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Vigils: Awaiting His Return

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Cover Photo: ***Awaiting His Return***
William Ladd Taylor, Awaiting His Return, ca. 1899, oil on canvas, 76.5 × 61 cm (30 1/8 × 24 in.), private collection. Image in the public domain.

ISSUE 4

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Awaiting His Return
William Ladd Taylor, Awaiting His Return, ca. 1899, oil on canvas, 76.5 × 61 cm (30 1/8 × 24 in.), private collection. Image in the public domain.

THIS ADVENT ISSUE focuses on the theme of Vigils, gathering the reflections of the monks and nuns of our Order on this night prayer—this nocturnal watch peculiar to the monastic tradition. Our Abbot General leads the reflections, reading from the book of his own experience, while a special notebook section collates voices from across our Oriens region. There, brothers and sisters candidly and intimately let us into the daily struggles of keeping watch, even as they find themselves overcome by the quiet beauty of this pre-dawn hour.

Accompanying our reflection is a 12th-century magister *turned Cistercian, Alan of Lille, who reminds us that Christ himself invites us to* vigilia *by spending the night in prayer, urging us to stay awake lest we slumber while Christ prays.*

The 'Whole' in Our Hearts

Our cover image, William Ladd Taylor's Awaiting His Return, *captures the quiet yet ardent expectation of a Cistercian soul—a bride looking out for the first sign of her returning Bridegroom. She conveys the spirit of a perpetual Advent, which our Cistercian Fathers have long taught us to embody: an active, loving readiness for the Bridegroom who comes at an unforeseen hour. Vigils and Advent thus become a natural pairing, mirroring that double movement of waiting and coming, that sacred alternation of expectation and fulfillment, of longing and arrival.*

Many a time, the darkness of the night—and the seeming futility of our watching—can feel lonely. Yet this very solitude holds the portent of a wholeness deep within, a yearning that refuses to be lulled into completeness by anything other than the Beloved. "On my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, and would not let him go" (Song 3:1, 4).

May this yearning—this deep nostalgia for the 'whole' in our hearts that ever renews our waiting and our watching—hold the door open for the true Sun to rise upon every human heart. And may we, as watchmen in this night, never cease to believe the promise: the eternal Morning comes.

A grace-filled season of Advent to us all, as we watch together for that Morning.

Sr. Anna Marie

Watchfulness in the Season of Advent: Two Texts from Alan of Lille

As our communities enter the season of Advent and keep watch through the silence of Vigils, the twelfth-century Cistercian master Alan of Lille (c. 1128–1202) offers a luminous guide to spiritual watchfulness. Known across medieval Europe as the *Doctor Universalis*, Alan spent his final years as a monk of Cîteaux, uniting scholastic clarity with monastic contemplation.[1]

Presented together here are two complementary texts: first, Chapter XXXV of The Art of Preaching (*Summa de arte praedicatoria*), *Informatio ad vigiliam*[2] ("Instruction in Watchfulness"[3]), which opens by reminding us that "Christ invites us to watchfulness by example, spending the night in prayer"; and second, a brief Advent sermon excerpt from his *Sermones*[4]—offered here in a preliminary English rendering—celebrating the coming of Christ through charity, the heavenly dew for whom we keep watch.

[1] *On Alan of Lille's life, his reputation as Doctor Universalis, and his retirement to the Abbey of Cîteaux, see the Prolegomena in Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 210 (Paris: Migne, 1855), cols. 9–14, Patrologia Latina Database, University of Chicago Library, uchicago.edu; and G. R. Evans, Alan of Lille: The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–17.*
[2] *Alanus de Insulis, Summa de arte praedicatoria, Patrologia Latina, vol. 210, cols. 178B–179D, Patrologia Latina Database, University of Chicago Library, uchicago.edu.*
[3] *Alan of Lille, The Art of Preaching (Summa de arte praedicatoria, cap. XXXV, PL 210, cols. 178B–179D), trans. Gillian R. Evans, Cistercian Studies Series 23 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 132.*
[4] *Alanus de Insulis, Sermo VII: In Adventu Domini, in Sermones, Patrologia Latina, vol. 210, cols. 217C–218A, Patrologia Latina Database, University of Chicago Library, uchicago.edu.*



Christ Praying While the Apostles Sleep, miniature from a prayer book (Fifteen Oes of St. Bridget), Tours, France, ca. 1475–1525, Harley MS 5319, fol. 113v, British Library, London. Image courtesy of the British Library.

I.

Alan of Lille
INSTRUCTION IN WATCHFULNESS

Ad vigilias exemplariter nos invitat Christus, in oratione pernoctans...
Christ invites us to watchfulness by example, spending the night in prayer...

'Blessed is that servant whom the Lord, when he comes, shall find watchful.' Again: 'If the head of that household had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched'. Again: 'Watch, therefore, for you know not at what hour your Lord will come'. Again: 'Watch and pray, so that you may not enter into temptation'. Solomon says: 'They who are watchful in the morning shall find me'.

Christ invites us to watchfulness by example, in spending the night in prayer, and in watching out for our instruction. Bodily vigils are to be performed to exercise the body, and to drive away torpor, to escape the phantoms of the night, to avoid the slippery passions of the flesh, so as to make a place for prayer and to deny the Enemy entry. The faithful soul should, like a man of great strength, 'Guard the bed of Solomon', and grasp his sword poised [in readiness] across his knees in the face of the terrors of the night. Not only in material vigils, but also in spiritual, the faithful soul should be watchful on behalf of the Church of God, the bed of Solomon—that is, of Christ—on which he rested, for it was a delight to him to be among the sons of men. He should also grasp his drawn sword, that is, he should wield the sword of discretion, to restrain the stirrings of the flesh and the attacks of the devil which are the most to be feared and avoided in the darkness of this world. We must undertake spiritual vigils, rather than bodily ones, so that the mind of each person may be watchful over his flock, that is the stirrings of the spirit, lest the wolf—that is, the devil—lying in wait, should force any stirring out of its proper place. We should be watchful lest the thief—that is, the devil—enter into the cloister of our heart through dissipation, or into the chamber of the mind through idleness, and steal the tapestries of the soul, that is, the adornment of the virtues. This thief is sometimes an invisible robber, when he does violence through the tyranny of princes; sometimes the thief makes his entry through heresy: now he comes like a bird, flying high in pride, now like a

snake, when he deceives through dissipation, now like a lion, when he carries on by open violence, now like a serpent, through hidden temptation.

There are four parts of the sin of the night-hours.
The first is called midnight, when a person delights in evil-thinking; the second, the late evening, when men—that is, reasonable urges—lie as prisoners to a misled will; the third, cock-crow, when the will clamors into action; the fourth, predawn, when the deed is openly performed.

Night vigils were not instituted without reason, for by them it is signified that we must rise in the middle of the night to sing the night office, so that the night may not pass without divine praise and so that bodily vigil may awaken spiritual. Let it shame a man if the sun rise before his own vigils, and if the cock crow at night, while he himself is absent from divine praise. O man, beware the watchman's stick, lest he find you sleeping; beware of the robber, lest he suffocate you loitering. The watchful rod, or the rod of vigilance, is the rod by which, once it has been brought into the house, the thief tests to see whether the head of the household is asleep or the household drowsy. If the head of the household sleeps, he steals everything he finds. If he is awake, he flees. In a spiritual sense, the rod of vigilance is Christ, of whom Jeremiah says: 'I see the rod of vigilance'. He it is who tests by his own judgement whether the head of the household is asleep, that is, whether a man's own continence is sluggish. If he finds him sleeping, he condemns him; if watchful, he finds in him no reason for injury. Likewise, the devil, who is the spiritual thief, if he finds a man watchful, flees; if sleeping, he snatches away everything. Because Ishbaal slept in the middle of the day, he was slain by the robbers. Samson, napping, was captured by his enemies; Sisera, asleep, was slain by a woman. Gideon slew his sleeping enemies. Christ, just before his Passion, reproached his sleeping disciples.



Excerpt from: Alain of Lille, The Art of Preaching, translated by Gillian Evans, CS 23, © 1982 by Cistercian Publications, Inc. © 2008 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. Used with permission.

II.

Alan of Lille

Sermo VII: In Adventu Domini
Rorate, coeli desuper, etc. *(Isa. XLV.)*

Patrologia Latina 210, cols. 217C–218A

Nos, fratres charissimi, habentes adventum Christi per carnem, postulemus adventum per charitatem, dicentes: Rorate, coeli desuper, etc. (Isa. XLV), ut terram mentis nostrae coeli compluant divino rore.

Terra tripliciter solet esse sterilis et infecunda: quando rastris et ligonibus non corrigitur, vel nimia ariditate damnatur, vel nimia inundatione submergitur. Sic terra mentis nostrae sterilis fit et infecunda, quando jejuniis, orationibus et vigiliis non corrigimus ariditatem cupiditatis, aut rivulis charitatis non temperamus, vel rivulos concupiscentiae per continentiam non refrenamus; ut sic coeli dignentur desuper rorare, id est terrae mentis nostrae rorem coelestis gratiae infundere.

Et sic nubes pluant justum, superius nubes suspendendo, id est fletus nostros ad coelos dirigendo, ut lacrymae nostrae sint nubes contra ardorem divinae justitiae, ut in nos coeli non fulminent per justitiam, sed nos irrigent per misericordiam; ut sic fletibus nostris velut nubibus, compluatur in nobis Christus; et sic terra aperiatur, et Salvator germinetur.

Aperiatur itaque terra mentis nostrae, oris confessione, cordis contritione, exteriori satisfactione, et sic terra nostra germinet Salvatorem. Ut sicut beata Virgo Maria Christum concepit materialiter, mens nostra illum concipiat spiritualiter; sicut illa concepit Spiritus sancti obumbratione, mens nostra concipiat interna inspiratione; et sicut illa concepit permanens integra, ita concipiat mens nostra permanens inviolata.

O felix mens illius animae, quae meretur esse mater Christi cum B. Virgine Maria, a longe quodammodo ejus vestigia insequendo; ut nimirum, sicut Virgo Christum concepit per fidem, ita mens concipiat per fidelitatem; sicut illa in carne, ita ista in charitate. Quod nobis praestare dignetur ipse Jesus Christus, qui vivit, etc. Amen.

Alanus de Insulis, "Sermo VII: In Adventu Domini," in Sermones, Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1855), vol. 210, cols. 217C–218A, Patrologia Latina Database, University of Chicago Library, uchicago.edu.

II.

Alan of Lille

Sermon VII. On the Advent of the Lord

Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, etc. (Isa. 45)

(Concluding Meditation)

*Preliminary English Rendering**

Dearest brothers, since we already possess the coming of Christ in the flesh, let us beg for His coming through charity, saying: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, etc." (Isa. 45:8), so that the heavens may water the earth of our mind with divine dew.

Earth is commonly barren and unfruitful in three ways: when it is not set right with rakes and hoes, when it is ruined by excessive dryness, or when it is submerged by excessive flooding. So too, the earth of our mind becomes barren and unfruitful when we fail to amend the dryness of greed through fasts, prayer, and vigils; or fail to moisten it with the streams of charity; or fail to curb the torrents of concupiscence through continence—so that the heavens may deign to drop down dew from above, that is, to pour the dew of heavenly grace upon the earth of our mind.

And thus "let the clouds rain down the Just One" (Isa 45:8) by lifting our clouds on high—that is, by directing our weeping toward the heavens—so that our tears may become clouds shielding us from the scorching heat of divine justice, and the heavens may not strike us with lightning in justice, but water us with mercy; so that through our weeping, as through clouds, Christ may be rained down within us, and thus the earth may be opened and a Savior bud forth.

Therefore, let the earth of our mind be opened by confession of the mouth, contrition of the heart, and outward satisfaction, and so let our earth bud forth a Savior. Thus, just as the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived Christ bodily, so may our mind conceive Him spiritually; just as she conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, so may our mind conceive by inward inspiration; and just as she conceived while remaining whole, so may our mind conceive while remaining inviolate.

O happy is the mind of that soul which is counted worthy to become a mother of Christ together with the Blessed Virgin Mary, following in her footsteps from afar—so that, just as the Virgin conceived Christ through faith, the mind may conceive Him through faithfulness; and just as she conceived Him in the flesh, so the soul may conceive Him in charity. May Jesus Christ Himself deign to grant this to us, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

**With sincere thanks to Prof. Jan Ziółkowski for the helpful feedback on the translation.*



Image: Taddeo Gaddi, Madonna del Parto, ca. 1334–1340, detached fresco, 140 × 85 cm, Church of San Francesco di Paola, Florence. Photograph by Sailko, via Wikimedia Commons.

O felix mens illius animae,
quae meretur esse mater Christi cum B. Virgine Maria,
a longe quodammodo ejus vestigia insequendo; ut nimirum,
sicut Virgo Christum concepit per fidem, ita mens concipiat
per fidelitatem; sicut illa in carne, ita ista in charitate.

O happy is the mind of that soul
which is counted worthy to become a mother of Christ
together with the Blessed Virgin Mary,
following in her footsteps from afar—
so that, just as the Virgin conceived Christ through
faith, the mind may conceive Him through faithfulness;
and just as she conceived Him in the flesh,
so the soul may conceive Him in charity.

ALAN OF LILLE

Vigils—From the Book of My Experience

DOM BERNARDUS PEETERS , OCSO

Like so many brothers and sisters, I found that praying during the night was one of my main reasons for joining our Order. The night vigil and the quiet time that followed, devoted to personal prayer and lectio divina, touched something I was searching for. The early hour, the darkness, and the silence helped me open myself to God. At the same time, the community sustained me: I was not keeping watch alone, but together with my brothers.

Yet there came a time when this night prayer became more difficult for me. Getting up so early felt like a burden. While others were still awake or just going to bed, we were already getting up again. But the struggle went beyond simply a matter of tiredness. The night also brought me face to face with my inner darkness and resistance. Remaining faithful to Vigils became a struggle, like Jacob's wrestling with the angel. I had to learn to remain, even when I felt small and prayer no longer carried me effortlessly.

It was during this time that a man spoke to me as I was closing the church door after the Eucharist. Every morning, around four o'clock, he drove to work. He would see the lights in the abbey church and hear the bell. He thanked us, saying that it did him good to know that we were praying for him. His words touched me. Had I ever consciously thought of him? Perhaps that morning I had turned on the lights or rung the bell without giving a thought to those who might see or hear them. Through his gratitude, I began to understand that our keeping watch reached beyond the walls of the church.

A poem by a German Benedictine nun[1] expresses for me this ministry of keeping watch:

Keeping Watch Is Our Ministry

Someone must be at home, Lord, when You come. Someone must wait for You.

Someone must keep watch, down by the bridge, to announce Your coming, Lord, for You come in the night like a thief.

Keeping watch is our ministry. Keeping watch... for the world as well. She is often so heedless, wandering

[1] *Silja Walter osb, Gebet des Klosters am Rand der Stadt (1979). For the English translation: H. Hagan osb, Silja Walter's Kloster Fahr Poems: A Translation with an Introduction, American Benedictine Review, Volume 74, Number 3 (September 2023), pp. 286–317.*

outside, and at night she is not at home either. Does she remember that You are coming? That You are her Lord and will surely come?

Someone must believe, must be at home at midnight, to open the door to You and let You in, wherever and however You come.

Since then, I have increasingly experienced the night office and the silence that follows as a ministry: remaining present before God, also on behalf of people I do not know. With the prophet Isaiah, I am learning to stand watch, day after day, and to look for the Lord who comes (cf. Isaiah 21:11–12). Singing God's praise in the darkness has become for me an act of hopeful resistance. The night is not yet over, but in prayer my heart already greets the dawn. Each day, once again, I wait for Christ, the true Sun.

The writings of Thomas Merton helped me deepen this experience. His words about a "virgin point" ("*le point vierge*")[2] led me to look with fresh attention at the transition from night to day. Anyone who goes outside at that hour may sense creation holding its breath for a moment. There is an instant of silence, as though everything is waiting. Then the light breaks through and a new day begins. Whenever I experience this, I receive it as a gift: life is given to me anew. I may say "yes" to the life I have received from God.

"The first chirps of the waking day birds mark the '*point vierge*' of a sky as yet without real light... They begin to speak to Him, not with fluent song but with an awakening question that is their dawn state... Their condition asks if it is time for them to 'be.' He answers 'yes.'

Then one by one they wake up and become birds. They manifest themselves as birds, beginning to sing. Presently they will be fully themselves and even fly."[3]

In this way, prayer during the night became for me an experience of being born anew out of silence. The words from the Book of Wisdom grew dear to me: "For while deep silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word came from heaven, from your royal throne" (Wisdom 18:14-15). These words help me listen. Before the bustle of the day begins, I may grow still and make room for God's Word.

Through Merton, I discovered that the "virgin point" also refers to the deepest, untouched centre of the human soul. To describe this reality, he used the French term he had borrowed from Louis Massignon (1883–1962). I understand it as the place where I stand empty-handed before God, beyond my conceit, my illusions and my desire to control everything. The passage from darkness to light thus became for me an image of an inner reality as well. In silence, I have nothing to prove. I may simply be there and listen to God's word of love.

Prayer during the night became for me an experience of being born anew out of silence. The words from the Book of Wisdom grew dear to me: "For while deep silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word came from heaven, from your royal throne".

When you realise that this "virgin point" exists in every human being, you cannot help but look at others differently. Keeping watch during the night therefore also brings healing to my relationships.

This does not make getting up easy every morning. The tiredness and resistance have not disappeared. But I understand more clearly why I rise: to be there, for God and for the world. Sometimes I think again of that man on his way to work. His words continue to invite me to remain faithful to this simple ministry. I do not have to dispel the night myself. I may keep watch, hold the door open, and trust that the Lord will come, not only within me, but in every human being, in all His creation. ✣

Dom Bernardus Peeters, OCSO is the Abbot-General of our Order. He is a monk of the monastery of Koenigshoeven (Tilburg) in the Netherlands.

[2] *Thomas Merton, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (1966), p. 131 and p. 157-158.*
[3] *idem, p. 131.*



Photo courtesy of Nový Dvůr

With the prophet Isaiah,
I am learning to stand watch, day after day,
and to look for the Lord who comes (cf. Isaiah 21:11–12).
Singing God's praise in the darkness has become
for me an act of hopeful resistance.
The night is not yet over,
but in prayer my heart already greets the dawn.
Each day, once again,
I wait for Christ, the true Sun.



I do not have to dispel the night myself.
I may keep watch, hold the door open,
and trust that the Lord will come, not only within me,
but in every human being, in all His creation.

DOM BERNARDUS PEETERS, OCSO

"Ushimitsudoki" *and* Awakening Before Dawn

The Time That Transforms the Darkness into a Vessel of Prayer

DOM FRANCISCUS YOSHIMOTO KUNIHIKO , OCSO

In the traditional Japanese sense of time, the hours between 1:00 and 3:00 a.m. are known as the "Hour of the Ox" (*Ushi no Koku*), with its deepest point around 2:00 a.m. called *Ushimitsudoki*. This is not merely a late hour of the night. Described in Japanese tradition as the time when "even the plants and trees sleep," it is a profoundly unique period when the vital activities of nature sink to their lowest ebb, and the boundaries that sustain our daytime order dissolve. When Trappist monks rise shortly after 3:00 a.m., they step directly into the lingering, deep darkness of Ushimitsudoki. When we overlay these two traditions of time, four profound connections emerge concerning the depths of human psychology and the cosmic order.

Liminal Time: Defenseless Darkness and the Emergence of the "Void"

In Japanese folklore and traditional cosmology, *Ushimitsudoki* has long been regarded as the time when the boundary between the other world (the eternal realm) and this world becomes thinnest. Because daytime rationality, social institutions, and the human-made

日本古来の時間感覚において、午前1時から3時を「丑の刻」と呼び、特にその午前2時過ぎを「丑三つ時（うしみつどき）」と呼びます。これは、単なる深夜の時刻ではありません。それは「草木も眠る」と言われるように、自然界の生命活動が最も沈潜し、日常の秩序を支える境界線が融解する、極めて特殊な時間です。トラピスト修道士が午前3時過ぎに起き出すのは、まさにこの「丑三つ時」の深い闇の余韻が支配する時間帯です。この二つの時間を重ね合わせるとき、そこには人間の深層心理と宇宙的秩序に関わる、4つの関連性が浮かび上がってきます。

境界（リミナル）の時間——無防備な闇と「真空」の出現

日本の民俗学や伝統的な宇宙観において、丑三つ時は「あの世（常世）とこの世（現世）の境界が最も薄くなる時間」とされてきました。昼間の理性や社会的な制度、人間が作り上げた「意味の体系」が眠りによって一時的に停止するた



Photo courtesy of Tarrawarra Abbey

"systems of meaning" are temporarily suspended by sleep, both for better and for worse, otherworldly forces and realms of the unconscious that are normally repressed easily rise to the surface. If I may borrow the words of Simone Weil, in light of her philosophy, this time of night can be called a "void" (*le vide*)—a state stripped of human-centered imagination and control. When human beings confront this defenseless void, they experience an instinctive dread: an awe and fear of the dark. Yet the monk does not sleep through this most vulnerable and even eerie liminal hour; rather, he intentionally awakens to embrace it. Placing oneself within the lingering stillness of *Ushimitsudoki*, when the armor of the ego is at its thinnest, serves as a sure threshold for relinquishing the false self.

