in a good sense) their divine beings were. In many ways Zeus, Apollo, Athena, etc of the Greek pantheon were all filled with pride, envy, jealousy etc. The things that happened to the world almost happened in spite of sinful and warring actions of the gods. Even in Canaan the gods of Baal and Moloch were interested more in child sacrifice and sex instead of the people who worshipped them. This is so different from the Jewish faith that we inherit.

For the Jewish people not only did God create the world out of nothing but He did so with a plan. The first chapter of Genesis is not so much interested in telling us that God created the world in seven days as it is about that God created the world with an order and a structure. For example God did not create human beings until He had created everything that human beings would need to live.

We would do well to remember that the Divine Being that we call our creator and God also has a Divine Intellect. Many of our doubts and problems in this life happen because of one of two things. We believe God does not care about us or that our God is stupid. How much different would our life be if we just trusted in God's intellect and not our own? The idea of Natural Family Planning would be a no brainer if we completely trusted that God was wise enough to know what we could handle or not. Suffering would be easier to bear knowing that it was a part of God's plan to make us stronger.

God's wisdom though is different from our as St. Paul reminds us: For the word 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 cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:18&ff.)

**Scripture Passages:**

**Isaias 11:2-3** - And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears.

**Isaias 28:29** - This also is come forth from the Lord God of hosts, to make his counsel wonderful, and magnify justice.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**December 8, 2013**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**O Antiphons**

Advent is a special time in the Church as we prepare to celebrate God entering into history to save us. One of the ways that we do this within the Catholic Church is to recall Old Testament Prophecies in the form of what has become known as the O Antiphons. Let us continue our look at this Advent tradition.

For our reflections on the O Antiphons, I will use the following format. I will give you first the date of the O Antiphon followed by O Antiphon itself, and then some personal reflections on the O Antiphon. I will then conclude with some Scripture verses that the O Antiphon may be drawn from. One last note the particular translation of the O Antiphons, I am using comes from the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* published by United States Bishops Conference.

**December 18**

**O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: come to rescue us with your mighty power!**

I think that it is hard for people in the United States to understand the connectedness between a nation and its gods and goddesses because of our Church and state separation. Add to the fact that most of believe, even if we are of different religions, believe in the same God today where in the time of the Old and New Testament that was not the case. I think that it would be safe to say that when the nation of Israel went into battle they believe that their God (Yahweh) and His army went into battle against the gods and heavenly armies of the nation they were fighting and if Yahweh one then that mean He defeated the other gods. Surprisingly though if the nation of Israel lost they did not look at as if their God had been defeated but rather that He let the other side win in order to punish and teach Israel a lesson.

Out of this comes the belief that the Messiah would be the one to teach people the right way to live so that God would always be with them. Remember that this was a nation that believed that it was literally created by God rescuing them from slavery.

**Scripture Passages:**

**Isaiah 11:4-5** - But he shall judge the poor with justice, and shall reprove with equity the meek of the earth: and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. And justice shall be the girdle of his loins: and faith the girdle of his reins.

**Isaiah 33:22** - For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king: he will save us.

**December 19**

**O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people: come to save us without delay!**

With God nothing is impossible. Every nation thinks back to its glory days and the glory days of the nation of Israel was under King David. Israel began to believe that even though it seemed impossible a prince from David's line would bring about another Golden Age. Little could anyone know that this would be done not by defeating earthly enemies but by defeating death itself.

"Come to save us without delay!" should also strike our hearts because I think there are many times that we say "come, but only after I have had my sinful fun," or "Don't come now Lord give a few more moments and then I will get ready for your coming." Sadly though we do not control when Jesus will come again and so we must be ready at any time.

## Scripture Passages

**Isaiah 11:1** - And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root.

**Isaiah 11:10** - In that day the root of Jesse, who standeth for an ensign of the people, him the Gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulcher shall be glorious

**Micah 5:1** - Now shalt thou be laid waste, O daughter of the robber: they have laid siege against us, with a rod shall they strike the cheek of the judge of Israel.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**December 15, 2013**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**O Antiphons**

Advent is a special time as we reflect on the different prophesies in the Old Testament that showed us Christ was coming. As we prepare to celebrate God entering into history to save us. One of the ways that we do this within the Catholic Church is to recall Old Testament Prophesies in the form of what has become known as the O Antiphons. Let us continue our look at this Advent tradition.

For our reflections on the O Antiphons, I will use the following format. I will give you first the date of the O Antiphon followed by O Antiphon itself, and then some personal reflections on the O Antiphon. I will then conclude with some Scripture verses that the O Antiphon may be drawn from. One last note the particular translation of the O Antiphons, I am using comes from the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* published by United States Bishops Conference.

**December 20**

**O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom: come and free the prisoners of darkness!**

The image of a key automatically invokes the image of something being locked. The question then becomes what the person will do with the key. Will he or she lock or unlock whatever is locked? When thinking about Jesus' ministry on earth I love to think of this quote from Helen Alexander's book *Experiencing Bereavement*. "In Jesus' life on earth we see God caring deeply about the things that make human being hurt—sickness, being a social outcast, being lost. In his life, his ministry, and his death, Jesus shows us a God who is with us in our pain, and who knows our being at its very worst. The message of Jesus is a simple one: heal the sick, accept the outcast, and find the lost. In other words, love one another, just as your Father in heaven loves you. Time after time, though, that message is ignored, and some of the most tragic sequences in human history have resulted—not from a vengeful God determined to punish his erring people, but from our own willfulness and selfishness." Knowing that God cares about me when I am sick, when I am a social outcast and when I am lost (and don't have a clue) truly does set me free from my fears.

