

Advent 2023 Reflections/Action Steps (Week Three)

Celebrating Christmas at Greccio (1223-2023)

In October 2021, the Conference of the Franciscan Family—a group made up of the leaders of all three orders of Franciscans—called all Franciscans to join in the Centenary which will commemorate the 800th anniversaries of several significant events in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. We began 2023 with the celebration of the Later Rule and will conclude with Christmas at Greccio. During this Advent season, we will examine the story of the celebration of Christmas at Greccio and how we can apply the lessons learned from this event to our everyday lives. This week's reflections include a part of Celano's description of Christmas at Greccio and a quote from *Admirabile Signum*, Pope Francis' 2019 Apostolic Letter on the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene.

Sunday, December 17, 2023 O Wisdom

"The holy man of God is dressed in the vestments of the Levites, since he was a Levite, and with full voice sings the holy gospel. Here is his voice, a *pleasant voice*, a clear voice, a musical voice, inviting all to the highest of gifts." (1 Celano 86)

"God does not abandon us but is there to answer our crucial questions about the meaning of life. Who am I? Where do I come from? Why was I born in this time in history? Why do I love? Why do I suffer? Why will I die? It was to answer these questions that God became man. His closeness brings light where there is darkness and shows the way to those dwelling in the shadow of suffering (cf. *Lk 1:79*)" (*Admirabile Signum*, 4)

Action Step: Light a candle and reflect on your life. Write about three gifts that you bring to the world.

Monday, December 18, 2023 O Lord of Israel

"Then he preaches to the people standing around him and pours forth sweet honey about the birth of the poor King and the poor city of Bethlehem." (1 Celano 86)

"The Creator of the universe lowered himself to take up our littleness. The gift of life, in all its mystery, becomes all the more wondrous as we realize that the Son of Mary is the source and sustenance of all life. In Jesus, the Father has given us a brother who comes to seek us out whenever we are confused or lost, a loyal friend ever at our side. He gave us his Son who forgives us and frees us from our sins." (*Admirabile Signum*, 3)

Action Step: Complete an Advent Examination of Conscience like the one found [here](#).

Tuesday, December 19, 2023 O Root of Jesse

"Moreover, burning with excessive love, he often calls Christ the 'babe from Bethlehem' whenever he means to call him Jesus. Saying the word 'Bethlehem' in the manner of a bleating sheep, he fills his whole mouth with sound but even more with sweet affection. He seems to lick his lips whenever he uses the expressions 'Jesus' or 'babe from Bethlehem,' tasting the word on his happy palate and savoring the sweetness of the word." (1 Celano 86)

"By being born in a manger, God himself launches the only true revolution that can give hope and dignity to the disinherited and the outcast: the revolution of love, the revolution of tenderness. From the manger, Jesus proclaims, in a meek yet powerful way, the need for sharing with the poor as the path to a more human and fraternal world in which no one is excluded or marginalized." (*Admirabile Signum*, 6)

Action Step: Participate in the revolution of tenderness. Make blessing bags to keep in your car and share with those experiencing homelessness or food insecurity.

Wednesday, December 20, 2023

O Key of David

“The gifts of the Almighty are multiplied there, and a virtuous man sees a wondrous vision. For the man saw a little child lying lifeless in the manger and he saw the holy man of God approach the child and waken him from a deep sleep.” (1 Celano 86)

“To our astonishment, we see God acting exactly as we do: he sleeps, takes milk from his mother, cries and plays like every other child!...The nativity scene shows God as he came into our world, but it also makes us reflect on how our life is part of God’s own life.” (*Admirabile Signum*, 8)

Action Step: Buy a pack of diapers or a carton of formula and donate it to a family shelter in your community.

Thursday, December 21, 2023

O Radiant Dawn

“Nor is this vision unfitting, since in the hearts of many the child Jesus has been *given over to oblivion*. Now he is awakened and impressed on their loving memory by His own grace through His holy servant Francis. At length, the night’s solemnities draw to a close and everyone went home with joy.” (1 Celano 86)

“Unlike so many other people, busy about many things, the shepherds become the first to see the most essential thing of all: the gift of salvation. It is the humble and the poor who greet the event of the Incarnation. The shepherds respond to God who comes to meet us in the Infant Jesus by setting out to meet him with love, gratitude, and awe.” (*Admirabile Signum*, 5)

Action Step: Put the shepherds in your crèche. Spend some time in quiet reflection about how you can meet the Christ child with love, gratitude, and awe.

Friday, December 22, 2023

O King of the Nations

“The hay placed in the manger there was preserved afterwards so that, through it, the Lord might restore to health the pack animals and the other *animals* there, as He *multiplied his* holy *mercy*. It came to pass in the surrounding area that many of the animals, suffering from various diseases, were freed from their illnesses when they ate some of this hay.” (1 Celano 87)

“Kneeling before him, [the Magi] understand that the God who with sovereign wisdom guides the course of the stars also guides the course of history, casting down the mighty and raising up the lowly. Upon their return home, they would certainly have told others of this amazing encounter with the Messiah, thus initiating the spread of the Gospel among the nations.” (*Admirabile Signum*, 9)

Action Step: Start your Magi figures on the journey. Pray for the nations of our world desperately in need of peace and healing.

Saturday, December 23, 2023

O Emmanuel: God with Us

“What is more, women who had been suffering with long and hard labor had an easy delivery after they placed some of this hay upon themselves. Finally, an entire group of people of both sexes obtained much-desired relief from an assortment of afflictions.” (1 Celano 87)

“When, at Christmas, we place the statue of the infant Jesus in the manger, the nativity scene suddenly comes alive. God appears as a child, for us to take into our arms. Beneath weakness and frailty, he conceals his power that creates and transforms all things. It seems impossible, yet it is true: in Jesus, God was a child, and in this way, he wished to reveal the greatness of his love: by smiling and opening his arms to all.” (*Admirabile Signum*, 8)

Action Step: Place Mary and Joseph in your Christmas crèche. Consider sharing a homemade treat with a neighbor.