The monks do not subdue the darkness of their inner passions by sheer force. Instead, simply by waking early, standing in the cold air, and allowing the words of the Psalms to resonate through their bodies, they transform the "empty gap where evil enters" into an "open space where grace can dwell."

Transforming the "Demonic" into the "Sacred": Confronting the Shadow of the Psyche

Historically, as symbolized by the ancient folkloric ritual of *Ushi no Koku Mairi* (shrine visits at the Hour of the Ox to lay a curse), *Ushimitsudoki* was considered a time when dark human passions—resentment, attachment, and jealousy—stirred in the shadows. As the Benedictine monk Anselm Grün explains by bridging the wisdom of the ancient Desert Fathers with Jungian depth psychology, silence and darkness first bring to the surface the inner "shadow" and "demons" (*logismoi*, or obsessive, destructive thoughts) hidden within the human heart. The Vigils (the nocturnal prayer and watch), for which Trappist monks rise immediately after *Ushimitsudoki* to gather in the church, historically carried the meaning of "spiritual warfare against the demons of the night." What is crucial here is that the monks do not subdue the darkness or their inner passions by sheer force. Instead, simply by waking early, standing in the cold air, and allowing the words of the Psalms to resonate through their bodies, they transform the "empty gap where evil enters" into an "open space where grace can dwell."

め、良くも悪くも、普段は抑圧されている異界の力や無意識の領域が噴き出しやすくなります。

シモーヌ・ヴェイユを引用させてもらいますが、彼女の思想に照らすならば、この時間帯は、人間中心の想像力やコントロールが剥がれ落ちた「真空」と言えます。人はこの無防備な真空に直面するとき、本能的な恐怖（闇への畏怖）を覚えます。しかし、修道士は、この最も無防備で不気味とも言える境界の時間を、眠りによってやり過ごすのではなく、あえて覚醒して引き受けます。自我の鎧が最も薄くなる丑三つ時の余韻の中に身を置くことは、偽りの自己を退かせる確かな入り口となるからです。

「魔」から「聖」への転換——深層心理の影との対峙

丑三つ時は、古来「丑の刻参り」に象徴されるように、人間の恨みや執着、嫉妬といった情念（魔）が蠢く時間とされてきました。ベネディクト会士のアンセルム・グリュンが古代の砂漠の教父たちの知恵とユング心理学を結びつけて説いたように、静寂と闇は、まず人間の内面に潜む「影」や「悪霊（ロゴイスモイ＝邪念）」を炙り出します。

トラピストの修道士が丑三つ時の直後に起き出して聖堂へ向かう「ヴィジリア（徹夜の祈り・見張り）」は、歴史的にも「夜の悪霊との霊的戦い」という意味合いを持っていました。重要なのは、闇や内なる情念を力でねじ伏せるのではなく、ただ早く目覚め、冷たい空気の中で立ち、詩編の言葉を身体に響かせることによって、「魔が差す隙（空虚）」を「恩寵が宿る余白」へと転換する点にあります。

朝の来ない夜はない——「再生の胎動」

No Night Without a Dawn: The Stirring of Rebirth

In its ancient pictographic origin, the Chinese character for “Ox” (丑, *Ushi*) depicts a sprout curving and stretching inside the shell of a seed, just on the verge of breaking through (or a hand twisting to gather strength). *Ushimitsudoki* is the hour when, though still invisible to the eye, new life begins to stir faintly deep within the earth. In other words, the act of rising between *Ushimitsudoki* and the break of dawn is not merely waking up early; it is a profoundly cosmological practice of making one’s own body present at the exact moment the universe turns from death (the extremity of darkness) toward rebirth (the stirring of light). This turning point of life in Eastern thought resonates at a deep level with the Christian reality that Christ’s Resurrection took place “while it was still dark” before dawn, and with the monastic practice of rising at that very hour to await the Resurrection.

Stability as “Watchmen of the World”: The Invisible Foundation Protecting the Community

From *Ushimitsudoki* into the Hour of the Tiger (3:00 to 5:00 a.m.), when the rest of the world is in its deepest sleep and most defenseless state, lamps are lit, and prayer is offered in the monastery. This reality brings an immeasurable spiritual and psychological stability (*stabilitas*) to the community and to society as a whole. In our modern world, where everyone competes solely for the daytime hours of efficiency and activity, some take upon themselves this least productive, loneliest, and darkest liminal hour, quietly keeping watch (*Vigilia*). This is nothing less than the work of filtering the world's darkness in an unseen place, purifying the “vessel” to receive the morning light.

The darkness of *Ushimitsudoki* and the awakening before dawn: by willingly embracing with one’s own body the hours of “unconscious darkness, solitude, and powerlessness” that human beings fear and wish to avoid most, this practice becomes a paradoxical locus of grace—

> 闇や内なる情念を力でねじ伏せるのではなく、ただ早く目覚め、冷たい空気の中で立ち、詩編の言葉を身体に響かせることによって、「魔が差す隙（空虚）」を「恩寵が宿る余白」へと転換する点にあります。

そもそも「丑（うし）」という字は、象形文字において「種子の殻の内部で芽が曲がりながら伸びようとし、今にも殻を破ろうとする状態（あるいは手をひねって力を込める形）」を表しています。丑三つ時は、まだ目には見えないものの、大地の奥底で新しい命が微かに胎動を始める時間です。

つまり、丑三つ時から夜明け前にかけて起きるという行為は、単なる早起きではなく、「宇宙が死（闇の極致）から再生（光の胎動）へと転じるまさにその瞬間に、自らの身体を立ち会わせる」という極めて宇宙論的な実践なのです。この東洋における生命の転換点は、キリスト教においてキリストの復活が「まだ暗い夜明け前」の出来事であったこと、そして修道士がその時刻に起きて復活を待ち望むことと、深い次元で一致しています。

「世界の番人」としての定住——共同体を守る見えない礎

世間の人々が最も深く眠り、無防備になっている丑三つ時から寅の刻（午前3時〜5時）にかけて、修道院では誰かが灯りをともして祈っている。この事実は、共同体や社会全体に対して計り知れない霊的・心理的な安定（スタビリティ）をもたらします。

誰もが効率と活動の「昼の時間」だけを奪い合う現代において、最も生産性がなく、最も孤独で暗い境界の時間を引き受け、そこで静かに「見張り（Vigilia）」を続ける存在がいること。それは、見えない場所で世界の闇を濾過し、朝の光を迎えるための「器」を清めておく作業に他なりません。

「丑三つ時」の闇と、夜明け前の目覚め。それは、人間が最も恐れ、避けて通りたい「無意識の闇・孤独・無力さ」の時間を、あえて身体をもって引き受けることで、最も純粋な「光と再生の源泉」へと変容させる逆説的な恩寵の場と言えます。闇の最も深い底に定住する者だけが、夜明けの第一光を誰よりも深く、恩寵として受け取ることができるのです。✣

transforming the night into the purest source of light and rebirth. Only those who dwell in the deepest depths of the darkness can receive the first light of dawn more deeply than anyone else, as sheer grace. ✣

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VIGILS becomes a paradoxical locus of grace — transforming the night into the purest source of light and rebirth. Only those who dwell in the deepest depths of the darkness can receive the first light of dawn more deeply than anyone else, as sheer grace.

Towards a Theology of Vigils

MO. ELEANOR CAMPION, OCSO

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The hour of rising is so determined that Vigils maintains its nocturnal character" [Statute 23. A of our Constitutions]

Most monastics are familiar with the question asked by curious guests: "Why do you get up so early?" One answer, which usually satisfies, is "We get up while it's still dark in order to pray at night." But that begs further questions, doesn't it? Why pray at night? Why not get a decent night's sleep and pray by day? And in any case, it's not merely about prayer—we don't just address a few quick words to God and then hop back into bed—it's about keeping vigil. This includes our liturgical celebration of Vigils, but also continues afterwards as we remain in prayer, lectio, and silent watchfulness until morning. Why do we do it?

Keeping Vigil: watching, waiting

To keep vigil is to watch. As Christians, our vigil is a watchful waiting in hope for the Lord's return. According to the synoptic Gospels, in his discourse on the Coming of the Son of Man, Jesus exhorted his disciples to constant vigilance.

"Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from his home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own work to do; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow or dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep" (Mk 13:33-36).

So the primary significance of our vigil-keeping is eschatological. Jesus told us to wait expectantly for his return—and that is what we do. In another parable, he warned us to be ready, like the wise virgins, because "At midnight, there was a cry: 'Look! The Bridegroom! Go out and meet him!'" (Mt 25:6). We are to be alert and prepared to go in with him to the eschatological wedding feast. The coming of the Son of Man will be as unexpected as that of a thief in the night (Mt 24:32), so we do not simply slumber through the hours of darkness, but are vigilant,

watchful and ready. We watch with longing hearts, eager for the arrival of the expected one. We are full of anticipation, as is the lover awaiting the arrival of the beloved, or as people on the shore anxiously wait for a sign on the horizon of those returning from sea. We are an Advent people, waiting in hope, trustfully yearning for the Bridegroom to come. Of course this is an attitude of heart that should characterise us twenty-four hours a day, and should find expression in all our way of living:

"This watchfulness, this persevering expectation of Jesus' return, should be a permanent part of Christian life and should manifest itself in the battle against daily temptations which are the prologue to the great eschatological combat." [Léon-Dufour, Dictionary of Biblical Theology, art. "Watch"]

Our nightly vigil is a concrete, physical expression of this. It symbolises our readiness to be watchful of heart and alert at all times. We rise during the night to keep vigil for the Lord's coming because we long for that coming at all times.

And while we watch, we pray, as Jesus did in Gethsemani and as we are exhorted to do by St Luke ["Stay awake, praying at all times" (Lk 21:36)] and St. Paul: "Be thankful as you stay awake to pray" (Col 4:2); "Never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's holy people" (Eph 6:18).

"In the sober anticipation of the coming of Christ, following the tradition of the Order, the hours before sunrise are appropriately consecrated to God by the celebration of Vigils, by prayer and meditation."[Constitution 23]

Night of Vigil: the Passover

St. Augustine called the Easter Vigil "the mother of all Vigils." If this is so, then all our vigil-keeping is somehow rooted in and takes meaning from the Easter Vigil.

The Easter Vigil celebrates the triumph of Christ over death, sin, and evil. On that most holy night, the light of the resurrection shines in the darkness and dispels its power. Every other vigil, particularly but not exclusively our Sunday vigil, is inextricably connected with this paschal event. As we keep vigil, we pass with Christ from darkness to light.

St Benedict does not outline a theology of the Hours in his Rule. But he does recommend that we read St Basil, and Basil, commenting on the various hours of the liturgy, said that "each period contains a reminder peculiar to itself of blessings received from God" (Long Rules, 37). Each hour reveals to us something of the goodness of God and the mystery of Christ. Each has its own unique colour and focus, linked particularly to the time of day at which it is celebrated.

Our vigil in the hours of darkness is linked to the great annual paschal vigil, and to the triumph of good over evil, of life over death, of love over hatred and vengeance. St Benedict assigns an "*Alleluia*" antiphon to the last group of psalms each night, connecting us firmly with the night par excellence of alleluias, the night of the paschal vigil.

But behind our paschal vigil lies the great Jewish Passover vigil. On that night, the *Exsultet* proclaims, God "freed the people of Israel from their slavery and led them dry-shod through the sea." Each year this foundational event was remembered by the Israelites as the Lord had instructed them:

"The night when Yahweh kept vigil to bring them out of Egypt must be kept as a vigil in honour of Yahweh by all Israelites, for all generations" (Ex 12:42, cf. Deut 16:3).

Note: the yearly Passover vigil ritually celebrated the night when Yahweh kept vigil for the Israelites—the original vigil was kept by God! It was God who watched in love, protecting the people and making possible their escape from slavery; it was God who waited anxiously, concernedly, on the alert for the outcome; it was God who did something extra that night, and God's vigilance was remembered and celebrated by a grateful people ever afterwards. As we keep vigil, it is good for us to know that we do nothing for God that God has not first done for us! It is God's vigilance towards ourselves that has brought us to where we are today, particularly the vigilance of God in Christ, the vigilant love which triumphed even over death and the tomb.

The revelation of God in darkness

"God is light" (1 Jn 1:5) and "the Father of all light" (Jas 1:17)—but to us that light is "unapproachable" (1 Tim 6:16, NRSV). God is mysterious and fear-inspiring, and there is a real sense in which it is in and through darkness that



William Blake, The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, ca. 1825. Watercolor. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection. Public Domain.

we "approach" and "experience" the divinity. Mystics in the apophatic tradition, such as Gregory of Nyssa, speak of the soul's ascent to God as an ascent into the divine darkness.

It was "as the sun was on the point of setting... and a deep dark dread" had fallen on Abraham that God spoke to him, and "when the sun had set and it was dark" that God, represented by smoking firepot and flaming torch, enacted the covenant ritual with him (Gen 15:12, 17). God spoke to Moses out of fire on Mt Sinai when it was "darkened by cloud, murky and thunderous" (Deut 4:11, cf Ex 19:16). It was at night that Jacob wrestled with the angel (Gen 28:10-22), that Samuel heard and responded to God's call (1 Sam 3:1-18), that Solomon was invited to ask for a gift, and so received wisdom (1 Kg 3:5-14). At night angels appeared to the shepherds near Bethlehem and announced the birth of the Saviour (Lk 2:8), and to the Incarnation are applied the words "When peaceful silence lay over all, and night had run the half of her swift course, down from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all-powerful Word" (Wis 18:14-15). It was in the fourth watch of the night that Jesus walked across the water to the frightened disciples in the storm-tossed boat, and they knew him as the Son of God (Mt 14:24-33). And the synoptic Gospels tell us that as Jesus died on the cross, "there was darkness over the whole land" (Mk 15:33 and pars.)—a terrible darkness, in which lay the greatest revelation of God's love for us, the redemptive death of Jesus.

Not every experience of darkness necessarily leads us to God. But it does seem that for many of us at some time or another, entering into the mystery of darkness precedes an experience of God's unfathomable love. Our commitment to night vigil expresses our readiness to face the darkness, over and over again. We will shy away neither from our personal, inner darkness nor from the mysterious darkness of the world, for we believe that God is present there too. "Yours is the day and yours is the night," says the psalmist (Ps 73). God is to be found in darkness as well as in light.

That does not mean that we can avoid experiencing the night and darkness as threatening, fearful, and mysterious. It may be true to say of God, "Even darkness is not dark for you, and the night is as clear as the day" (Ps 138), but it is not yet true of ourselves. However, we continue to face the darkness in faith, supporting others by our presence at the vigil, and being supported by them. (How many of us would persevere in keeping vigil alone?). And we join with the psalmist in singing, "You, O Lord, are my lamp; my God who lightens my darkness" (Ps 17).

> We watch with longing hearts, eager for the arrival of the expected one. We are full of anticipation, as is the lover awaiting the arrival of the beloved, or as people on the shore anxiously wait for a sign on the horizon of those returning from sea. This is an attitude of heart that should characterise us twenty-four hours a day, and should find expression in all our way of living:

Prayer at night: the example of Jesus

Jesus taught us to pray not only by his words but by his example. As a Jew, the psalms were central to his prayer. And his practice of prayer included what is so often mentioned in the psalms—prayer at night.

Happy indeed are those...
who ponder the law of the Lord day and night. (Ps 1)

By night I will sing to him, praise the God of my life. (Ps. 41)

Lord my God, I call for help by day,
I cry at night before you. (Ps 87)

It is good... to proclaim your truth in the watches of the night. (Ps 91)

At midnight I will rise and thank you for your just decrees. (Ps 118:62 – quoted by St Benedict when speaking of the Opus Dei at night)

I rise before dawn and cry for help. (Ps 118:147)

Jesus did this, literally. He rose early in the morning to pray (Mk 1:35). He sometimes spent the whole night in prayer to God (Lk 6:12), or stayed in prayer until the fourth watch (Mt 14:23, 25). We pray in and through Christ, and



Photo courtesy of Glencairn Abbey, Ireland.

consciously imitate him in his earthly prayer. So we rise at night and join our prayer to his. With him, we experience the quietness of night, when nature itself is still and the very silence draws us to awareness of God. This profound silence provides the best possible atmosphere for listening to the Word of God, both in the liturgy and in our lectio. This is why we observe the "Great Silence" during these hours, taking care not to compromise the gift of this time with too much activity, noise, or bustle.

The synoptic Gospels also present Jesus to us as keeping a prayerful, if agonising, vigil in Gethsemani at the supreme moment of choice, the moment when he once-and-for-all accepted the terrifying, brutal way of the cross ahead of him as God's will. He is presented as a model of watchfulness and earnest prayer, especially by contrast with the disciples who could not be vigilant with him. "Stay awake," he tells them, "and pray not to be put to the test." This word applies not only to the disciples in the garden, but to us all through the struggle of Christian life.

Night is a time of anguish for many. Pain, guilt, fear, loneliness, despair—in the night, these often seem worse and are harder to endure. The fact that prayer is rising to God, even in those hours of darkness, is a significant act of solidarity with those experiencing the night of suffering, the night of the cross.

Prayer for a world in darkness

The darkness of night is a powerful symbol of the suffering of the world. Pain, fear, anguish, helplessness, sorrow—they are all around us. In the hours of darkness we are conscious of those in darkness, lost in the night of unbelief, trapped in the blackness of injustice, worn out, despairing. Many of the psalms of the night Office are laments, calling out to God from the depths of distress, imploring mercy, help, justice, victory over evil. As we pray them in the darkness, we give voice to the cries of the poor and troubled, those who have suffered too much brutality or shock or degradation to be able themselves to turn Godwards, or who do not even believe in a God to whom they can cry out. We identify with those who are weary and lost, and call out with them and for them. We stand in the darkness and call on God.

The fact that we do this literally is important. Night is a time of anguish for many. Pain, guilt, fear, loneliness, despair—in the night, these often seem worse and are harder to endure. The fact that prayer is rising to God, even in those hours of darkness, is a significant act of solidarity with those experiencing the night of suffering, the night of the cross.

Praising God even in darkness

Not only psalms of lament characterize the night. We also offer prayer of praise and thanksgiving at this time. For even in darkness, we know that God's faithful love surrounds us, that we are a people called, chosen and blessed. Even when the evidence is not visible, we continue to praise God. For "though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines... yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (Hab 3:17-18). We walk by faith, not by sight. So our nightly song of praise rises up, a sign of faith, a sign of fidelity, perhaps a sign of contradiction—a sign that causes people to ask, "Why do you get up so early?"

The ascetical/ penitential dimension

If in the past the idea of vigils as penitential was over-stressed, that is no reason to omit it altogether now. Perhaps we need to revisit the whole notion of "penance" in our life.

Keeping vigil constantly calls, at least, for bodily discipline. While it is true that our bodies adjust to a regular timetable, and that our horarium allows an adequate, healthy amount of time for sleep, it is still the case that our bodies do not, for the most part, really like getting up at night. Deep within us we are programmed not to rise before it is light, and constantly to do otherwise requires discipline and commitment. This is part of our monastic ascesis, part of the "yoke" we take on when we profess our adherence to the Rule. Through the practice of this bodily discipline we express our willingness to

renounce our own agenda (or "will"), and our commitment to ongoing conversion. We die a little to ourselves in order to find deeper life in Christ, and to have our hearts expanded in love of God and of our neighbour.

Conclusion

St Peter tells us to have an answer ready for those who ask us the reason for our hope (1 Pet 3:15). There is surprisingly little written on the monastic concept of night vigil, so we will have to think out a reply to offer to our curious guests.