## Scripture Passages

**Isaiah 22:22** - And I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder: and he shall open, and none shall shut: and he shall shut, and none shall open.

**Isaiah 9:6** - For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.

**December 21**

**O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.**

I do not think that most people living in our times, appreciates light as much as we could. All most of us has to do is flip a switch and not even a second later we have light to see and to protect us. This was not the case in Biblical times. One depended upon the dawn to provide light and also in some sense protection from those who would use the darkness to cover their crime. Perpetual light means perpetual safety and clear vision.

## Scripture Passages

**Isaiah 9:2** - The people that walked in darkness, have seen a great light: to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen.

**Malachi 4:1-3** - For behold the day shall come kindled as a furnace: and all the proud, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall set them on fire, saith the Lord of hosts, it shall not leave them root, nor branch. But unto you that fear my name, the Sun of justice shall arise, and health in his wings: and you shall go forth, and shall leap like calves of the herd. And you shall tread down the wicked when they shall be ashes under the sole of your feet in the day that I do this, saith the Lord of hosts.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**December 22, 2013**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**O Antiphons**

As this Advent season come quickly to the end, I hope that these reflections on the O Antiphons have been helpful. We have two more O Antiphons to look at today and we shall finish all seven. For next week, I will focus on Mary's Magnificat.

For our reflections on the O Antiphons, I will use the following format. I will give you first the date of the O Antiphon followed by O Antiphon itself, and then some personal reflections on the O Antiphon. I will then conclude with some Scripture verses that the O Antiphon may be drawn from. One last note the particular translation of the O Antiphons, I am using comes from the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* published by United States Bishops Conference.

**December 22**

**O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!**

No matter what separates us from one another, economic status, social status, ethnicity, or nationality there is something greater that unites us. We all have one God as our creator. The more that we focus on this fact the more unity in the world there will be. This is part of the reason why the Church is so important to the world. One of the Church's missions is to tell people of their Creator and the love our Creator has for us.

Giving Jesus the title "King" should also remind us that even though our God loves us, that we are all destined for judgment. Are our actions loving actions that Jesus would approve of?

## Scripture Passages

**Isaiah 9:7** - His Empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace: he shall sit upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom; to establish it and strengthen it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth and forever: the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

**Isaiah 2:4** - And he shall judge the Gentiles, and rebuke many people: and they shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they be exercised any more to war.

**December 23**

**O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord our God!**

I have been taking part in a series of classes on how to be a better spiritual director. At the end of each session, one of the staff would get up and give a few pieces of advice and offer some points for prayers. I will always remember when the staff person said "the devil only has two lies 1) you are not good enough and 2) you are alone." In the one title "Emmanuel" Jesus shatters both of those lies. He is Emmanuel and therefore He is "God with us" and thus we are not alone. Since He is with us we must be good enough to be in God's company and thus with God all things are possible. Let us always ask God to be with us instead of trying to do this on our own.

“Giver of the Law” should also remind us that the 10 Commandments and other Church rules are not bad but are good for us. They give us direction in the same way that a training regimen gives an athlete focus. It helps us to be the best person we can be.

### Scripture Passages

**Isaiah 7:14** - Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**December 29, 2013**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**O Antiphons**

Christmas has come and gone and we have finished the seven O Antiphons that help us celebrate Advent and we still have one Sunday left in the month of December. For this Sunday then, I would like to look at Mary's song of praise when she visited Elizabeth after the Annunciation. The song is called the Magnificat and is used by Catholics in a special way during Evening Prayer as a part of the Liturgy of the Hours. To help us in this endeavor, we will turn to Fulton Sheen and his book *The World's First Love: Mary, Mother of God*. Quotes from his book will be in bold.

Magnificat/Canticle of Mary

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

**When the Divine enters into the human, then the soul thinks less of asking than of loving Him. The lover seeks no favors from the beloved; Mary has no petitions but only praise. As the soul becomes detached from things and is conscious of itself and of its destiny, it knows itself only in God.**

I know the more focused I become on my identity as a beloved son of God (through Baptism) the less I worry about other things. Mary with Christ in her has no doubt of God's love for her.

**The humble are necessarily the joyful, for where there is no pride, there can be no self-centeredness, which makes joy impossible.**

It is often my self-centeredness that prevents me from rejoicing in others successes and makes me worried that others are not rejoicing with successes. I also know that I am much better and happier person when I am humble and not prideful.

**A box that is filled with sand cannot be filled with gold; a soul that is bursting with sand cannot be filled with gold; a soul that is bursting with its own ego can never be filled with God.**

Sand being something that Mary would have seen every day and thus an ordinary substance of life makes me think of the ordinary things that I need to get out of my heart so that I can receive more of God.

**Blessedness is happiness. Mary had everything that could make a person truly happy. For to be happy, three things are required: to have everything one wants, to have it united in one person who is loved with all the ardor of one's soul, and to know that this is possessed without sin. Mary had all three.**

If I am not happy, which of the three things do I not have?

**If her Divine Son had not intended that His Mother should be honored where He is adored, He would never have permitted these prophetic words of hers to have had fulfillment. He would have stopped the lips of the poets, and would have frozen our fingers as we told our beads.**

All my prayers devoted to Mary always end up leading me closer to her Son. She helps me understand His will. She is not only His mother but she is also the perfect disciple.

