



3rd week of Advent (Sunday Year A) - Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh 11th & 12th December 2022

“From Starry Skies Thou Comest”

My reflection last week, the 2nd Sunday of Advent, was heavily influenced by a visit to the Abruzzi mountains east of Rome and in particular the shrine of St Nicholas of Bari. I had flown to Rome from where I travelled east to the Abruzzi so this gave me an opportunity to visit St Peter’s Square for the Angelus prayer led by Pope Francis on the First Sunday of Advent. It was the time when the Christmas Tree was being put up: it was going to be lit up and the Crib unveiled the following weekend, 3rd December. I watched out for it on the internet, and I was not disappointed. Crowds assembled, the tree was beautifully lit, and a lovely Crib was unveiled.

There was a special surprise: over the sound system, gently in the background, came the tune of “Tu Scendi Dalle Stelle”, “From Starry Skies Thou Comest”, an Italian carol which in my time as a student in Rome, the Shepherds came down from the Abruzzi Hills to play on the Zampognari Bagpipes. They communicate the sense of joy and rejoicing at the Feast. Original lyrics of the carol were written by Saint Alphonsus Liguori, a prominent priest and philosopher who founded the Redemptorist Missionary Order. I found a version of the carol sung by Luciano Pavarotti on YouTube, I’m posting the link for you on the Ethnic Chaplaincy website (Our Lady of Good Counsel). Part of the first verse sung by children in Vienna where it was recorded, goes:

Tu scendi dalle stelle
O Re del Cielo
E vieni in una grotta
Al freddo al gelo

In English:
From starry skies descending
O King of the Heavens
You come to a cave
To cold and ice

Then Pavarotti sings a section of the second verse:
A te, che sei del mondo
Il Creatore
Mancano panni e fuoco
O mio Signore!

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese



In English:

To You who are the world's Creator, robes and fire are missing, O my, Divine Lord.

The melody is magical as you will hear. It will always remain with me as a song from Rome at Christmas, a song that communicates the wonder and rejoicing that is part of Christmas, that brings the season alive, as does some of our own carols such as 'Silent Night' and 'O Come All Ye Faithful'.

The Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete (Rejoice) Sunday, as we are moved by the Liturgy to the celebration of the event that is soon to unfold. At this time when we are hearing lots about the sacred character of the environment because of the Cop Conference in Montreal, focusing on the natural world, it is noted that the Liturgy of the Third Sunday has the wonderful reading from Isaiah where we see the presence of God already reflected in our world: "The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon".

As we watch the scenes on TV of the world of nature created by God and threatened by extinction because of our bad care of it, we are directed to the Liturgy to an even greater coming of the Divine that we can let pass by because of our lack of attention. John the Baptist calls for us to be aware of the miracles of Jesus which signalled the presence in his time. But Advent is also about the coming of God in our time, the Divine is among us, especially in the love and the rejoicing that surrounds us. We see it in so many ways. One of the highlights for me this past week was seeing the care, the generosity being shown to refugees from Ukraine.

People sometimes say to me, "What do you miss about not being in your Parish anymore?": The Christmas Tableau, on Christmas Eve, where children, parents and parishioners come together to re-enact the Christmas Story, is probably the answer. Here you see the joy, the happiness of the presence of Jesus who has been born for us, who is with us now, who is the cause of our rejoicing in the Blessed Season.

"Tu scendi dalle stelle" – "From starry skies Thou comest". It is not just an event long ago; He comes again into our hearts, into our homes, if we open up to him now. Then it is that we can look to the future and look to ways of spreading that love through our lives and actions. Gaudete!

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