"Why do you get up so early? Why do you pray at night?" A full answer will include the following:

- to be ready for the Lord's return: alert, joyful, longing;
- to enter into the paschal movement from darkness to light;
- to unite in prayer with Jesus, who prayed at night;
- to praise God, even in darkness;
- to pray in darkness for and with a world in darkness;
- as an act of asceticism and penance.

Perhaps someone will take this further? ✣

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Awaiting the *Light* of the World

SR. JOSIE TUPAS , OCSO

The modern understanding of time is linear, metric, and strictly partitioned into twenty-four uniform hours. For the medieval monk, however, time was fluid, seasonal, and profoundly theological. Grounded in the ancient Roman system of dividing daylight and darkness into the seasonal hours, the monastic schedule expanded and contracted with the sun. As the sun fluctuated, so too did the rising bell. At Matutum Abbey, the dormitory buzzer sounds at 7:30 pm after Compline, indicating that we should be set to rest in our cell until the rising at 2:45 a.m. The monastic horarium made the act of repose and rising an ever-changing test of obedience and fidelity.

Vigils represent the absolute frontier of monastic discipline, a relentless daily battle against human weakness, fatigue, and the temptation of the flesh. The challenge lies in our persistence to stay awake with Christ—the Light of the World. Returning to bed after Vigils is a desertion of the spiritual battlefield while Christ's foes lie in ambush. In his critiques of Black Monk laxity, St. Bernard rouses monks from their lethargy: "Your comrades are out wallowing in blood and gore, and here you are enjoying fine food and taking your morning sleep!" [1]

For Bernard, monks are the *milites Christi*, and the monastery is an armed camp. He wrote to his young nephew Robert, who had abandoned Clairvaux for the less rigorous Cluny, explicitly warning him that removing the harsh monastic habit and indulging in soft bedding strips him of his spiritual protection, leaving him exposed to the devil: "Arise, soldier of Christ! Shake off the dust!... Do you think that because you have forsaken the front line the enemy has forsaken you? ... Can you sleep unarmed in the morning hours when it was at that time that Christ rose from the dead?" [2]

Enduring cold or heat, and combating sloth and pride—serves as armor. Flight signals cowardice, as invisible enemies strike hardest from behind when a monk lowers his guard during soft

[1] *Apologia 22*
[2] *Epistola 1.13*



Eslam Mohammed Abdelmaksoud, Traditional Lantern and Wooden Door in Dubai, photograph, via Pexels.

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comfort or morning sleep. Because dawn marks Christ's Resurrection, sleeping during prayer hours is a theological contradiction—sleeping at your post while the King rises victorious.

Towards the end of his life, Bernard articulated a splendid vision. Night provides a quiet space, unburdened by noise and the 'dust of earthly care,' allowing the mind to focus. The solemnity of night signifies the interior chamber where the soul meets the Word. Whereas the Desert Fathers viewed the night as the arena for battling the "noonday devil" and nocturnal demons, Bernard saw it as a sanctuary of divine intimacy. Seeking God at night is an act of bridal longing rather than mere ascetic discipline, with the bed symbolizing complete union and freedom from worldly anxiety.

"A time of leisure is best and most convenient; the deep silence when others are asleep is particularly suitable, for prayer will then be freer and purer. 'Arise at the first watch of the night, and pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord, your God' [Lam 2:19]. How secretly prayer goes up in the night, witnessed only by God and the holy angel who received it to present it at the heavenly altar! How pleasing, how unclouded it is, colored with the blush of modesty! How serene, how calm, free from noise and interruption! How pure it is, how sincere, unsullied by the dust of earthly care, untouched by ostentation or human flattery! Therefore the Bride, as modest as she is cautious, when she desired to pray, that is, to seek the Word—for they are the same—sought the privacy of her bed at night."[3]

Our life bears the character not only of a continuous Lent, but also of a continuous Advent —a state of perpetual expectation. In the Hesychast and Eastern Christian ascetic traditions, the Greek word nepsis—typically translated as watchfulness, sobriety, or attentiveness—describes the soul's interior vigilance. Derived from the verb *nepho* ("to be sober" or "to abstain from wine"), it is far more than intellectual concentration; it is an active, spiritual state of wakefulness that guards the heart against destructive thoughts and keeps it attuned to God. If patience is the anchor that grounds the soul, *nepsis* is the sharp, discriminating sight that keeps it from drifting into sleep. Through it, we remain present to God, present to others, and present to the quiet work of grace within.

The liturgy for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time brings this imperative into clear focus. The Gospel Antiphon for Matthew 25:13, sung at Lauds and Vespers, conveys a sense of urgent call: "Keep watch with love, with your lamp alight. See, the Bridegroom comes; go out to welcome him." In a complementary movement, the Book of Wisdom personifies divine wisdom as luminous, accessible, and comforting—a pathway to contemplation: "Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her... Anyone keeping vigil for her will soon be free from care" (Wisdom 6:12, 15b).

Wisdom knocks at the door of our hearts; his head is covered with the dew of night. He wants to enter, to find his bride waiting and watching. Alas, if when the Bridegroom comes, he finds us asleep! Note that the virgins' duty is not merely to keep watch, but to do so with their lamps alight—that is, with love and devotion.

What does Jesus truly mean when he commands us to "watch"? The coming of the Bridegroom is not an event to dread, but the fulfillment we eagerly anticipate and pray for daily: "Thy Kingdom come! Come, Lord Jesus!"

The act of waiting varies depending on the individual's state of life and circumstances. Consider a farmer awaiting the harvest, a traveler at the departure gate, a mother expecting a baby, a convict awaiting sentence, or a terminally ill patient facing the end. Crucially, there is a profound difference between the waiting of a servant and the waiting of a lover. The former is often driven by fear—a survival mechanism aimed at avoiding punishment—while the latter is a sober-minded awareness, eager to receive and respond. Jesus does not call us to mere survival; he invites us into the fullness of life, here and now.

[3] *SC 85.3*

In The Shattering of Loneliness, Erik Varden highlights a twofold meaning of the word "aware": to notice, and to take care of or protect. Early monastic tradition, starting with the Desert Fathers, embraced both dimensions of watchfulness. If we focus exclusively on one to the exclusion of the other, we fail to fulfill Jesus' command. When we become consumed with "taking care of," we lose the ability to recognize the truth, goodness, and beauty surrounding us. Fear takes over as we anxiously attempt to control our lives and reality. In this state, a life of trust, surrender, and receptivity becomes impossible; our vision narrows, leaving no room for childlike wonder or holy surprise.

A few simple disappointments come to mind—like a broken promise, or a doctor who schedules an appointment for 9:00 AM only to arrive at 1:00 PM (or fail to show up at all). But the Bridegroom certainly comes. And when He does, we discern traces and signs of both His arrival and His departure, an experience

St. Bernard beautifully describes in his 74th Sermon on the Song of Songs. The Word enters without physical signs or sensory proof, recognizable only by its inner effects: arousing the slumbering soul, softening a hardened heart, illuminating darkness, and driving out vices. Conversely, His withdrawal brings a cooling of spiritual fervor, plunging the soul into a holy sadness until He returns.

Jesus, our victorious King, overthrows the powers of darkness and brings His Kingdom definitively and gloriously into the midst of a world that passes away. The awareness of his active presence leads us to respond with joyful readiness to enter into the eternal wedding feast. Today, however, culture pulls us toward the opposite extreme. A subtle turn inward has bent us into self-absorption and willful blindness. This relentless pragmatism expresses itself in the "cult of speed"—an environment dominated by an unremitting message to hurry up, decide faster, and eliminate every moment of apparent inactivity.

Despite our sophisticated communication tools, we have rarely been so disconnected from our own depths. Fractured by digital noise, economic pressures, and self-regarding preoccupations, we face a subtle crisis: not an overt rejection of God, but an atrophy of interiority—the slow decay of the contemplative faculty that recognizes the Sacred in the ordinary. Recovering this dimension calls us back to Cistercian anthropology, a roadmap pointing to our deepest hope and desire.

Despite our sophisticated communication tools, we have rarely been so disconnected from our own depths. Fractured by digital noise, economic pressures, and self-regarding preoccupations, we face a subtle crisis: not an overt rejection of God, but an atrophy of interiority

Responding to this crisis begins with reclaiming the sacramental rhythm of daily life—through liturgy, lectio, work, dialogue, and study—a formation which does not create isolated individuals, but a people, always.

True renewal stems not from grand strategy, but from the continuous conversion of the heart. By yielding to the School of Christ—"where the Son forms his disciples, the Holy Spirit consoles his friends, and the Father exalts his children"—we offer light to a searching world. Far from a retreat from reality, a life elevated by grace allows the integrated heart to become the place where the finite touches the Infinite, transforming daily life into unceasing worship.

Jesus is the Word made flesh, stooping to share in our fragile humanity so that we might share in his divinity. Watchfulness is invaluable, but it is not the destination. It opens us to the transcendence Christ offers. As the Way, the Truth, and the Life, he entered our world so that we might be united to him, discovering a reality that endures long after the temporary shadows of this world vanish. ✣

If ever, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ
shall knock at my door,

bringing with Him either truth without grace or grace without truth,

I shall know that He comes not
as a Bridegroom but as a Judge.

God forbid
that this should ever happen to me!

Let Him "enter not into judgment"
with His servant.

Let Him come in with peace, let Him come
in with cheerfulness and gladness;

but let His coming be also attended
with gravity and sobriety,

to the end that by fixing upon me
the severe glance of truth

He may repress my forwardness
and chasten my joy.

Let Him enter my soul as a bounding hart and at the same time as a watchful roe,

so that He may, by dissembling,
skip over my faults,

and out of compassion have regard
to the pains which I suffer.

Let Him come into me as if descending
from "the mountains of Bethel,"

all radiant and blissful; or as proceeding from the Father, in sweetness and mildness.

For thus He will not disdain to be called

and to become the Bridegroom of the soul that seeks Him,

although He is over all things, God blessed forever.

Amen.[1]

- ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

[1] *St. Bernard of Clairvaux, SC 74.11*

Sr. Josie Tupas is a solemn-professed member and juniorate director of Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey, Philippines.



Image: William Holman Hunt, The Light of the World, 1851–1856, oil on canvas over panel, 49.8 × 26.1 cm, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, UK. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Faithful Wakefulness to Love and Praise:
Learning Anew

SR. VIRGINIA VENTURA , OCSO

I

Learning Anew from a Cistercian Father: John of Ford

"... He (the Spouse) who 'has given songs in the night'
obviously takes pleasure in nocturnal hymns and canticles,
and a song at night is sweeter in his ears than other songs.
So if you want to show that your soul is truly the beloved of Jesus
or is truly a mother,
'arise at night at the beginning of your time for keeping vigil!'
I go further:
Even when the burden of weakness and misfortune
bears down upon you with the heaviest weight imaginable,
rise up at midnight and glory in the Lord,
because the Lord is good and his mercy endures forever!
See that you do not set about it in a half-hearted way,
for you bear the image of a great reality.[1]

[1] *John of Ford: "Sermons on the Final Verses of the Song of Songs", Volume II; Sermon 19:8 (CF 39, p. 73)*

"...We should remember the holy angels
who hear and join us in our praise."
"We seem to be keeping vigils, there is plainsong on our lips;
but our hearts are asleep."
"Awake, my glory, awake, lyre and harp. I will awake the dawn."
(Ps. 108:2)[2]



St. Bernard's Vision of the Night Office
German School (Cologne, formerly Cistercian Abbey of Altenberg), 1505–1532, stained glass, North Chancel Window (nII, panel 1b), St. Mary's Church, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England. Photograph by Gordon Plumb, via Vidimus (Issue 128).

[2] *Costello, Hilary: "Sky-blue is the Sapphire, Crimson the Rose" (CF 69, p. 66)*

II

Learning Anew

from a 12th century lay-brother

"while watching and keeping the night-watch over the flock..."

On the eve of the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the patronal feast of our Order, we read at supper the Cistercian Menology. And so the text goes:

We commemorate a lay-brother of simple heart,
who lived during the time of St. Bernard
and whom posterity gave the name of

DESIDERIUS.

Once on the feast of Our Lady's Assumption,
Desiderius was detained out of obedience
to tend the flocks at one of the granges.

Although unable to be in the church
with his brethren,
Desiderius wished to join in their praises of Mary.

At the sound of the bells,
he arose at the hour of Vigils and,
standing with his eyes and heart
turned towards the monastery,
began to recite his 'Hail Marys' (Aves)
and other prayers,
and continued thus throughout the night
up till early morning.

St. Bernard, who came to know of it
by heavenly revelation,
affirmed before his monks in chapter that
this simple lay-brother's prayer had surpassed
even the most sublime contemplation of the monks
and was the most pleasing among all
to Our Lady.
(Hag. 340)[3]



Kate Green, Artist's Impression of a Cistercian Lay-Brother, illustration for the Cistercians in Yorkshire project, Digital Humanities Institute, University of Sheffield.

[3] *From the Cistercian Menology*

III

Learning Anew

from a young nun

"WHEN THE BELL RINGS, WHO IS CALLING?"[4]

The Rule of St. Benedict devotes Chapter 22 (vv. 6,8) on the Night Vigils, about encouraging each other, especially those who go back to sleep. But the young Lutgarde didn't have an elder to call her...

St. Lutgarde: The Matins Incident[5]

While Lutgarde was still a young girl, before she had made profession with the Benedictine Nuns of St. Catherine's, she received a remarkable grace. Lutgarde had fallen sick with a fever. She was in bed, and heard the bell ring for Matins (=Vigils), about 2 a.m. Her head was burning, her flesh shook with chills, and her clothing was wet with perspiration. She thought it would be wise to stay in bed and sleep off her sickness, because it might be dangerous for her to get up and go to choir with the nuns, and stand in the cold church when she was shivering and wet with fever. Considering her youth and her more or less equivocal position in the religious life, and in a mitigated Order, she was quite entitled to stay in bed.

However, Lutgarde heard the voice of Christ, urging her to rise and go to choir with the others:

"Get up quickly, Lutgarde! Why are you lying there? For at this very hour, sinners are wallowing in the mire of their vices, and you ought to be doing penance for them, instead of lying there and letting your body perspire!"

Filled with fear, Lutgarde leapt from her bed and hastened to choir where the Office had already begun. At the door of the church, she saw CHRIST...

Lutgarde beheld Christ's living body, nailed to the Cross; but the lance wound was open in His side. As she approached Him, Christ let down one of His arms from the cross to embrace her and drew her to Himself. As He did so, He pressed her lips to the bleeding wound in His side, and from His Sacred Heart the young nun drew forth a mighty current of spiritual power which filled her with fortitude and joy..." ✣



Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, Saint Lutgardis (Santa Lutgarda), 1787, oil on canvas, 220 × 160 cm (86.6 × 63 in.), Real Monasterio de San Joaquín y Santa Ana, Valladolid, Spain.

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[4] *Don Ambrogio Pisoni's question in one of his lessons to Matutum community, May 2025*

[5] *Merton, Thomas: What Are These Wounds? p. 17f; cf. Thomas of Cantimpré, biographer and author of the Vita Lutgardis, who had known Lutgarde intimately for 16 years places this vision in the same period when she experienced the "exchange of hearts".*



Photo courtesy of Glencairn Abbey, Ireland

The Hour before Sunrise:

VOICES FROM THE NIGHT WATCH

MONKS & NUNS OF THE ORIENS REGION

"I will take my stand on the watchtower, and station myself on the rampart, and keep watch to see what He will say to me." (Hab 2:1)

Long before the world stirs—or just as it settles into sleep—a quiet bell rings across our monasteries, summoning brothers and sisters from their beds to stand at their choir posts in the pre-dawn silence.

In these pages, members of our Oriens region open the notebook of their daily lived experience, sharing with disarming honesty what it means to leave the warmth of bed in the dead of night: the heaviness of sleep, the chill of the choir, the wandering mind, and the inevitable seasons of interior dryness and reluctance. Yet, woven through every candid admission of human frailty is a shared wonder at our vocation to Vigils—the quiet grace of standing side by side in the Great Silence, holding the world in prayer while it sleeps, and watching for daybreak, when the first light of Christ rises over the horizon.

From the watchtower of the night,
monks and nuns of our Oriens communities speak.

Here are their voices from the night watch.

"Aku mau berdiri di tempat pengintaianku dan berdiri di menara, aku mau meninjau dan menantikan apa yang akan difirmankan-Nya kepadaku." (Hab. 2:1)

Jauh sebelum dunia terjaga—atau tepat ketika dunia mulai terlelap—sebuah lonceng lirih berdentang di seluruh biara kita, memanggil para saudara dan saudari bangkit dari tempat tidur mereka untuk berdiri di tempat masing-masing di panti paduan suara dalam keheningan dini hari.

Di halaman-halaman ini, para anggota dari regio Oriens kita membuka buku catatan pengalaman hidup mereka sehari-hari, berbagi dengan kejujuran yang menyentuh hati tentang apa artinya meninggalkan hangatnya tempat tidur di tengah pekatnya malam: beratnya rasa kantuk, dinginnya ruang paduan suara, pikiran yang mengembara, dan masa-masa kekeringan batin yang tak terelakkan. Namun, di balik setiap pengakuan yang jujur akan kerapuhan manusiawi itu, terjalin rasa takjub yang sama atas panggilan kita pada Ibadat Vigili—rahmat hening untuk berdiri berdampingan dalam Keheningan Agung, menopang dunia dalam doa sementara dunia terlelap, dan menantikan fajar menyingsing, saat cahaya pertama Kristus terbit di ufuk timur.

Dari menara jaga malam, para rahib dan rubiah dari komunitas-komunitas Oriens kita berbicara.

Inilah suara-suara mereka dari tugas jaga malam.

「わたしは監視所に立ち、砦に身を置き、見張りを続けよう。主がわたしに何を語られるかを見よう。」（ハバクク 2:1）

世界が目覚めるはるか前——あるいは、まさに眠りにつこうとする頃——静かな鐘の音が私たちの修道院に響き渡り、兄弟姉妹たちを寝床から呼び起こし、夜明け前の静寂の中でそれぞれの聖歌隊席へと立たせます。

このページでは、オリエンス地域のメンバーたちが日々の生活体験のノートを開き、真夜中に暖かい寝床を離れることの意味——眠気の重さ、聖堂の冷え込み、散漫になる心、そして避けられない霊的な渇きの季節——について、飾らない率直さで分かち合っています。しかし、人間の弱さをありのままに認めるその言葉の一つひとつには、私たちが「寝ずの番の祈り（読書課）」へと招かれていることへの共通の驚きが織り込まれています。それは、「大沈黙（マグヌム・シレンティウム）」の中で肩を並べて立ち、眠りにつく世界を祈りのうちに支え、地平線にキリストの最初の光が昇る夜明けを待ち望むという静かな恵みです。

夜の物見やぐらから、オリエンス地域の修道士と修道女たちが語りかけます。

I.

夜明け前の静寂の一時、心も体も目覚めて祈ることの難しい自分の貧しさと向き合いながら、他の兄弟姉妹の存在に励まされて過ごします。それは、常に目覚めて世界を包み込んでくださる神の偉大さに改めて出会い、賛美する一時です。

夜明け前に起きるシトーの伝統は、罪と暗闇の中でもがく私たちが、光り輝く太陽として来てくださるキリストの中で復活し、日々、新しい私として生きることができるよう招いてくれます。

To be resurrected in Christ, who comes to us as the radiant Sun.

During this quiet time before dawn, as I face my own poverty—finding it difficult to wake up both in mind and body to pray—I am encouraged by the presence of my fellow brothers and sisters. It is a moment to encounter anew and praise the greatness of God, who is always awake and embraces the world.

The Cistercian tradition of rising before dawn invites us—who struggle amidst sin and darkness—to be resurrected in Christ, who comes to us as the radiant sun, and to live each day as a new self.

- Our Lady of Tenshien Abbey, Japan

II.

Every morning, the Lord God awakens us from the "sleep of death" and grants us the gift of a new day to live out our monastic vocation to the best of our abilities. He presents us with this new day to be accepted humbly, for His glory in worship and thanksgiving, and for intercession on behalf of His people everywhere. This first Divine Office of the day is called Vigils or Night-Office. It is the most sanctifying liturgy of the day, preferring Christ and the Work of God over the comfort of our beds. We discipline ourselves and do not allow comfort and laziness to govern us. To persevere in this daily commitment to “the Work of God” seven times a day, we need the Holy Spirit to sustain our fervor and enthusiasm amid life’s many inner and outer pressures and temptations. We also need an open ear to learn ever more from the Lord, who speaks his words of love to us in so many different ways.

