

1st Sunday of Advent 2022

Nov. 27, 2022

Reflection by Sr. Virginia Jung, OSB

Isaiah 2: 1-5 | Romans 13: 11-14 | Matthew 24: 37-44

Today is the first Sunday and the first day of Advent. For lovers of Advent, and I think there are many here this morning, it's good news that this year Advent is the longest it can be – four full weeks of time to prepare the way of the Lord.

Advent represents the new liturgical year in our Church, and it takes place simultaneously with the winding down of the year in our society. The tension that we live in between those parallel endings and beginnings, when we recognize and welcome it, is great for creativity. It is a fine place to re-establish a workshop or a lab or as St. Benedict might say, school.... for the Lord's service.

If you haven't done so already, today is a day to think about and decide how you will keep Advent as an individual and what your hope is for our monastery or your own community during this season.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes: "And do this because you know the time; it is the hour now for you to wake from sleep." In RB80, the notes link that verse to verse 8 of the Prologue to the Rule: "Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say" *"It is high time for us to arise from sleep."* I would add, Let us as Benedictines, Sisters or Oblates, as Christians, recommit ourselves to the sustained practice of *lectio divina* with Scripture. If you already have and manage to sustain a well established practice, good for you. But if you are a little off the path there, this Advent time is ideal for returning to the practice or for re-configuring it a bit..

In a commentary on verse 8 of the Prologue of the Rule, Sr. Aquinata Böckmann, OSB observes that Scripture is a force that acts. We believe this about *lectio divina* faithfully done, that it guides our actions. Sister Aquinata also writes about how St. Benedict commingles Hebrew and Christian scripture throughout the Rule, and sees scripture as another kind of community at work in the Rule. When we practice *lectio divina*, we are

interacting with the inspired Word of God, with all of the authors, with all of the other readers and prayers across thousands of years.

There are various ways to do it. I am sharing a few and I know that you all can add more. One is, to find the links between scripture and the Holy Rule, reflect and pray on them. Make notes in your copy of the Rule.

Another is to choose a book of the Bible to read straight through. Then you know what “this” refers to when St. Paul starts out – “And do *this* because you know the time....” He had just been writing about the importance of keeping the commandments and that, as he wrote, “Love does no evil to the neighbor hence love is the fulfillment of the law” So the word “this” refers to Love – So act in Love because you know the time -.Love is the garment of light that you are putting on. Love is the force that acts through scripture and through you, as Sr. Aquinata observed.

Another option is to use the mass readings of the day. When you do *lectio divina* with the readings of the day, it often provides links for contemplation as we hear today with the image of light in Isaiah “House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord” and St Paul: “Let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” What does light mean for you here and now, in this time and place? God has an answer for you when you listen.

St. Benedict tells us we can do *lectio divina* with the Holy Rule, the books of the Old and New Testament, or the books of the Holy Catholic Fathers – or Mothers for that matter. Maybe you want to get a hold of some writings of St. Hildegard, or St. Basil or St. Gertrude or St. Gregory, and dig in!

Again and again in the readings of today, we are admonished to stay awake – *lectio divina* definitely requires that, right? To keep a real practice, you have to get up early or stay up late or forgo a nap or ,even if you have *lectio* neatly ensconced in your day, sometimes, struggling to stay awake while reading or meditating is a real part of the experience. Being intimately present to the Word helps us become more present to each other, to neighbors

near and far. So, go find your copy of *Sacred Reading* by Michael Casey; refresh your memory of the process.

Listen with the ear of your heart to Isaiah's call – “Come, let us go up to the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways.” Why? So that “we may walk in his paths”. That path, as St. Paul tells us is love, which does no evil to the neighbor hence love is the fulfillment of the law.” And do this because looking within and looking round about, you can see that in your own life and in our world today, “now is the hour”. This year, Advent, is an hour that lasts a full four weeks.