Above all, we need to pray at all times and never lose heart so that we can love God and everybody else to the best of our abilities. "No eye has seen; no ear has heard, nor mind perceived the things God has prepared for those who love Him."

- Bro. Aelred, Kopua Monastery, New Zealand

to live out our monastic vocation to the best of our abilities.

Rule of St. Benedict, 72:11; 43:3

Luke 11:13

Luke 18:1

1 Cor 2:9

III.

私は、もう一日生かされたことを喜び、神に感謝します。そして、この大沈黙の時に神に向かって問いかけ、聴きます。こうして私は、私と神とのつながりを悟ります。『....私を離れては、あなた方は何も出来ない‥』(ヨハネ15:5).との御言葉を思いめぐらします。私の何が、他者のさまたげになるか、悟れるように希望しています。

I rejoice in being given another day of life and thank God. Then, during this Great Silence, I question and listen to God. In doing so, I realize the connection between God and myself. I meditate on the Word: "...apart from me you can do nothing". I hope to become aware of what within me might be a hindrance to others.

John 15:5

- Sr. Martina, Nishinomiya Abbey, Japan

become aware of what within me might be a hindrance to others.

IV.

私達は夜明け前に、教会と人々の代表として、神に賛美と感謝の祈りを捧げます。パウロとシラスは牢屋に入れられても、真夜中に起きて賛美の歌を歌い神に祈りました。(ACTS 16:25)私達も共同体一同で夜明け前に起きて賛美と感謝を祈るなら、神は聞いて下さると信じています。

Before dawn, we offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God as representatives of the Church and the people. Even when Paul and Silas were imprisoned, they got up at midnight, sang hymns of praise, and prayed to God. I believe that if we, as a whole community, also wake up before dawn to pray in praise and thanksgiving, God will hear us.

Acts 16:25

- Sr. Rosaria, Nishinomiya Abbey, Japan

V.

世の中が、まだ眠っているとき、沈黙の中に神の声を聴くために黙想します。このとき、自分の沈黙だけでなく、隣人の沈黙も大切にしなければならないと思います。沈黙の祈りのうちに、その一日の生活のための力と恵みを頂きます。

I must value not only my own silence, but also the silence of my neighbor

While the world is still asleep, I meditate to listen to God's voice in the silence. At this time, I feel that I must value not only my own silence, but also the silence of my neighbor. Within silent prayer, I receive strength and grace for that day's life.

- Sr. Lucia, Nishinomiya Abbey, Japan

VI.

入会してからOpus Deiの時刻を守る大切さを学びました。それは神の招きの時だからです。特に夜明け前の祈りでは、神から恵みと力を頂いています。この恵みによって姉妹達に奉仕することが出来ます。主イエスは模範を示して下さいました。『朝早くまだ暗いうちに、イエスは起きて、人里離れた所へ出て行き、そこで祈っておられた』(マルコ1:35)その後、主は宣教に出て行かれました。

Since entering the community, I have learned the importance of keeping the hours of the Opus Dei (Divine Office), because those are times when God calls us. Especially during prayer before dawn, I receive grace and strength from God. Through this grace, I can serve my sisters. The Lord Jesus set an example for us: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." Afterward, the Lord went out to preach.

Mark 1:35

- Sr. Scholastica, Nishinomiya Abbey, Japan

VII.

I love Vigils. I love getting up at 3:00 a.m. and praising God together with my sisters at 3:20 a.m., while the world—the majority of human beings—is still sleeping, and even the sun has not yet risen. It is so dark, a bit dangerous; so quiet, a bit sleepy; so peaceful, but a bit heavy.

When the bell rings, it is like Lazarus hearing Jesus call him to come out of the tomb. Jesus calls my name and wakes me up: "Come out of your bed, out of your darkness. I am waiting for you outside in the Light."

When I walk down the stairs toward the church, I feel like Mary Magdalene, carrying on her shoulders all the spices she could afford to buy, running together with her friends to the tomb that buried her Beloved. Even though she didn't know how to roll away the heavy stone or how to enter the tomb, it didn't matter. Living the monastic life is not about solving a problem; it is about entering into the mysteries of our beloved Jesus—His birth, His death, and His resurrection.

Like a candle, Jesus lights our wick with His words, hymns, canticles, readings, and Marian songs.

When we sing, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise," it reminds us that we need God even just to open our lips. Without Him, we can do nothing.

The Divine Office is not only our privilege to foretaste heavenly life on earth by giving praise and thanks to God unceasingly; it is also our mission. Like a candle, Jesus lights our wick with His words, hymns, canticles, readings, and Marian songs. He places us on the mountaintop of Penha, making us the light of Macau—its casinos and its power-seeking. This is our vocation: to let God ignite our souls and bodies, burning away our impurities, sins, and vices, so that we may illuminate the world and its people.

- Our Lady Star of Hope, Macau

VIII.

"The monk keeps vigil in the night, waiting for the Lord."

Rule of St. Benedict, 8; 11:1

For me, Vigils is a means of spiritual discipline, helping me cultivate patience, endurance, and a deeper awareness of God's presence. I also find that ruminating on the second reading of Vigils prepares my heart to welcome our daily common life, especially in carrying out my service to the community with ease, joy, and a heart full of gratitude. The following saying of the Desert Fathers is true for me:

"The monk's warfare is greatest during the night, when sleep presses heavily upon him, and he must force himself to stand before God."

Apophthegmata Patrum-
Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Yet, over time, I was helped by the example of Beatrice of Nazareth : “When you hear the bell ring, jump from your bed as if there is a fire there. So, you will be ready for the Vigils.”

Moreover, the many episodes depicted in the Exordium Magnum also challenge me in the context of how my disposition is when I attend the Night Vigils. I end with a quote from CF 72: “Although each of the faithful in the Church of God must apply himself with all his power to render the divine praise in whatever way he can, it must be honestly said that the Cistercian Order is even more bound to do this arduous task of devotion than other Orders, since the monks of the Cistercian Order get up for Vigils a little after midnight, or sometimes at midnight and disdaining the sweetness of morning sleep, they persevere in labor and hardship.”

CF 72, Cistercian Fathers
Series, #125-129

Rule of St. Benedict, 8; 11:1

2 Cor 11: 27

- Our Lady Star of Hope, Macau

IX.

It is a moment before dawn that I have come to love in my long monastic life. The world is quiet, the darkness still lingers, and everything seems suspended in expectation. Creation itself waits, holding its breath for the arrival of light; we, accompanied by the psalms, are soothed and softened by grace.

God is worth getting up for.

Whenever I hear the bell in the darkness, I am reminded that God is worth getting up for. That may sound simple, but some mornings it is not easy. My body would prefer sleep. My mind is slow.

Yet something deeper calls me. Not duty alone, but desire.

I come before God at Vigils not because I am spiritually strong, but because I am needy.

The darkness seems to strip away all pretense.

Before the day begins, before I can accomplish anything or prove anything,

I stand before God exactly as I am.

"for you we wait"—describe the entire Christian life.

The words of one of our Vigils hymns express what I cannot put into words myself: “Lord, in the silence of the night we know your presence here; your voice resounds within our hearts, in prayer, for you we wait.”

The phrase, "for you we wait," seems to describe the entire Christian life.

We spend so much of our days waiting—for answers, for healing, for peace, and for understanding.

Yet at Vigils, I learn that waiting is never empty time. Waiting can be prayer; waiting can be love.

I do not always understand what God is doing in my life, and there are seasons when His presence seems hidden. Even so, Vigils teaches me to remain attentive.

The darkness itself becomes a teacher.

It reminds me that God is at work even when I cannot clearly see Him. Perhaps this is why the night has always been so important in the monastic tradition.

Vigilance. Not success. Not perfection. Just vigilance.

The darkness removes many of the supports on which I normally depend.

I cannot rely on feelings, enthusiasm, or visible results.

I can only remain there, quietly, before God.

And sometimes that remaining is difficult.

The Desert Fathers understood this struggle well: "The monk's warfare is greatest during the night, when sleep presses heavily upon him, and he must force himself to stand before God."

There are mornings when prayer feels effortless, but there are many others when simply being present seems like an achievement.

I find comfort in knowing that generations of monks and nuns have faced the same battle.

Vigilance. Not success. Not perfection. Just vigilance. Staying awake to God's presence. Returning again and again when my mind wanders.

Continuing to seek Him even when I feel nothing.

Vigils gently teach another lesson: prayer is first of all about seeking God because He is worthy of being sought—even when I am tired, and perhaps especially when I am tired. God does not ask me to leave my weakness at the chapel door. He invites me to bring it inside.

My fatigue, my distractions, my lack of concentration, even my struggle to stay awake can become offerings placed in His hands.

The difficulty is not separate from the prayer.

It becomes part of the prayer.

In the stillness before dawn, while the world sleeps and the psalms rise into the darkness, I am reminded of a simple truth: God is already present.

The One for whom I wait is the One who has been waiting for me all along.

- Our Lady Star of Hope, Macau

Prayer before sunrise is a powerful expression. . .

X.

For our community, rising before sunrise is a sacred time for us to pray, meditate, and reflect on our relationship with God and neighbor in a moment of peace, silence, and darkness.

Matthew 25:13

The practice of prayer before sunrise is a powerful expression of our faith and devotion. It reminds us of our call to be watchful for the return of Christ, as Jesus Himself warns, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour". This practice encourages us to contemplate the end of our lives and to remember God's mercy, urging us to convert each day. We are also called to love our neighbor, do acts of charity, and forgive others just as God forgives us, in accordance with the commandments of our Lord.

- Our Lady of Joy Abbey, Hong Kong

XI.

Long before I fully entered Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey, the mystery of Vigils—this quiet, humble watching—first drew me to the contemplative vocation.

Even during my years of discernment, I was drawn to the image of rising while the whole world still lies asleep, setting aside comfort, rest, and the natural desire for ease to wait upon the Lord. Now that I have vowed myself to this way of life, as I rise at 2:40 a.m. to prepare for Vigils at 3:00 a.m., I begin to grasp more profoundly its true depth and meaning.

Saint Bernard teaches that our monastic consecration calls us to a "Perpetual Vigil," not merely a once-in-a-while duty, warning that the enemy constantly seeks to lull the soul into spiritual slumber.

As we chant together, these words echo softly within my soul: "My soul is longing for the Lord; I count on His word. My soul is longing for the Lord more than a watchman for daybreak." Ps 129:5-6

At this hour, the world remains wrapped in deep stillness. There is no noise, no rush of daily tasks—only the quiet of the night, the cool air, and the gentle pull of my body back toward the warmth of bed. My eyes are heavy, my limbs sluggish, and my mind often clouded by sleep. Yet it is in this very struggle to rise—to step forward even when I do not feel like it—that I meet my own weakness and learn that I cannot keep this watch by my own willpower alone.

St. Bernard reminds us that we must watch all the more carefully because heaven itself watches over us with such tender solicitude, knowing how vulnerable we are to weariness and distraction. Only God's grace stirs within me that sacred longing: a hunger not merely for sunrise, but for the Lord Himself.

As the chant of the psalms draws my wandering heart back to Him, Vigils slowly cease to be just a rule or a schedule I must obey. It becomes the very axis upon which my whole day turns—the starting point that orients every hour, every work,

and every encounter toward God. It forms me into a watchman who stands in the dimness, watching and waiting for Him before the world awakens.

When I enter the church and see my sisters already there—each one carrying her own weariness, some quietly fighting drowsiness, others still distracted—we begin Vigils with the ancient plea: "Lord, open my lips." In the flow of our chanted psalms, my heart expands in love toward my neighbour. I realize we are one body keeping watch together. Each soul's longing is woven into the next through our shared chant; each sister's fatigue is an offering laid before the Lord as our voices blend into one. I learn patience and understanding, knowing that no one keeps this watch alone. Our presence side-by-side during this pre-dawn hour is already a fruit of the love that draws us all toward God. We come as we are—sinful, weak, poor, and needy—and yet together we become a community of watchers, united in a single longing.

We come as we are—sinful, weak, poor, and needy—and yet together we become a community of watchers, united in a single longing.

This night watch also deepens my love for God and unveils ever more clearly the beauty of the contemplative life to which we have freely vowed ourselves: to lift the whole world in prayer. Like the watchman who patiently and faithfully awaits the dawn, I learn that Vigil is a time of longing for Christ, our true Sunrise, who comes to pierce every shadow and darkness in our lives and in our world.

St. Bernard insists that true vigilance is not merely staying awake physically, but keeping the heart alert, ever expecting the coming of the Lord even when the body is weary. On many mornings, my heart feels dry and barren, when I experience nothing but tiredness, and I inwardly question why I rise so

early. Yet it is precisely in these dry moments that I discover I come not for warm consolation, but rather out of pure love and trust—trust that the Lord is already present, waiting for me long before I arrive in the church.

My vows renew this trust each day, even when my voice is still heavy with sleep. God meets me not when I am fully alert, fervent, and ready, but exactly as I am: weary and empty, so that I may learn to rest wholly upon Him rather than rely on my own strength. The words of the psalms become my prayer when I cannot find words of my own. As our hearts burn with longing for the Lord, this same longing reaches beyond the walls of our monastery, stretching outward to embrace the whole of humanity.

Keeping Vigils is not only for ourselves; it is a holy mission entrusted to us for the entire Church and for all those who suffer across the world.

My love for this vocation grows deeper and more heartfelt. Keeping Vigil is my way of standing before the Lord on behalf of the world—an offering of my weariness, my dryness, my struggles, and the deep longing of my heart, made permanent through the vows I have professed. I trust that He hears our cry, sees our watch, and blesses all who patiently wait for Him. In this way, Vigils transforms my life. It teaches me to be a watcher, a supplicant, and a lover—one who rises before sunrise so that the world may be held in God's loving presence.

- Sr. Cristiana, Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey, Philippines

be a watcher, a supplicant, and a lover—one who rises before sunrise so that the world may be held in God's loving presence

XII.

Who can comprehend God's invitation to listen in the stillness of the night? Who can understand its purpose? Only the heart that is willing—willing to listen, ready to learn, and open to whatever God wishes her to be.

Each day, before the dawn broke forth, I was summoned to my duties and responsibilities—struggling against the demands of life to meet the everyday needs of the flesh. I never took the time to pause and listen to the interior needs of my soul.

Yet, I was drawn to the stillness of the night. Like a quiet companion, she traveled with me and brought me safely to my destination every day, until the day she revealed her true purpose. Even then, I did not fully understand how relevant and significant that quiet was. Was God preparing me for something greater? Perhaps. Though I did not understand it, I knew for certain that I loved it most.

I was drawn to the stillness of the night. Like a quiet companion, she traveled with me. . .

Its silence was strange; even when interrupted by the noise of passing cars and the voices of people around me, the stillness of the night remained uncommon, possessing a life of its own whose meaning we cannot fully grasp.

Later, my encounter with her inside the monastery deeply moved me. Psalm 42, which speaks of a soul yearning for God, enkindled what was hidden within me. God was inviting me more deeply, and the call was more urgent than I could have ever imagined. Within the monastery walls, that call became personal, real, and concrete, resonating into the very depths of my heart.

When the buzzer for Vigils rang in my ears, it urged me on—reminding me that He was waiting. Yet this time, I was not summoned to struggle through worldly duties, but rather to listen while He spoke. What made the difference was this: God was calling me into intimate union with Him, inviting me to a

much deeper listening that would broaden my perspective and help me understand the needs of the world.

As the Psalms were chanted, the words seeped into me. The human cry for God's help—expressed in sorrow, gratitude, and joy—met God's response of mercy, love, and compassion. Little by little, day after day, its significance penetrated my soul. What could teach me more deeply than this? I was taught to listen, just as St. Benedict urges at the very beginning of the Prologue: "Listen, my son, to the teaching of the Master."

I was invited to listen in the depths of my being. Listening is a difficult 'major' subject in the "School of Love." How can one learn charity or humility without first passing this lesson? We often fail because it demands so much of us, yet when one learns this lesson with simplicity of heart, everything else naturally follows. The challenge is laying down your own ideas to truly listen, and stepping into another's shoes to understand them better. This is what I call deep interior listening concretely. I have often failed at this, especially when unexpected events shake and trouble me. Yet, the rhythm of falling and rising along my journey has taught me a great deal.

Listening is a difficult 'major' subject in the "School of Love."

I have come to realize that listening to one's neighbor is the fundamental ground needed to grow in maturity. As the years pass, Vigils helps me understand the core of my vocation, its significance in the heart of the world, and my responsibility toward my neighbor. Its goal is to teach us fraternal listening so we can build a strong foundation of trust, love, hope, and understanding—a secret path to spiritual maturity. How many communities, friendships, and relationships have been broken simply because of our lack of listening?

The Prologue is clear: we are not invited to speak, to comment, or to insist on our own way, but only to listen to how God speaks to us in the stillness of the night. Vigils is the fundamental tool that helps us immerse ourselves in our true vocation. What are our souls yearning and running for, if not to obey and follow God's ways? And as St. Benedict reminds us, it all begins with one word: Listen.

- Sr. Charlotte, Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey, Philippines

XIII.

Those who can say "Thank you!" to the night will surely be able to say, "Thank you for coming!" to the dawn.

I am grateful to be a Trappist nun, for I believe I have received a special grace—a unique privilege. What is this privilege? It is the grace of being able to thank both the night and the dawn—to wait for and long for the Lord, who grants us this very privilege. Thus, when the morning wake-up bell rings, we can rise without hesitation and hasten to welcome Him.

I believe that our vigils, offered at the break of dawn, most vividly manifest this holy calling. It is a prayer of awakening—a cycle of completely dying, the night, and then rising again into the light of dawn, representing the resurrection.

the time of daybreak should be a sacred, undisturbed interval—a moment we yield to nothing else—

As nuns, we lead a life that allows us to deeply appreciate both the darkness and the light—a life blessed by the night, which frees us from the chaotic glare of so many different lights. Every living being needs the night, and every living thing seeks the light of dawn. For us nuns, in particular, the time of daybreak should be a sacred, undisturbed interval—a moment we yield to nothing else—dedicated entirely to contemplation, where we welcome the Lord as one would welcome a long-awaited lover. This night prayer is a unique privilege—an invitation to prepare for the Lord's Eucharist with the eager anticipation of one who has been summoned. It carries a profound responsibility; we must never be negligent in offering it.

We are invited to offer this Night Prayer every single day of the year—365 days without exception—throughout our entire lives. This is truly a blessing and a grace. I sincerely hope that this beautiful tradition—the Night Prayer (Office of Readings) offered at the break of dawn, which lies at the very heart of our Trappist identity—will endure forever, wherever we nuns may live and for as long as we live.

A Cistercian monastic life without this Night Prayer is simply unimaginable.

For calling us to this monastic vocation—today, tomorrow, and for all time—I offer my thanks to the Lord!

- Sr. Gemma, Our Lady of Sujong Abbey, South Korea

XIV.

Rising before sunrise for our Ashram's Night Vigil at 3:45 a.m. teaches me profound lessons about myself, about God, and my relationship with Him. In the quiet stillness of a sleeping world, stepping away from all noise and distraction reveals my need for discipline, silence, sacrifice, and humility, and reminds me that God must always be my priority. This sacred hour is not merely a routine of prayer, but a transformative journey toward holiness and an expression of my deepest love and trust in Divine Providence. By placing my life, my community, and humanity in the Creator's hands, I learn that my spiritual fruitfulness depends on keeping God at the center of my existence.

Furthermore, this nocturnal prayer teaches me invaluable truths about my neighbour and expands my heart in solidarity with all creation. Prayer is never a purely solitary act; rather, it connects me in fellowship with my brothers and sisters, sleepless angels, and all humanity across every continent who keep watch before a God who never slumbers. Before the dawn breaks, as I join the stars in praising the King of all, I am empowered to stand alongside others—both near and far—and offer the reassuring presence of love while interceding for world peace, the departed, and every living being. This fills my soul with joy and zeal, echoing the ancient Sanskrit mantra fulfilled so super-abundantly in Jesus: "ASATHO MA SAD GAMAYA; THAMASO MA JYOTHIR GAMAYA; MRUTHYOR MA AMRUTHAM GAMAYA" (Lead me from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality).

Asatho ma sad gamaya; Thamaso ma jyothir gamaya; Mruthyor ma amrutham gamaya.

- Fr. Augustine, Kurisumala Ashram, India

Butir Embun di Bibir Subuh:

Misteri Kebangkitan Harian dalam Senyap Fajar

XV.

Ketika kita bangkit dari tempat tidur dalam keheningan sebelum fajar dan mendaraskan, “Ya Tuhan, sudilah membuka bibirku, supaya mulutku mewartakan pujian-Mu,” (Mzm 51:17), kita tidak sekadar memulai sebuah disiplin atau rutinitas harian yang kaku. Seruan dari Mazmur 51 ini adalah pintu masuk menuju misteri transformasi eksistensial, sebuah penyerahan kendali hidup yang radikal kepada Allah sejak detik pertama hari baru. Dalam dimensi relasi dengan Tuhan, kalimat ini menjadi pengakuan bahwa tanpa sentuhan-Nya, kita hanyalah keheningan yang mati; kita mempersembahkan kekosongan diri kita agar dipenuhi oleh gerak Roh Kudus. Sementara dalam relasi dengan diri sendiri, keheningan subuh yang bebas dari kebisingan dunia memaksa ego kita untuk tunduk, memurnikan conversatio morum kita, dan mengingatkan identitas terdalam kita yang paling jujur di hadapan Allah—bukan sebagai pekerja atau pencari prestasi, melainkan sebagai pendoa yang diciptakan murni untuk memuji kemuliaan-Nya.

Misteri bangun pagi ini mencapai kepenuhannya saat kita melangkah ke kapel biara, di mana dimensi relasi dengan sesama mewujud secara mistik. Meskipun kita bangkit dalam kesendirian asketis yang sunyi, ketika bibir kita mulai melantunkan pujian bersama, kata "mulutku" yang tunggal melebur menjadi "mulut kita" sebagai satu tubuh komunitas. Di sinilah rutinitas monastik kita memeluk seluruh umat manusia: di saat dunia masih tertidur lelap, bibir dan suara kita mewakili jeritan, kecemasan, harapan, serta syukur dari jiwa-jiwa yang mungkin lupa atau tidak tahu bagaimana cara memuji Penciptanya. Oleh karena itu, janganlah biarkan fajar yang kita sambut setiap hari menjadi sekadar kebiasaan mekanis yang menjemukan, melainkan sebuah partisipasi nyata dalam misteri Paskah—sebuah kebangkitan harian dari kegelapan malam menuju terang Kristus, yang menjadikan

komunitas-komunitas kita sebagai mercusuar doa yang terus menyala demi keselamatan dunia.

Dewdrop on the Lips of Dawn:

The Mystery of Daily Resurrection in the Silence of Daybreak

When we rise from our beds in the silence before dawn and recite, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise" (Ps 51:15), we are not merely beginning a rigid daily discipline or routine. This cry from Psalm 51 is the gateway to a mystery of existential transformation, a radical surrender of life's control to God from the very first second of a new day. In our relationship with God, this phrase acknowledges that without His touch, we are nothing but dead silence; we offer our emptiness to be filled by the movement of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, in our relationship with ourselves, the dawn silence—free from the world's noise—forces our ego to submit, purifying our conversatio morum, and reminding us of our deepest, most honest identity before God: not as workers or achievers, but as prayers created purely to praise His glory.

the gateway to a mystery of existential transformation,

a radical surrender of life's control to God . . .

The mystery of this morning waking reaches its fullness as we step into the monastery chapel, where our relationship with neighbors manifests mystically. Although we rise in solitary, quiet asceticism, the moment our lips begin to chant praises together, the singular "my mouth" dissolves into "our mouth" as the single body of a community. Here, our monastic routine embraces all of humanity: while the world is still fast asleep, our lips and voices represent the cries, anxieties, hopes, and gratitude of souls who may have forgotten or do not know how to praise their Creator. Therefore, let us never allow the dawn we welcome each day to become a mere mechanical, tedious habit, but rather a real participation in the Paschal mystery—a daily resurrection from the darkness of night into the light of Christ, which transforms our communities into burning beacons of prayer for the salvation of the world.

- Rm. Gabriel, Our Lady of Lamanabi, Indonesia

XVI.

Saya bahagia dengan adanya Colloquium bagi Ordo, khususnya untuk regio Oriens, yang saya diperkayakan oleh isi tulisan-tulisannya, juga tema-temanya aktual, tentang hidup kita.

Ketika menerima undangan untuk berpartisipasi membuat saya merasa kecil, namun saya akan mencobanya melalui kekecilan pengalaman hidup monastik saya.

Bukankah kita masing-masing sungguh menantikan Fajar Abadi dengan semangat berjaga dan berdoa untuk sungguh hanya merindukan Dia – Allah dan Bapa Tuhan kita Yesus Kristus.

Betapa kita sebagai rahib/rubiah OCSO tak putus-putusnya bersyukur untuk suatu kekhasan panggilan kita, berjaga di malam hari sebelum matahari terbit.

Beberapa hal yang saya ingin berbagi rasa syukur saya yang mendasari berjaga di malam hari:

1. Menemukan kedalaman misteri Paskah, di mana saya dikasihi dan diselamatkan secara cuma-cuma (Mazmur 102(103):2-4) “Pujilah TUHAN, hai jiwaku! Pujilah nama-Nya yang kudus, hai segenap batinku! Pujilah TUHAN, hai jiwaku, dan janganlah lupakan segala kebaikan-Nya! Dia yang mengampuni segala kesalahanmu, yang menyembuhkan segala penyakitmu, Dia yang menebus hidupmu dari lobang kubur, yang memahkotai engkau dengan kasih setia dan rahmat”

Mzm 102:2-4

Inilah salah satu mazmur favoritku, yang terus memberi semangat untuk berusaha bangun untuk memuji Tuhan dan berdoa bagi orang lain.

2. Seruan untuk terus diselamatkan, karena masih mengenakan tubuh yang telah dilukai dosa dengan akibat-akibatnya yang masih hidup, dalam permohonan seperti pemazmur ini :

Mzm 85:2

“Peliharalah aku, karena aku mengasihi Engkau,

selamatkanlah hamba-Mu yang percaya kepada-Mu".

3. Mengalami betapa besar mujizat-mujizat harian yang kualami setiap hari, diberi hidup dan bersyukur masih bisa beraktivitas dalam hidup regulir, namun masih terus perlu direstorasi, seperti seruan pemazmur: "Ya Tuhan, Allah semesta alam, pulihkan kami, tunjukkanlah seri wajah-Mu, maka selamatkanlah kami."

Mzm 79:4

4. Semua pengalaman ini saya dapatkan melalui kesetiaan para pendiri dan juga di komunitas lain yang saya pernah berkunjung yang setia hadir dalam ibadat, sungguh memberi daya untuk terus belajar setia. Di samping itu belajar pula mulai dari yang muda dan setiap saudari dengan segala perjuangannya sebagai bagian dari Tubuh Kristus, juga dari para tamu yang sungguh perlu didoakan dan dibawa dalam hidup pertobatan untuk dipersembahkan kepada Dia, yang, "Dalam hidup-Nya sebagai manusia, Ia telah mempersembahkan doa dan permohonan dengan ratap tangis dan keluhan kepada Dia, yang sanggup menyelamatkan-Nya dari maut". (Ibr. 5:7) .

Marilah kita membangunkan dunia

5. Merasakan kedekatan sebagai keluarga Cisterciensis kita, bukan hanya dalam kesempatan perjumpaan, yang dipisahkan oleh jarak namun merasa dekat ketika menyanyikan "TE DEUM", karena hanya dibedakan oleh waktu. Pengalaman ini membawa sukacita menjadi bagian anggota Ordo.

Dan jangan lupa bahagia sebagai Cistercian.

Betapa indahnya panggilan hidup Cisterciensis kita. Kita dipanggil untuk memuji Tuhan bersama para malaikat, para martir, para kudus dalam kemuliaan abadi yang pantas kita rindukan.

Marilah kita membangunkan dunia dengan lagu pujian, doa dan pertobatan, persembahan hidup harian kita yang biasa, supaya semakin banyak orang diselamatkan dalam perlindungan Bunda Maria. Dan jangan lupa bahagia sebagai Cistercian. Yesus telah mengalahkan kematian. Dialah Jalan, Kebenaran, dan Hidup.

I am so happy for the gift of Colloquium for the Order and especially for the Oriens Region. I have been enriched by its writings. The themes, which are about our life, are contextual. When I received the invitation to share my experience, I feel small, but I will try to say something through the littleness of my monastic experience.

Shouldn't each of us look forward to welcoming the Eternal Dawn eagerly? Shouldn't we live only to desire Him—our God and Father, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—with the spirit of vigilance and prayerfulness?

As Cistercian monks and nuns, we should continuously be in awe of our special vocation of praying at night before sunrise. There are several reasons for my gratitude toward the practice of vigils that I would like to share.

1. One of my favourite Psalms that gives me energy to wake up at night to praise our Lord and pray for others is Psalm 102: 2-4. It says, "Bless the Lord, my soul, and do not forget all his kindness; He forgives all your sins and heals all your sickness; He redeems your life from destruction and crowns you with love and compassion". In this Psalm I find the depth of the Paschal mystery that helps me realize how much I am loved and gratuitously saved.

Ps 102:2-4

2. I need to be continuously saved because I am still living in the flesh that has been wounded by sin and its consequences. I find my need expressed in the cry of the psalmist, "Preserve my life, for I am faithful; save your servant who trusts in you."

Ps 85:2

3. I experience that daily life is full of daily miracles. I am given the gift of life and the gift of activities within the regular life of monastic life, and through them, I am restored. The psalmist expresses this through the prayer, "Restore us, O God of hosts; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved."

Ps 79:4

4. The faithful witness of our foundress sisters, either in Gedono or other communities that I have visited, in attending the vigils, gives me courage and spirit to be

faithful, too. Besides, I also learn from the newcomers, the juniors, and each of our sisters as part of the Body of Christ, and our guests who really have heavy burdens in their lives. They really need our prayer and conversion and our sacrifice, as Christ, in the days of his mortal life, offered his sacrifice with tears and cries. He prayed to him who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his humble submission (Hebrews 5:7).

Let us wake up the world ...

5. When I sing the "*Te Deum*" in the vigils, I do really feel close to my brothers and sisters of our Cistercian family, especially in our region. This 'spiritual encounter' is much closer than the physical encounter. Although distance separates us, we are one in the "Te Deum". This experience of belonging to the Order fills my heart with gratitude and joy.

How wonderful our Cistercian vocation is! We are called to praise the Lord, together with all the angels, martyrs and saints. This is worth desiring.

Let us wake up the world through our prayer and conversion, our self-offering in our daily life, and under the protection of Our Lady. And do not forget to be happy as a Cistercian. Jesus has conquered death. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

And do not forget to be happy as a Cistercian.

-Sr. Magda, Bunda Pemersatu Gedono, Indonesia

"ERO CRAS": The O Antiphons *and* the Vigils Awaiting the Dawn

SR. FRANCESCA ZELIOLI, OCSO

"Adventus is the Latin word that could be translated as 'arrival,' 'coming,' 'presence.' In the language of the ancient world, it was a technical term indicating the arrival of an official—in particular, the visit of kings or emperors to the provinces—but it could also be used for the appearance of a deity [...]

By adopting this term Advent, Christians intended to express the special relationship that united them to Christ crucified and risen. He is the King, who [...] has granted us the gift of his visit and [...] has nevertheless chosen to remain with us: we perceive this mysterious presence of his in the liturgical assembly.

[...] Advent therefore means **remembering the Lord's first coming in the flesh, while already looking ahead to his definitive return, and, at the same time, recognizing that Christ, present among us, becomes our traveling companion in the life of the Church that celebrates his mystery**.

[Advent] should prepare us to welcome him when 'he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end' [...] In this perspective, Advent becomes for all Christians a time of waiting and hope, a privileged time of listening and reflection, provided we allow ourselves to be guided by the liturgy that invites us to go out to meet the Lord who is coming."

(Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers of the First Sunday of Advent, 2009)

Abstract

Advent already carries a movement within its very name: *someone is coming*. And where someone is coming, someone else must be there waiting for him. The watchman on the walls, the servants with their belts fastened and their lamps lit, the virgins who brought a supply of oil, the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night. These and other images recur throughout the Bible and express various facets of a single fundamental attitude that characterizes the depths of every human heart: vigilance in waiting.

This article interweaves two realities to which the liturgical life of the Advent season calls us: the waiting marked in particular by the seven antiphons we sing at Vespers during the

«ERO CRAS»: Le Antifone O e la Veglia che Attende l'Aurora

SR. FRANCESCA ZELIOLI, OCSO

*«**Adventus** è la parola latina, che potrebbe tradursi con 'arrivo', 'venuta', 'presenza'. Nel linguaggio del mondo antico era un termine tecnico che indicava l'arrivo di un funzionario, in particolare la visita di re o di imperatori nelle province, ma poteva anche essere utilizzato per l'apparire di una divinità [...]*

Adottando questo termine Avvento, i cristiani intesero esprimere la speciale relazione che li univa a Cristo crocifisso e risorto. Egli è il Re, che [...] ci ha fatto dono della sua visita e [...] ha voluto comunque rimanere con noi: percepiamo questa sua misteriosa presenza nell'assemblea liturgica.

[...] Avvento significa dunque **far memoria della prima venuta del Signore nella carne, pensando già al suo definitivo ritorno e, al tempo stesso, significa riconoscere che Cristo presente tra noi si fa nostro compagno di viaggio nella vita della Chiesa che ne celebra il mistero.**

[L'Avvento] dovrebbe prepararci ad accoglierlo quando "di nuovo verrà nella gloria per giudicare i vivi e i morti, e il suo regno non avrà mai fine" [...] In questa prospettiva l'Avvento diviene per tutti i cristiani un tempo di attesa e di speranza, un tempo privilegiato di ascolto e di riflessione, purché ci si lasci guidare dalla liturgia che invita ad andare incontro al Signore che viene»

(Benedetto XVI, Omelia ai Primi Vespri della I domenica di Avvento, 2009)

Abstract

L'Avvento porta già nel suo nome un movimento: *qualcuno viene*. E dove qualcuno viene, qualcun altro deve esserci ad attenderlo. La sentinella sulle mura, i servi con la cintura ai fianchi e la lampada accesa, le vergini che si sono provviste d'olio, i pastori che di notte fanno la guardia al loro gregge. Queste e altre immagini ricorrono in tutta la Bibbia ed esprimono varie sfaccettature di un unico fondamentale atteggiamento che caratterizza al fondo il cuore di ogni uomo: la vigilanza nell'attesa.

Questo articolo intreccia due realtà a cui la vita liturgica del tempo di Avvento richiama: l'attesa scandita in particolare dalle sette antifone che cantiamo ai Vespri della Novena di Natale e la preghiera notturna delle Vigilie. Vorremmo mostrare che le Antifone O non sono soltanto antiche e belle, ma sono, nel senso più proprio, un canto di veglia: il grido di chi, quando il giorno

Christmas Novena, and the nocturnal prayer of Vigils. We wish to show that the O Antiphons are not merely ancient and beautiful, but are, in the truest sense, a vigil song: the cry of one who, when the day declines, does not resign himself to the night, but calls out to Him who is to come.

Keeping Watch: A Night That Belongs to God

In Latin, *vigilia* indicates first and foremost a night watch. The Romans divided the night into four "watches," and these are the very ones Jesus recalls when he invites us to keep watch because we do not know whether the master will return in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the morning (Mk 13:35). Christians adopted the word to designate the night of prayer preceding major feasts, and for Saint Augustine the Easter Vigil was mater omnium sanctarum vigiliarum, the mother of all holy vigils. In everyday language, "vigil" (or "eve") eventually came to mean simply the day before a feast, and Christmas Eve the evening of December 24; yet behind this usage lies a precise liturgical idea, already belonging to the Jewish tradition: the feast begins the previous evening, with First Vespers, because the Church does not wait for dawn to welcome what is about to come, but already awaits it in the night.

The vigil of monks and nuns is the response, on behalf of all, to the question the prophet hears rising from the night: "Watchman, what of the night?" (Is 21:11). The watchman does not answer with his own weariness, but with a promise: "Morning comes. . ." (Is 21:12)

Scripture knows a night that belongs in a special way to the Lord: the night of liberation from Egypt, of which the Book of Exodus says that it was "a night of vigil for the Lord" (Ex 12:42). This detail is precious: before we keep watch, it is God who keeps watch. Our vigil invents nothing, but participates in his.

Saint Benedict made this intuition a way of life. The Prologue of the Rule rouses us with the words of the Apostle: "it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep" (Rom 13:11; RB Prol. 8), the very verse the liturgy has us hear at the beginning of Advent. For the night office, the Rule prescribes that during the winter season—which for Benedict runs from November 1 to Easter, and therefore encompasses all of Advent—one rises at the eighth hour of the night, so as to rest a little longer after midnight (RB 8). He justifies this with the words of the psalmist: "at midnight I rise to give you praise" (Ps 118:62; RB 16). And he adds the phrase that for centuries has set the rhythm of the monastic day: let nothing be preferred to the Work of God (RB 43:3).

Thus, even today, we nuns rise at night. In the darkness and silence we pray, we sing, we listen to Sacred Scripture, and we remain in silence, with no one listening to us except the Lord and the angels. We do not do this only for ourselves. While many sleep, others struggle, suffer, or keep watch against their will beside a sick person or on a bed of pain; and all, whether they know it or not, await light, salvation, love, and fullness of life. The vigil of monks and nuns is the response, on behalf of all, to the question the prophet hears rising from the night: "Watchman, how much of the night is left?" (Is 21:11). The watchman does not answer with his own weariness, but with a promise: "Morning is coming" (Is 21:12). And the psalm the Church entrusts to those who keep watch has precisely this horizon: "Bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord" (Ps 133:1).

Moreover, the silence of the night is not an emptiness. The Book of Wisdom, in a verse that returns in the liturgy of the Christmas season, sings that while peaceful silence enveloped all things and night in its swift course was half spent, the all-powerful Word leaped down from heaven, from the royal throne (Wis 18:14–15). The Incarnation took place in this way: in the dead of night, without clamor. Those who keep watch have learned that it is right there, in silence, that one can hear Someone approaching.

declina, non si rassegna alla notte e chiama Colui che deve venire.

Vegliare: una notte che appartiene a Dio

In latino *vigilia* indica anzitutto il turno di guardia. I Romani dividevano la notte in quattro «veglie», e sono le stesse che Gesù ricorda quando invita a vegliare perché non si sa se il padrone tornerà alla sera, a mezzanotte, al canto del gallo o al mattino (Mc 13,35). I cristiani presero la parola per indicare la notte di preghiera che precede le grandi feste, e per sant'Agostino la Veglia pasquale era *mater omnium sanctarum vigiliarum*, la madre di tutte le sante veglie. Nel linguaggio di ogni giorno la «vigilia» è poi diventata semplicemente il giorno prima della festività, e la vigilia di Natale la sera del 24 dicembre; ma dietro questo uso c'è un'idea liturgica precisa, appartenente già alla tradizione ebraica: la festa comincia la sera precedente, con i Primi Vespri, perché la Chiesa non aspetta l'alba per accogliere ciò che sta per venire, ma lo attende già nella notte.

La Scrittura conosce una notte che appartiene in modo speciale al Signore: la notte della liberazione dall'Egitto, di cui il libro dell'Esodo dice che fu «notte di veglia per il Signore» (Es 12,42). Il particolare è prezioso: prima che noi vegliamo, è Dio a vegliare. La nostra veglia non inventa nulla, ma partecipa alla sua.

San Benedetto ha fatto di questa intuizione una forma di vita. Il Prologo della Regola ci scuote con le parole dell'Apostolo: «è ormai tempo di svegliarci dal sonno» (Rm 13,11; RB Prol. 8), lo stesso versetto che la liturgia ci fa ascoltare all'inizio dell'Avvento. Per l'ufficio notturno la Regola dispone che nella stagione invernale – che per Benedetto va dal 1° novembre a Pasqua, e comprende dunque tutto l'Avvento – ci si alzi all'ottava ora della notte, in modo da riposare ancora un poco dopo la mezzanotte (RB 8). Lo giustifica con le parole del salmista: «a mezzanotte mi alzo per renderti lode» (Sal 118,62; RB 16). E aggiunge la frase che per secoli ha scandito la giornata monastica: nulla sia anteposto all'Opera di Dio (RB 43,3).

Così, ancora oggi, noi monache ci alziamo di notte. Nel buio e nel silenzio preghiamo, cantiamo, ascoltiamo la Sacra Scrittura e restiamo in silenzio, senza nessuno ad ascoltarci se non il Signore e gli angeli. Non lo facciamo soltanto per noi. Mentre molti dormono, altri lottano, soffrono, vegliano loro malgrado accanto a un malato o su un letto di dolore; e tutti, lo sappiano o no, attendono la luce, la salvezza, l'amore, la vita piena. La veglia dei monaci è la risposta, a nome di tutti, alla domanda che il profeta sente salire dalla notte: «Sentinella, quanto resta della notte?» (Is 21,11). La sentinella non risponde con la propria stanchezza, ma con una promessa: «Viene il mattino» (Is 21,12). E il salmo che la Chiesa affida a chi veglia ha esattamente questo orizzonte: «benedite il Signore, voi che state nella casa del Signore durante le notti» (Sal 133,1).

La veglia dei monaci è la risposta, a nome di tutti, alla domanda che il profeta sente salire dalla notte: «Sentinella, quanto resta della notte?» (Is 21,11). La sentinella non risponde con la propria stanchezza, ma con una promessa: «Viene il mattino» (Is 21,12).

Il silenzio della notte, poi, non è un vuoto. Il libro della Sapienza, in un versetto che torna nella liturgia del tempo di Natale, canta che mentre un silenzio profondo avvolgeva ogni cosa e la notte era a metà del suo corso, la Parola onnipotente scese dal cielo, dal trono regale (Sap 18,14-15). L'Incarnazione è avvenuta così: nel cuore della notte, senza clamore. Chi veglia ha imparato che è proprio lì, nel silenzio, che si può sentire arrivare Qualcuno.

Le parole della veglia: la Scrittura che attende

Tutta la Sacra Scrittura è punteggiata di figure che attendono e da richiami alla veglia. C'è il grido a mezzanotte delle dieci vergini: «Ecco lo sposo, andategli incontro!» (Mt 25,6), con l'olio che non si può prestare perché l'attesa è cosa di ciascuno, e del cuore intero. C'è la beatitudine dei

The Words of the Vigil: Scripture That Waits

All of Sacred Scripture is punctuated by figures who wait and by calls to vigilance. There is the midnight cry of the ten virgins: "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" (Mt 25:6), with oil that cannot be lent because waiting is a matter for each person individually, and with one's whole heart. There is the beatitude of the servants whom the master, upon returning, finds still awake, and whom—to our surprise—he seats at table and serves himself (Lk 12:35–38). There is Jesus' appeal not to let ourselves be found asleep (Mk 13:33–37): in each of the three liturgical cycles, the Gospel of the First Sunday of Advent is, in different forms, an invitation to keep watch. There is the bride of the Song of Songs, who sleeps while her heart keeps vigil, and hears the voice of her beloved knocking (Song 5:2). There is the psalmist who waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the dawn (Ps 130:6). And there is the prophet Habakkuk, who takes his stand as a watchman on the rampart to see what the Lord will say to him (Hab 2:1) and receives this reply: the vision still has its time; if it delays, wait for it, for it will surely come and will not delay (Hab 2:3). Let us remember this last word: we will find it again in the antiphons.

The O Antiphons: The Song of Eventide

During the days of the Christmas Novena—from December 17 to 23—the liturgy has us sing seven very ancient antiphons, called the Great Antiphons or "O" Antiphons because each of them begins with an invocation—"O"—addressed to the Lord Jesus.

Today the Missal has inserted the texts of these antiphons as the Gospel Acclamation on the days of the Christmas Novena, but the original place for which they were composed is as the antiphon to the *Magnificat* at Vespers, where the Gregorian liturgy still places them. This setting is not insignificant. Vespers is the hour when daylight wanes and the lamp is lit: the evening hour, when the creature feels its longing most acutely. At the center of Vespers stands the canticle of Mary, the Magnificat: the woman who waited more than any other, and who already bears within herself the One who is coming. The antiphon frames this canticle and colors it with desire. For seven consecutive evenings, while the longest night of the year[1] descends outside, the invocation grows: "Come!"

Their origins are ancient. The earliest certain attestations date back to the Carolingian era (8th–9th centuries), and tradition links them to the work of Gregory the Great († 604): they are already attested in the *Liber responsorialis sive antiphonarius* as antiphons to the Gospel canticle of the Magnificat for Vespers on the seven days preceding Christmas (PL 78, 740 or 732D–733A). These Gregorian antiphons are true masterpieces, capable of accompanying and nourishing our prayer and our desire in awaiting Christmas. Taken individually, they are brief prayers steeped in Sacred Scripture and faith; considered as a whole, they reveal a textual and melodic structure of great subtlety: they are seven invocations we address to the Lord, yet taken together they already conceal His answer.

Every antiphon has the exact same structure:

- the Lord Jesus is invoked with a specific messianic title;
- an explanation of that title is given;
- a petition is formulated.

The pivotal point, the central hinge on which this structure turns, is always the word "*VENI*" (Come!), which the Gregorian melody highlights by isolating it, expressing with two simple, heartfelt notes the full force of our desire and need for Jesus. It is the watchman's cry: not a request to know how much of the night remains, but the invocation of one who knows Someone must arrive and does not want him to delay.

For seven days we will call upon the Lord, singing:

O **S***apientia … Veni …*

O **A***donai … Veni …*

O **R***adix … Veni …*

O **C***lavis David … Veni …*

O **O***riens … Veni …*

O **R***ex gentium … Veni …*

O **E***mmanuel … Veni …*

[1] *It is worth keeping in mind that whoever composed these antiphons undoubtedly lived in the Northern Hemisphere and probably in Europe, where the days of the Christmas novena are those with the fewest hours of daylight in the entire year. Since the author lives in Europe, they experience the coincidence of this astronomical phenomenon with the texts of the antiphons—something that, naturally, cannot be experienced in the same way by those living in the Southern Hemisphere.*

servi che il padrone, tornando, trova ancora svegli, e che – sorpresa – fa mettere a tavola e serve lui stesso (Lc 12,35-38). C'è l'appello di Gesù a non lasciarsi trovare addormentati (Mc 13,33-37): in ciascuno dei tre cicli liturgici il Vangelo della prima domenica d'Avvento è, in forme diverse, un invito a vegliare. C'è la sposa del Cantico, che dorme mentre il suo cuore veglia, e sente la voce dell'amato che bussa (Ct 5,2). C'è il salmista che attende il Signore più di quanto le sentinelle attendano l'aurora (Sal 130,6). E c'è il profeta Abacuc, che si mette di sentinella sulla fortezza per vedere che cosa gli dirà il Signore (Ab 2,1) e riceve questa risposta: la visione attende il suo tempo; se tarda, attendila, perché verrà senza ritardo (Ab 2,3). Ricordiamoci di quest'ultima parola: la ritroveremo nelle antifone.

Le Antifone O: il canto del crepuscolo

Nei giorni della Novena di Natale – dal 17 al 23 dicembre – la liturgia ci fa cantare sette antifone molto antiche, dette *antifone maggiori* o *antifone «O»* per il fatto che ciascuna di esse inizia con un'invocazione – «O» – rivolta al Signore Gesù.

Oggi il Messale ha inserito i testi di queste antifone come canto al Vangelo nei giorni della Novena di Natale, ma il luogo originario per cui furono composte è l'antifona al Magnificat dei Vespri e qui ancora le prevede la liturgia gregoriana. Questa collocazione non è indifferente. I Vespri sono l'ora in cui il giorno declina e si accende la lampada: l'ora della sera, in cui la creatura avverte più acutamente la propria attesa. Al centro dei Vespri sta il cantico di Maria, il Magnificat: la donna che più di ogni altra ha atteso, e che già porta in sé Colui che viene. L'antifona incornicia questo cantico e lo colora di desiderio. Per sette sere consecutive, mentre fuori scende la notte più lunga dell'anno[1], l'invocazione cresce: "Vieni!".

Le loro origini sono antiche. Le prime attestazioni sicure risalgono all'epoca carolingia (VIII-IX secolo), e la tradizione le ricollega all'opera di Gregorio Magno († 604): sono attestate già nel *Liber responsorialis sive antiphonarius* come antifone al cantico evangelico del Magnificat per i vespri dei sette giorni precedenti il Natale (PL 78, 740 o 732D-733A). Queste antifone gregoriane sono dei veri e propri capolavori, capaci di accompagnare e nutrire la nostra preghiera e il nostro desiderio nell'attesa del Natale. Se prese singolarmente sono brevi preghiere intrise di Sacra Scrittura e di fede, considerate nel loro insieme rivelano una struttura, testuale e melodica, di grande finezza: sono sette invocazioni che noi rivolgiamo al Signore, ma nell'insieme nascondono già la Sua risposta.

Ogni antifona ha la medesima struttura:

- si invoca il Signore Gesù con un particolare titolo messianico;
- si dà una spiegazione di quel titolo;
- si formula una domanda.

Il punto cardine, il perno centrale su cui ruota questa struttura, è sempre la parola «VENI» (Vieni!), che la melodia gregoriana sottolinea isolandola, esprimendo con due semplici note accorate tutta la forza del nostro desiderio e bisogno di Gesù. È il grido della sentinella: non la richiesta di sapere quanto resta della notte, ma l'invocazione di chi sa che Qualcuno deve arrivare e non vuole che tardi.

Per sette giorni noi chiameremo il Signore cantando:

O **S***apientia ... Veni ...*

O **A***donai ... Veni ...*

O **R***adix ... Veni ...*

O **C***lavis David ... Veni ...*

O **O***riens ... Veni ...*

O **R***ex gentium ... Veni ...*

O **E***mmanuel ... Veni ...*

[1] *Occorre tenere presente che chi ha composto queste antifone viveva senza dubbio nell'emisfero boreale e probabilmente in Europa dove i giorni della novena di Natale sono quelli con meno ore di sole di tutto l'anno. Chi scrive, dal momento che vive in Europa, sperimenta la coincidenza di questo fenomeno astronomico con i testi delle antifone, cosa che naturalmente non può sperimentare allo stesso modo chi vive nell'emisfero australe.*

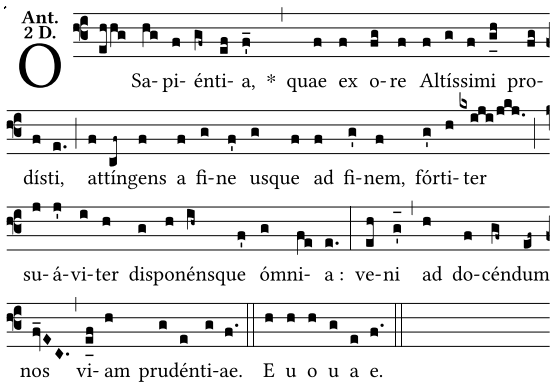


December 17: O Sapientia

O SAPIENTIA, quae ex ore Altissimi prodiisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

O Wisdom, who came forth from the mouth of the Most High (Sir 24:5), reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly (Wis 8:1): come to teach us the way of prudence (Prov 9:6).

O Sapienza, che uscisti dalla bocca dell'Altissimo (Sir 24,5), ti estendi da un estremo all'altro e tutto disponi con forza e dolcezza (Sap 8,1): vieni a insegnarci la via della saggezza (Pr 9,6).



The first title is Wisdom, the creative Word that came forth from the mouth of God: the Word that, according to the Book of Wisdom, leaped down from heaven in the silence of the night (Wis 18:14–15), and that in our Vigils we learn to listen to. "Mightily and sweetly," fortiter suaviterque, is also the style of the vigil: without clamor, yet without yielding. And the first petition entrusted to our song is significant: we do not ask first of all to be saved, but to be taught. Those who keep watch must first place themselves in a posture of listening, like a disciple who must learn to recognize the hour and the right path.

Il primo appellativo è Sapienza, la Parola creatrice uscita dalla bocca di Dio: quella che, secondo il libro della Sapienza, scese dal cielo nel silenzio della notte (Sap 18,14-15), e che nelle nostre Vigilie impariamo ad ascoltare. «Con forza e dolcezza», fortiter suaviterque, è anche lo stile della veglia: senza clamore, ma senza cedimenti. E la prima domanda che viene affidata al nostro canto è significativa: non chiediamo anzitutto di essere salvati, ma di essere istruiti. Chi veglia deve anzitutto mettersi in ascolto come discepolo che deve imparare a riconoscere l'ora e la strada buona.

Image: Wisdom, in Stammheim Missal, ca. 1170, tempera colors, gold, silver, and ink on parchment, 28.2 × 18.9 cm, Ms. 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 11, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, getty.edu.

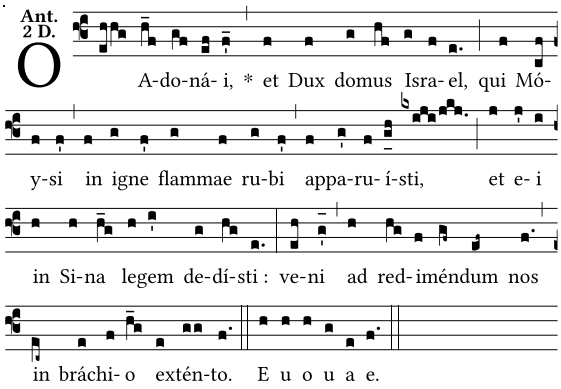


December 18: O Adonai

O ADONAI, dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et in Sina legem dedisti: veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extenso.

O Lord "Adonai", (Ex 6:2 Vulgate), leader of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush (Ex 3:2) and gave him the law on Mount Sinai (Ex 20): come to redeem us with an outstretched arm (Ex 15:12–13).

O Signore «Adonai», (Es 6,2 Vulgata), guida della casa d'Israele, che sei apparso a Mosè nel fuoco di fiamma del roveto (Es 3,2) e sul monte Sinai gli hai dato la legge (Es 20): vieni a redimerci con braccio potente (Es 15,12-13).



The second invocation takes us into the desert where the Lord made himself known to Moses in the bush that burned without being consumed, and then made himself known as guide and liberator for the people of Israel in the Exodus. And the Exodus is a nocturnal event: the night of Passover in Egypt, the "night of vigil for the Lord" (Ex 12:42), the pillar of fire that guides the people by night (Ex 13:21). Before we keep watch, it is the Lord who keeps watch: it is He who guides in the darkness and stretches out his arm, fights on our behalf, and protects us. To Him we ask to do for us today what He did then: to redeem, to pay the ransom for our liberation.

La seconda invocazione ci porta nel deserto dove il Signore si è fatto conoscere da Mosè nel roveto che bruciava senza consumarsi, e poi si è fatto conoscere come guida e liberatore per il popolo di Israele nell'Esodo. E l'Esodo è un evento notturno: la notte di Pasqua in Egitto, la «notte di veglia per il Signore» (Es 12,42), la colonna di fuoco che di notte guida il popolo (Es 13,21). Prima che noi vegliamo, è il Signore a vegliare: è Lui che nel buio guida e stende il braccio, combatte in nostro favore e ci protegge. A Lui chiediamo di fare per noi, oggi, ciò che fece allora: redimere, pagare il riscatto per la nostra liberazione.

Image: The Nativity, in Stammheim Missal, ca. 1170, tempera colors, gold, silver, and ink on parchment, 28.2 × 18.9 cm, Ms. 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 92, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, getty.edu.

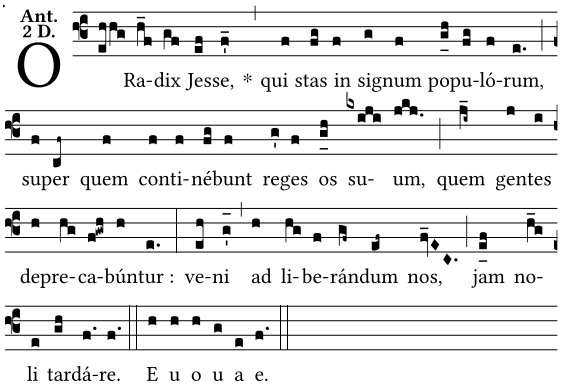


December 19: O Radix Jesse

O RADIX Iesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur: veni ad liberandum nos, iam noli tardare.

O Root of Jesse, who stand as a sign for the peoples (Is 11:10), before whom kings shall shut their mouths (Is 52:15) and whom the nations shall beseech: come to deliver us, delay no longer (Hab 2:3).

O Germoglio di Iesse, che ti innalzi come segno per i popoli (Is 11, 10), tacciono davanti a te i re della terra (Is 52,15) e le nazioni ti invocano: vieni a liberarci, non tardare (Ab 2,3).

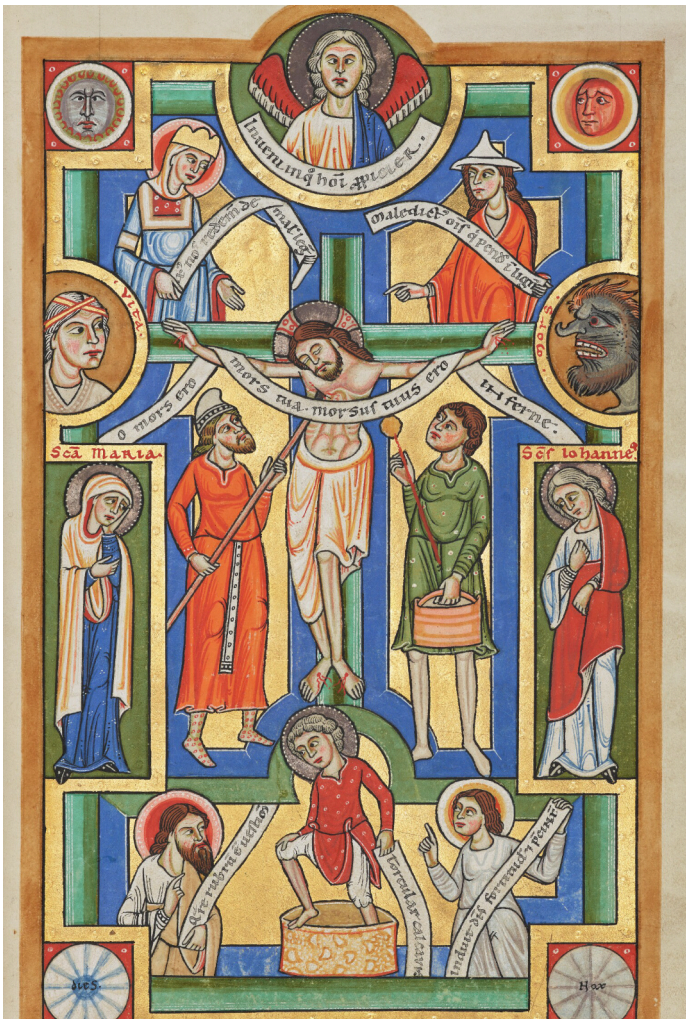


The third antiphon is the one that openly voices what every vigil feels: do not delay. And the prophet from whom this expression comes is the very same Habakkuk who stationed himself as a watchman: his answer ("if it delays, wait for it") is already embedded within the antiphon. The title root refers to generation; it is what remains hidden underground in winter: nothing is visible, yet life is at work. Those who keep watch know this because they live it: the hidden fidelity of one night after another, in which seemingly nothing happens, is a root that digs deep and draws from the soil the nourishment that allows the entire plant to live and bear fruit.

La terza antifona è quella che dice apertamente ciò che ogni veglia avverte: non tardare. E il profeta da cui viene l'espressione è lo stesso Abacuc che si era messo di sentinella: la sua risposta («se tarda, attendila») è già dentro l'antifona. L'appellativo radice fa riferimento alla generazione, è ciò che d'inverno resta nascosto sotto terra: nulla si vede, eppure la vita lavora. Chi veglia lo sa, perché lo vive: la fedeltà nascosta di una notte dopo l'altra in cui apparentemente nulla accade, è una radice che scava in profondità e trae dal terreno il nutrimento che permette a tutta la pianta di vivere e dare frutto.

Image: Initial F: The Tree of Jesse, in Stammheim Missal, ca. 1170, tempera colors, gold, silver, and ink on parchment, 28.2 × 18.9 cm, Ms. 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 145v, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, getty.edu.

Image: (facing page) The Crucifixion, ca. 1170, tempera colors, gold leaf, silver leaf, and ink on parchment, 28.2 × 18.9 cm, Ms. 64, fol. 12 (97.MG.21), J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, getty.edu

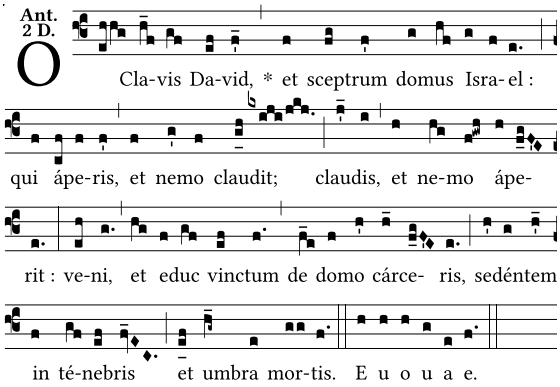


December 20: O Clavis David

O CLAVIS David et sceptrum domus Israel, qui aperis, et nemo claudit; claudis, et nemo aperit: veni et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O Key of David (Is 22:22) and scepter of the house of Israel (Gen 49:10), who open and no one shuts (Rev 3:7); who shut and no one opens: come and bring the captive out of the prison house, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death (Ps 106:10, 14).

O Chiave di Davide (Is 22,22) e scettro della casa d'Israele (Gn 49,10), che apri e nessuno chiude (Ap 3,7); chiudi e nessuno apre: vieni e strappa dal carcere l'uomo prigioniero, che giace nelle tenebre e nell'ombra di morte (Sal 106, 10.14).



The captive is the human being of every age: whoever is locked in a cell, in an illness, in grief, in fear. It is here that the vigil reveals its face of intercession. While the world sleeps, someone prays for those who are in chains. The title "Key of David" refers to the prophecy of Isaiah: "I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his ancestral house" (Is 22:22–23). According to the Church Fathers, this passage contains a prophecy of the cross. Keys in antiquity were large and often carried slung over the shoulder, just as the crossbeam of the cross was carried by Jesus. Moreover, possessing the key to the king's house was equivalent to holding the office of steward of the kingdom—it was a sign of great power. Even in the image of the peg driven into a solid place, some see a prefiguration of the cross that will open heaven to sinners.

✣

Il prigioniero è l'uomo di ogni tempo: chi è chiuso in una cella, in una malattia, in un lutto, in una paura. È qui che la veglia mostra il suo volto di intercessione. Mentre il mondo dorme, qualcuno prega per chi è incatenato. L'appellativo "Chiave di Davide" fa riferimento alla profezia di Isaia "Gli porrò sulla spalla la chiave della casa di Davide: se egli apre, nessuno chiuderà; se egli chiude, nessuno potrà aprire. Lo conficcherò come un piolo in luogo solido e sarà un trono di gloria per la casa di suo padre" (Is 22,22-23). Secondo i Padri questo passo racchiude in sé una profezia della croce. Le chiavi anticamente erano grandi e spesso portate a tracolla, così come il palo trasversale della croce fu portato da Gesù. Inoltre possedere la chiave della casa del re equivale ad avere il compito di amministratore del regno, era un segno di grande potere. Anche nell'immagine del piolo piantato in un luogo solido, alcuni vedono una prefigurazione della croce che aprirà il cielo ai peccatori.

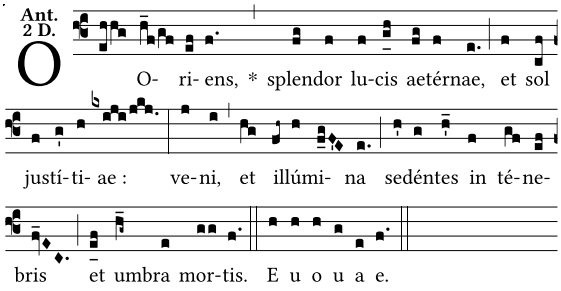


December 21: O Oriens

O ORIENS, splendor lucis aeternae et sol iustitiae: veni et illumina sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O Rising Dawn (Zech 3:8; Jer 23:5), splendor of eternal light (Wis 7:26) and sun of justice (Mal 3:20): come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death (Is 9:1; Lk 1:79).

O Astro che sorgi (Zc 3,8; Ger 23,5), splendore della luce eterna (Sap 7,26) e sole di giustizia (Ml 3, 20): vieni e illumina chi giace nelle tenebre e nell'ombra di morte (Is 9,1; Lc 1,79).



Winter solstice, that is,
the shortest day of the entire year.

This antiphon is, in a sense, the morning song intoned the evening before; it marks the "turning point": on the day of the solstice, when the night reaches its greatest length and from that moment begins to shorten, the liturgy calls upon the Sun before it can even be seen. The longest night begins, and this antiphon has the shortest text; even the invocation "Veni" changes its melody: not two ascending notes (a pes followed by a punctum) as in all the other antiphons, but two single puncta (A – G), a cry that drops by a single step from the high note. From the deepest darkness, the watchman leans out and invokes the light: the answer, now, begins to become visible. Its final words are those of the Benedictus, the Canticle of Zechariah that welcomes the dawn every morning at Lauds: visitavit nos Oriens ex alto, illuminare his qui in tenebris et in umbra mortis sedent (Lk 1:78–79).

Questa antifona è, in un certo senso, il canto del mattino intonato la sera prima, segna il "giro di boa": nel giorno del solstizio, quando la notte raggiunge la sua massima lunghezza e da quel momento comincia ad accorciarsi, la liturgia chiama il Sole prima ancora che si veda. Inizia la notte più lunga e l'antifona è quella con il testo più breve e anche l'invocazione "Veni" cambia melodia: non due note ascendenti (un pes seguito da un punctum) come in tutte le altre antifone, ma due singoli puncti (LA – SOL), un grido che dall'acuto scende di un solo grado. Dal buio più profondo la sentinella si sporge e invoca la luce: la risposta, adesso, comincia a diventare visibile. Le sue parole finali sono quelle del Benedictus, il Cantico di Zaccaria che ogni mattina, a Lodi, accoglie l'aurora: visitavit nos Oriens ex alto, illuminare his qui in tenebris et in umbra mortis sedent (Lc 1,78-79).

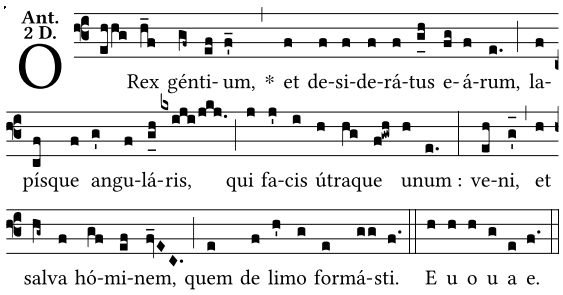


December 22: O Rex

O REX gentium et desideratus earum, lapis angularis qui facis utraque unum: veni et salva hominem quem de limo formasti.

O King of the nations (Jer 10:7) and their desired one (Hag 2:7), cornerstone (Is 28:16) who make both one (Eph 2:14): come and save humanity, whom you formed from the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7).

O Re delle genti (Ger 10,7) e da esse desiderato (Ag 2,7), pietra angolare (Is 28,16) che fai dei due uno (Ef 2,14): vieni e salva l'uomo che hai formato dalla terra (Gn 2,7).



"Desired": desire is the soul of every vigil. Here, however, it is the desire of all peoples, and He who comes is the cornerstone who makes of two separated peoples a single new people. The monastic vigil possesses this universal breadth: in the darkness we remember everyone, even those who do not know they are waiting, even those who do not believe they need a cornerstone to hold us together and sustain our fraternity. And at the end of the antiphon lies the fragility of humanity molded from earth: night is the hour when we feel most keenly how much we are dust, and how much it matters that someone stooped down to form us and give us life with the breath of His Spirit.

«Desiderato»: il desiderio è l'anima di ogni veglia. Ma qui il desiderio è di tutti i popoli, e Colui che viene è la pietra angolare che fa di due popoli separati, un solo popolo nuovo. La veglia monastica ha questo respiro universale: nel buio ricordiamo tutti, anche quelli che non sanno di attendere, anche chi non crede di avere bisogno di una pietra angolare che ci tenga uniti, che sorregga la nostra fraternità. E c'è, in fondo all'antifona, la fragilità dell'uomo plasmato dalla terra: la notte è l'ora in cui meglio si sente quanto siamo polvere, e quanto vale che qualcuno si sia chinato a formarci e a darci la vita con il soffio del Suo Spirito.

Image: Christ in Majesty, in Stammheim Missal, ca. 1170, tempera colors, gold, silver, and ink on parchment, 28.2 × 18.9 cm, Ms. 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 85v, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, getty.edu.

Image: (facing page) The Creation of the World, in Stammheim Missal, ca. 1170, tempera colors, gold, silver, and ink on parchment, 28.2 × 18.9 cm, Ms. 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 10v, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, getty.edu.

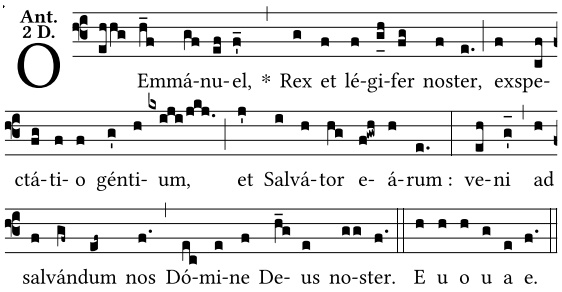


December 23: O Emmanuel

O EMMANUEL, rex et legifer noster, expectatio gentium et salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos, Dominus Deus noster.

O Emmanuel (Is 7:14), our king and lawgiver (Is 33:22), hope and salvation of the nations (Gen 49:10; Jn 4:42): come to save us, O Lord our God (Is 37:20).

O Emmanuele (Is 7, 14), re e legislatore nostro (Is 33, 22), speranza e salvezza dei popoli (Gn 49, 10; Gv 4, 42): vieni a salvarci, o Signore nostro Dio (Is 37, 20).



On the final evening, the name is the one that says it all: God-with-us. The expectation of the nations (*expectatio gentium*) becomes presence, and for the first time in the series the invocation closes with the words "*Dominus Deus noster*": no longer a title pronounced from afar, but our God, the Savior to whom we belong and from whom no one will ever be able to snatch us.

L'ultima sera il nome è quello che dice tutto: Dio-con-noi. L'attesa delle genti (*expectatio gentium*) si fa presenza, e per la prima volta nella serie l'invocazione si chiude con le parole «*Dominus Deus noster*»: non più un titolo da pronunciare da lontano, ma il nostro Dio, il Salvatore a cui apparteniamo e dal quale nessuno potrà mai strapparci.

Image: The Annunciation, in Stammheim Missal, ca. 1170, tempera colors, gold, silver, and ink on parchment, 28.2 × 18.9 cm, Ms. 64 (97.MG.21), fol. 10v, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, getty.edu.

The Night That Deepens and Then Opens

If we trace the seven antiphons as one journeys through a night of vigil, we realize they follow a progression. The first three—*Sapientia, Adonai, Radix*—look back to salvation history: the creative Word, the Exodus, the root of Jesse. They are the Old Testament. At the center, in *Clavis* and *Oriens*, the exact same words are pronounced twice: "in darkness and the shadow of death." Right on the days when the night is the longest of the year, the song pauses at the darkest point and names it without fear. And then, with *Rex* and *Emmanuel*, the tone shifts: the Lord is called King, cornerstone, hope of the nations, and finally God-with-us. Vigilance is not a passive waiting in a void, but the heartfelt invocation of a name, of a Beloved who is already making himself present.

And while we pray in this way, His answer is already taking shape, becoming complete on the seventh day. To discover it, one need only read the initial letters of the seven titles as an acrostic: **S-A-R-C-O-R-E**, read in reverse order, forms the Latin phrase **ERO CRAS**, meaning "I will be [there] tomorrow." Whether intended by the ancient authors or discovered later by the devotion of those who sang them, this reading is one of the finest surprises of the liturgy. To our seven-evening vigil, the Lord responds with a promise, almost an appointment: tomorrow.

To our seven-evening vigil, the Lord responds with a promise, almost an appointment: tomorrow.

Alla nostra veglia di sette sere, il Signore risponde con una promessa, quasi un appuntamento: domani.

"Tomorrow": The Dawn That Answers

To the invocation of seven evenings, the Lord answers with a single phrase: *Ero cras*, "I will be [there] tomorrow." And in the responsory of First Vespers of Christmas (December 24) resounds the word addressed by Jahaziel to King Jehoshaphat and the besieged people: *Iudaea et Ierusalem, nolite timere:* **cras egrediemini, et Dominus erit vobiscum** (2 Chr 20:15–17), "Judah and Jerusalem, do not be afraid: tomorrow go out, **and the Lord will be with you**." The night of fear ends in a morning; it is not a generic promise, but a promise that becomes presence.

Uno sguardo d'insieme: la notte che si fa più profonda e poi si apre

Se ripercorriamo le sette antifone come si percorre una notte di veglia, ci accorgiamo che hanno un andamento. Le prime tre, Sapientia, Adonai, Radix, guardano indietro, alla storia della salvezza: la Parola creatrice, l'Esodo, la radice di Iesse. Sono l'Antico Testamento. Al centro, Clavis e Oriens, vengono pronunciate per due volte le stesse parole: «nelle tenebre e nell'ombra di morte». Proprio nei giorni in cui la notte è più lunga dell'anno, il canto si ferma sul punto più buio e lo nomina senza paura. E poi, con Rex ed Emmanuel, il tono cambia: il Signore è chiamato Re, pietra angolare, speranza delle genti, e infine Dio-con-noi. La veglia non è un'attesa passiva nel vuoto, ma invocazione accorata di un nome, di un Amato che già si fa presente.

E, mentre noi preghiamo così, già si forma la Sua risposta, che sarà completa nel settimo giorno. Per conoscerla è sufficiente leggere come un acrostico le iniziali dei sette appellativi: **S-A-R-C-O-R-E**, letto in senso contrario, forma in latino la frase **ERO CRAS**, cioè «(ci) Sarò domani». Che sia stata voluta dagli antichi autori o scoperta più tardi dalla pietà di chi le cantava, questa lettura è una delle più belle sorprese della liturgia. Alla nostra veglia di sette sere, il Signore risponde con una promessa, quasi un appuntamento: domani.

«Domani»: l'alba che risponde

All'invocazione di sette sere il Signore risponde con una parola sola: *Ero cras*, «sarò domani». E nel responsorio dei I vespri di Natale (il 24 dicembre) risuona la parola rivolta da Iacaziel al re Giosafat e al popolo assediato: *Iudaea et Ierusalem, nolite timere:* **cras egrediemini, et Dominus erit vobiscum** (2 Cr 20,15-17), «Giuda e Gerusalemme, non temete: domani uscirete, e il Signore sarà con voi». La notte della paura finisce in un mattino, non è una promessa generica, ma promessa che si fa presenza.

In the liturgical tradition, Christmas Eve opens with an invitatory that says the same thing in other words: *Hodie scietis quia veniet Dominus, et mane videbitis gloriam eius*, "Today you will know that the Lord is coming, and in the morning you will see his glory." The vigil, therefore, does not end in darkness. The entire night is oriented toward the dawn, just as the watchman's eye looks toward the east. And this holds true all the way to the greatest night of all: Easter morning, the Gospel of John tells us, begins while it is still dark (Jn 20:1). Even the brightest dawn in history was announced to those who were already up, to those who had not stopped searching.

Every year, Advent entrusts us anew with the task of the watchman: to wait while listening to Scripture and the liturgy, making our own in particular these splendid antiphons that the Church places upon our lips from December 17 to 23, and letting the Veni rise from within—for ourselves, for those who sleep, for those who struggle, for those who suffer, and for those who perhaps do not even know they are waiting and yet are never satisfied. To every vigil of ours the Lord responds—indeed, has already responded: Behold, I am with you!✣

Nella tradizione liturgica la vigilia di Natale si apre con un invitatorio che dice la stessa cosa con altre parole: Hodie scietis quia veniet Dominus, et mane videbitis gloriam eius, «Oggi saprete che viene il Signore, e domattina vedrete la sua gloria». La veglia, dunque, non finisce nel buio. Tutta la notte è orientata verso l'aurora, come l'occhio della sentinella guarda verso l'oriente. E questo vale fino alla notte più grande di tutte: il mattino di Pasqua, racconta il Vangelo di Giovanni, comincia ancora nel buio (Gv 20,1). Anche l'alba più luminosa della storia si è annunciata a chi era già in piedi, a chi non aveva smesso di cercare.

L'Avvento ci consegna nuovamente ogni anno un compito di sentinella. Attendere in ascolto della Scrittura e della liturgia, facendo nostre in particolare queste splendide antifone che la Chiesa ci mette sulle labbra, dal 17 al 23 dicembre, e lasciare che il Veni salga da dentro, per sé, per chi dorme, per chi lotta, per chi soffre, per chi forse neppure sa di attendere e tuttavia non è mai sazio. Ad ogni nostra veglia il Signore risponde, anzi ha già risposto: Ecco, Io sono con voi! ✣

Sr. Francesca Zelioli, OCSO is a solemn-professed member of Our Lady of St. Joseph Abbey in Vitochiano, Italy.

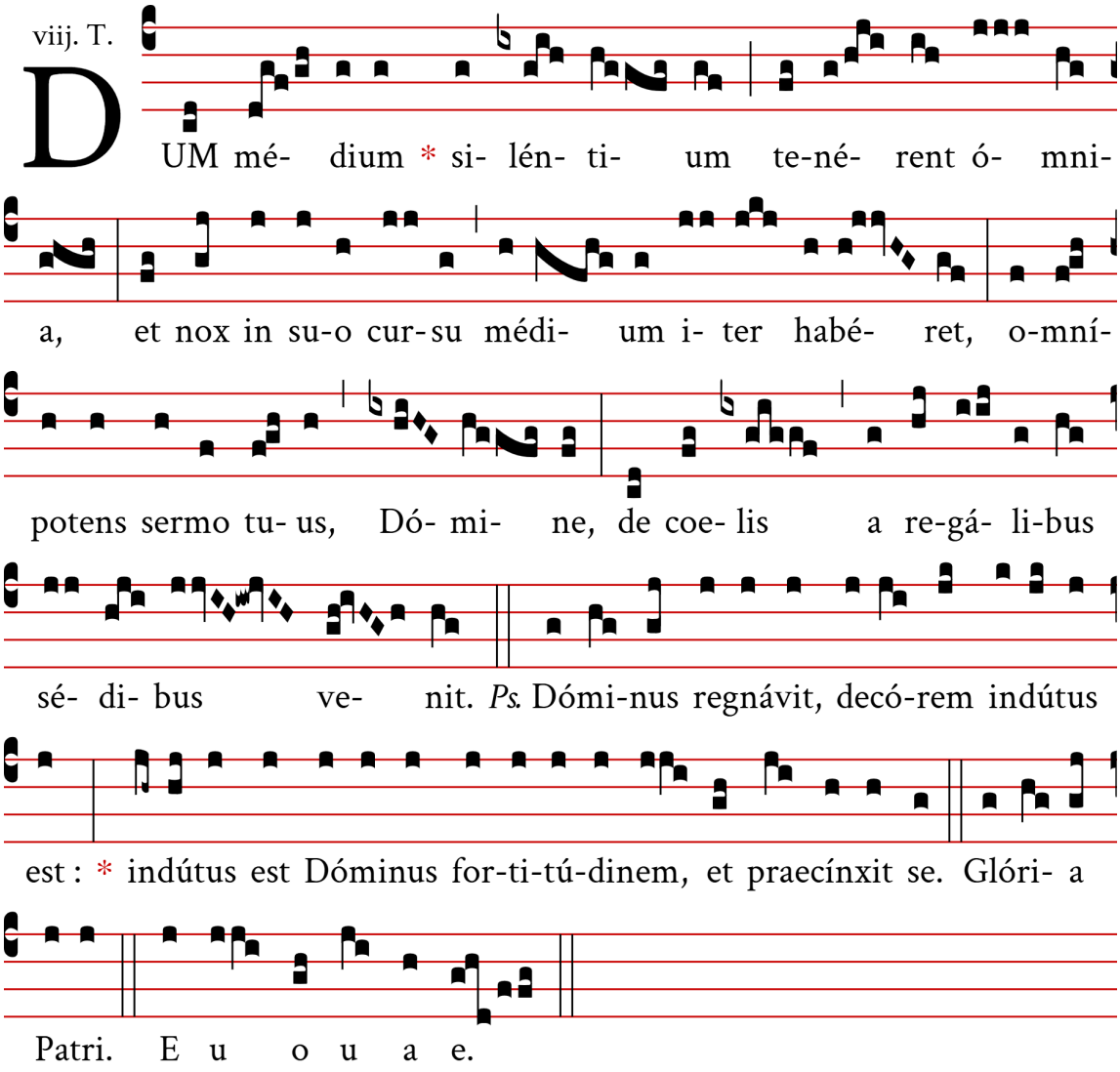
SACRED MUSIC



Image: Geertgen tot Sint Jans, The Nativity at Night, ca. 1490, oil on oak panel, 34 × 25.3 cm (13 3/8 × 10 in.), National Gallery, London.

DUM MEDIUM SILENTIUM

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO



Dum medium silentium tenerent omnia, et nox in suo cursu medium iter haberet, omnipotens sermo tuus, Domine, de coelis a regalibus sedibus venit.

While peaceful silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was half spent, your all-powerful word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven from the royal throne.

Dum Medium Silentium

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

"While peaceful silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was half spent, your all-powerful word, O Lord, leaped down from heaven from the royal throne."

The Church has received from the Holy Spirit the gift of discerning the signs of the times, and she discerns them liturgically. St. Bernard acknowledges this gift several times in his Liturgical Sermons.

For him, the liturgical fulfillment of Scriptural events is more real than the literal historical narration of those events. In his third sermon on Christmas Eve, referring to the words of Exodus 16:6-7: 'Today, Scripture says, you shall know that the Lord will come,' he observes: "These words occur in Scripture, of course, in their own time and space. Mother Church, however, has not inappropriately adopted them for the eve of the Lord's birth. The Church, I say, who possesses the wisdom and the Spirit of her Bridegroom and God, whose beloved rests on her bosom, having and holding in a princely way the possession of the throne of her heart. She is the one who has wounded his heart, who pierces the abyss of the hidden things of God with the eyes of contemplation; she makes an everlasting dwelling for him in her heart, and for herself in His heart. When then, the Church either alters or exchanges words in the divine Scriptures, this arrangement of the words is more forceful than the original, and perhaps as much more forceful as that which separates reality from symbol, light from shadow, mistress from handmaid." (VNat 3,1).

This insight from Bernard regarding the Church's liturgical interpretation of a Scriptural passage is especially fitting for the Introit of the Second Sunday of Christmas. Undoubtedly, Wisdom 18:14-15 refers to the Passover night of the Exodus, when the

avenging angel struck all the firstborn in Egypt and Israel fled in haste.

Like a warrior with a drawn sword, the Word of God descended in the night to wreak death upon the enemy camp and free His people from Egyptian slavery. The Word, depicted as an avenging warrior, makes us think more of the shining chevaliers appearing to Joshua, to King Jehoshaphat. For instance, as Judas Maccabeus was on his way to the battle of Beth Horon, he suddenly saw horsemen at their head. They were clothed in white garments and brandished golden weapons. On the other hand, the evangelist Luke reveals that on Christmas night, a host of angels surrounded the cave where the King of Kings was born, and Jesus himself told Pilate that he could call upon a host of angels to defend his kingdom if his kingdom were of this world. The radiant host constantly surrounded the Lord, and angels appeared to comfort him after his temptations and during the terrible moment of his agony. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews also tells us that the Word is a double-edged sword that pierces even to the point of dividing the marrow from the bones.

This avenging aspect of the Word that comes to fight evil is present in the Gospels and cannot be ignored even though the Lord fights with humility and meekness. His humility and meekness are veritably a sword that divides in a world completely oriented to worship, honor, money, and success.

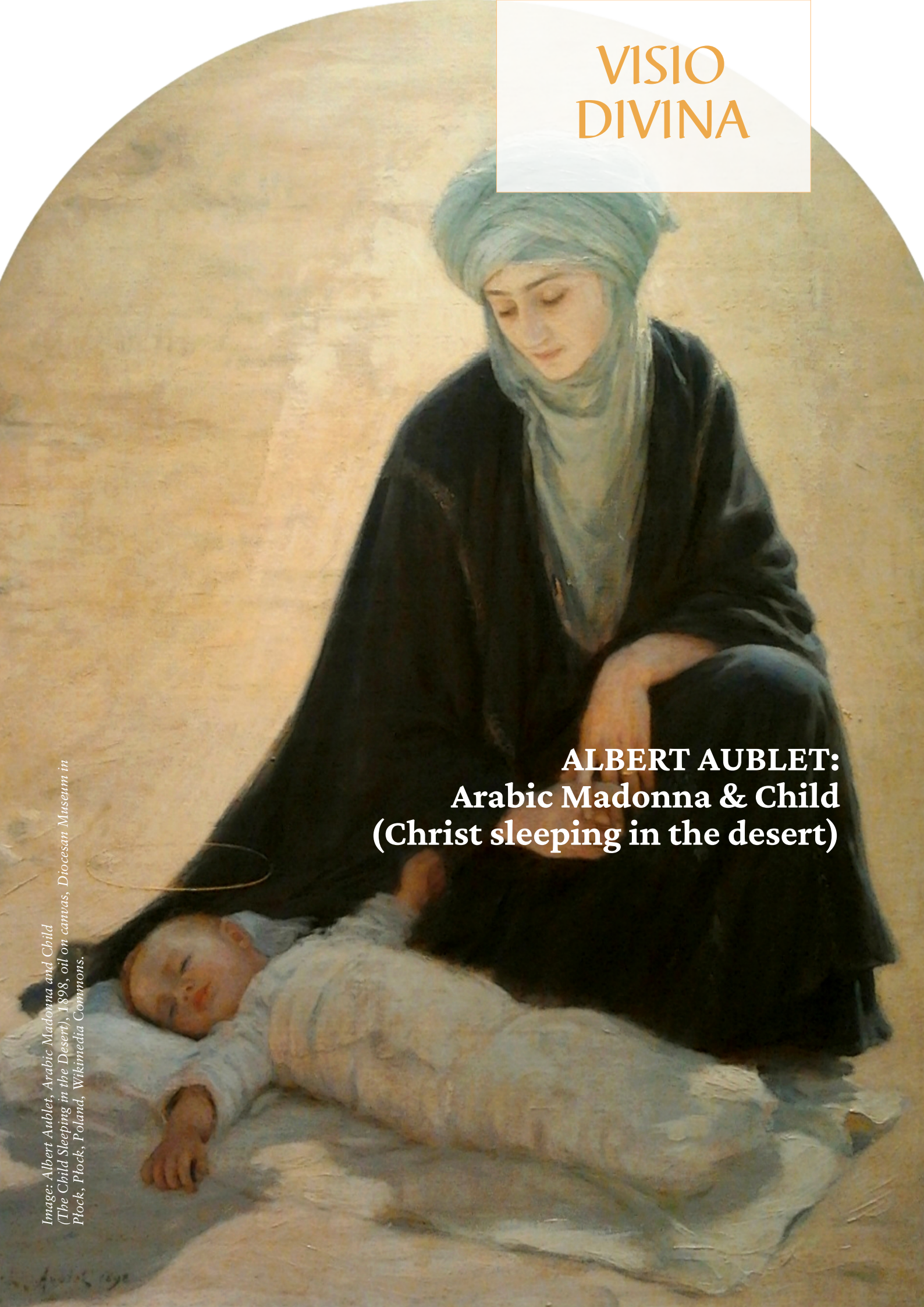
On the other hand, the Church's choice of this passage of Wisdom to tell the Christmas story gave rise to many of the most beautiful Christmas carols, of which the most famous is, without any doubt, Stille Nacht. The Lord of the universe comes in silence and in the midst of poor people who were able to recognize him and were full of holy fear.

Also, the tradition that the Lord was born at midnight can be attributed to this passage —*nox in suo cursu medium iter haberet*—because Luke does not specify it.

Composed in the eighth Gregorian mode, the melody is solemn and rich. The word that is most underlined is *regalibus*, and we therefore are made aware of the regal dignity of God. He keeps everything in his power and royally disposes of everything for the good of his creation and humanity. The strength of God is for life and salvation.

Our consolation and glory are in being enrolled in his army. ✣

VISIO DIVINA



ALBERT AUBLET:
Arabic Madonna & Child
(Christ sleeping in the desert)

Image: Albert Aublet, Arabic Madonna and Child (The Child Sleeping in the Desert), 1898, oil on canvas, Diocesan Museum in Płock, Płock, Poland, Wikimedia Commons.

Swaddling Clothes

MO. GIOVANNA GARBELLI, OCSO

Giotto's Nativities are the most famous paintings of the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes sleeping in the hands of the Virgin.

However, after Giotto, it is difficult to find nativity scenes that depict St. Luke's reference to Jesus being wrapped in swaddling clothes. Most nativity scenes depict Jesus as a naked baby lying on bare soil. Since the Renaissance, artists have painted Jesus naked to demonstrate the truth of the Incarnation. His nudity also symbolizes primordial purity, innocence, and freedom from original sin, revealing him as the new Adam.

The late Middle Ages mystic St. Bridget of Sweden's vision of the Nativity where she saw the newborn Jesus lying completely naked on the bare ground of the stable heavily influenced Renaissance painters such as Fra Angelico and Piero della Francesca. These painters also wanted to emphasize extreme vulnerability, humility, and poverty, representing a Franciscan shift in the meaning of the Incarnation.

St. Luke's repeated mention of the swaddling clothes might initially seem like a minor detail, but upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that there's more to it than meets the eye. We read that Mary "gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger" (Lk 2:7). Then again we read that the angels announce "a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Lk 2:11-12)

Many scholars and saints believed that the swaddling clothes foreshadowed Jesus' death. They thought that the bands mentioned both at his birth and death link the beginning and end of the Gospel like bookends. For example, in one of his homilies, St. Gregory Nazianzen states: "He was wrapped in swaddling clothes—but He took off the swathing bands of the grave by His rising again."



Giotto di Bondone, The Nativity (detail), ca. 1310–15, fresco, Lower Church, Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi, Assisi. Image sourced via Wikimedia Commons.

Early Christian iconography further emphasizes this connection by depicting Jesus swaddled like a mummy.

The swaddling clothes were also believed to refer to the Jewish tradition of binding the legs of lambs intended for sacrifice at the Temple. This revealed Jesus as the "Lamb of God" sacrificed for our salvation, as if Luke wanted to emphasize the Child's sacrificial destiny.

The swaddling clothes might simply mean that Jesus shared the condition of babies in his time and culture. Since ancient times and in many cultures, women have wrapped their newborn infants. The umbilical cord is cut and tied, then the baby is washed with water and rubbed with finely pulverized salt. Then he is laid on a cloth, legs straight and arms at his sides. A long strip of cloth, 4 or 5 inches wide by 5 or 6 yards long, is wrapped in overlapping bands from head to toe. Room is left for the face, of course. The snug cloths prevent startling, help limbs to grow straight, and are said to aid in sleeping. After all, if it were a common practice that wouldn't have helped the shepherds identify this baby. Why, then, does Luke mention it? Why does Luke call them a sign? The main reason why St. Luke includes this small detail is typological.

Swaddling clothes are mentioned two times in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 16:1-5.

In the dark days of the Babylonian exile, God told Ezekiel a story to explain Jerusalem's exile. Jerusalem was like a pagan baby girl, unwanted and abandoned in an open field to

die:

> "On the day you were born your navel string was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor swathed with bands. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you; but you were cast out ..."

Ezekiel goes on to explain how God after having rescued the girl and tenderly washed and cared for her, decked her out in gold and jewels and brought her up to be his bride. Yet she squandered her gifts and adornments on other lovers and idols, making herself a harlot. Therefore, she was exiled. However, God ends the story with the promise of a new covenant. The babe in swaddling cloths is the sign that the New Israel has been born! God's everlasting covenant, promised centuries before, will be established through this swaddled child.

While Ezekiel's story might be behind Luke's mention of swaddling cloths, the passage in Wisdom 7:4 is more to the point. Here Solomon – the first "Son of David" – speaks of his own birth in these terms:

"Mortal, like all men ... in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh ... and my first sound was a cry, like that of all. I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths. For no king has had a different beginning of existence; there is for all mankind one entrance into life, and a common departure."

The swaddling clothes link the birth of Jesus with that of King Solomon, reiterating his royal lineage and the fulfillment of messianic hopes.

The angels bring great news: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ ("*Messiah*") the Lord. And this will be a sign for you..."

Swaddling cloths are a sign of the promised king, made clear through the words of Solomon—the royal son of David who sought wisdom above riches and whose swaddling clothes were a sign not merely of humility, but of his humanity. "No king has had a different beginning of existence," Solomon wrote. Not the first son of David, and not this last.

This typological meaning of the detail in the Nativity of Luke is also preserved in Venantius Fortunatus' hymn "*Pange Lingua.*"

Vagit infans inter arcta conditus praesepia,
Membra pannis involuta Virgo Mater alligat,
Et manus pedesque et crura stricta cingit fascia.

All within a lowly manger, lo, a tender babe He lies!
See his gentle Virgin Mother lull to sleep his infant cries!
While the limbs of God incarnate round with swathing bands she ties.

In Aublet's painting of the Nativity, we cannot see the manger; only the Arabic desert is visible, reminiscent of Franciscan poverty. Yet, the gentle Virgin Mary is there. She contemplates Jesus who is lying on the sand after she had lulled Him to sleep and tied his limbs with swaddling bands.

She kneels on the bare sand, absorbed in the mystery of this Baby, keeping it in her heart. ✣



Stillness

Stillness,
Untamed space of love,
Quiet space of discipline,
Steady presence of the divine
soaring on high,
unreserved heart
yearning for the dawn
of Mercy.

And it comes,
Mercy comes,
Today as yesterday,
Hushed and unadorned
Generating and regenerating,
Telling me of my sins
And of the hollowness of my dust,
And telling me
Of my redemption too.
Again, and always:
Re – Creation.

It comes
Telling me a secret,
A melody,
A rhapsody:
"How good
And how pleasant it is
When brothers live in unity..."



Christ Knocking at the Door of the Soul; (facing page) Christ Playing Music for the Loving Soul; Woodcuts from Christus und die minnende Seele (Erfurt: Wolfgang Schenck, c. 1500). Bibliothek Otto Schäfer, Schweinfurt (OS 0231). Public domain.

Oh charming stream
Of music and poetry,
Of light and enchantment
All other than
Bitter crumbs of old hurts
Unquiet ghosts of yesterday
Dropping from a crowded
Overstuffed,
Resentful backpack...

Oh! An oil
Of blessing and harmony,
Of love,
Abundant and unyielding love
reminding me that my life, too,
has a charted course
as the first silver ray
above the horizon.

It comes
Whispering in my ears
Of YOU,
Of Your obstinate faithfulness
Reliable and new each day,
Of Your eternal Love,
Of Your holiness and truth,
Of Your goodness and justice,
Of Your Wisdom,
Of Your ever aligned unity
With the Father.



Sr. Rosanna Savarese, OCSO

Sr. Rosanna Savarese is a solemn-professed member of Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey.

At Your Advent

Bread from heaven whom we adore,
Present with us forevermore;
A baby boy the Virgin bore;
Joyful tidings for us you pour.

A quiet night arrayed with light;
A mystery before our sight;
O little boy whom we delight:
At your advent a fire ignite.

O Word of God, Emmanuel!
Resting in the tabernacle;
Deign to be a form so fragile;
In flesh and host with us you dwell.

Our creator who made us all;
Who cares for every human soul;
In silence you invite us all;
"Come now", for I come to you all.

Sr. Roxanne Acaylar, OCSO



Sandro Botticelli, The Nativity, ca. 1473–1475, fresco transferred to canvas, 160 × 140 cm (63 × 55 1/8 in.), Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Sr. Roxanne Acaylar is a solemn-professed member of Our Lady of Mt. Matutum Abbey.

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Lent

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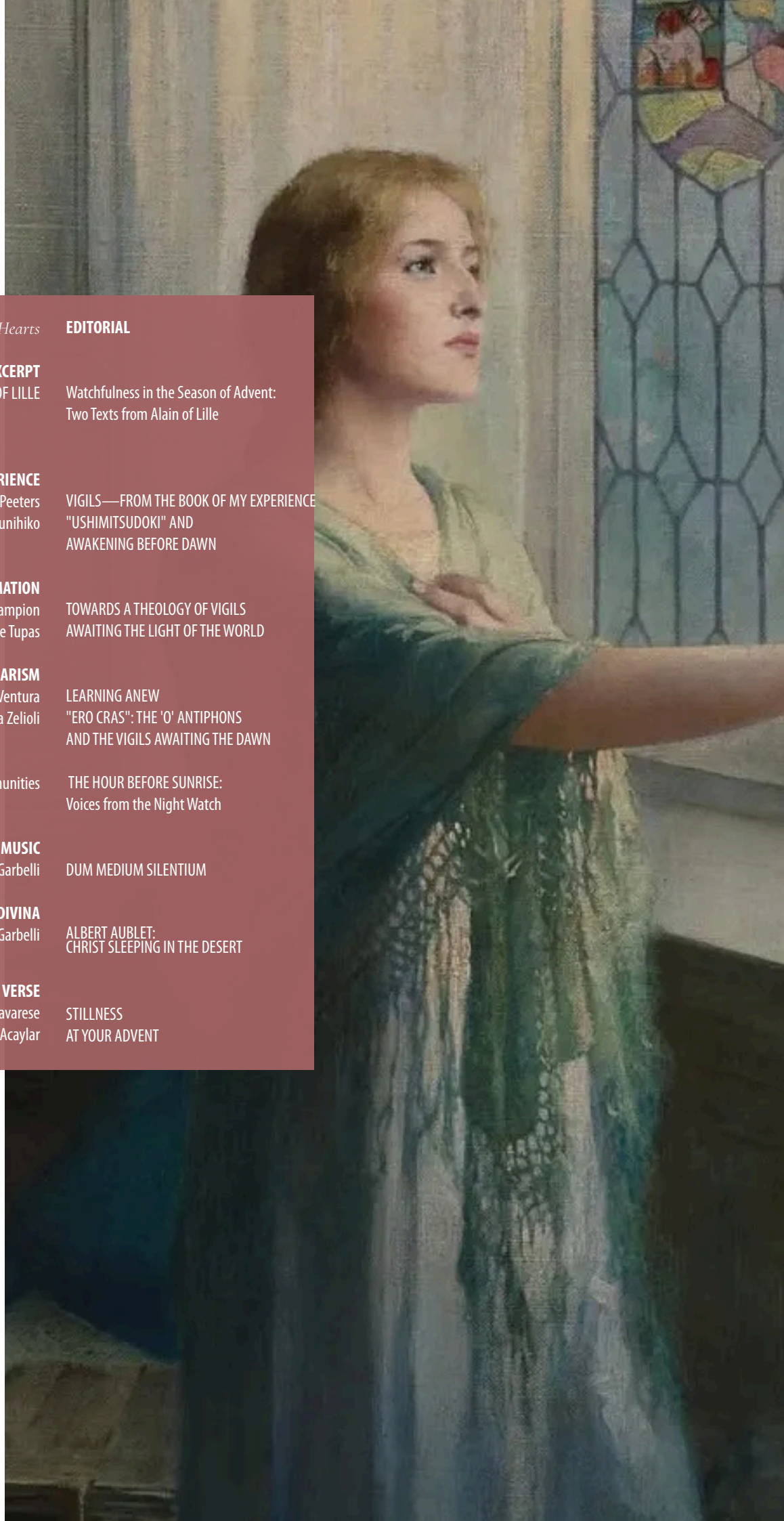
Word count must be from 500—2000 words.
It is preferable to cite references as footnotes.
Scriptural citations should be placed alongside text.

Entry into Jerusalem, miniature from the Vaux Passional (London or Flanders, c. 1503–1504). National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 482D, fol. 17v. Public domain.



The 'Whole' in Our Hearts — **EDITORIAL**

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Sr. Francesca Zelioli — "ERO CRAS": THE 'O' ANTIPHONS AND THE VIGILS AWAITING THE DAWN

ORIENS Communities — THE HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE: Voices from the Night Watch

SACRED MUSIC
Mo. Giovanna Garbelli — DUM MEDIUM SILENTIUM

VISIO DIVINA
Mo. Giovanna Garbelli — ALBERT AUBLET: CHRIST SLEEPING IN THE DESERT

VERSE
Sr. Rosanna Savarese — STILLNESS
Sr. Roxanne Acaylar — AT YOUR ADVENT

Awaiting His Return. *William Ladd Taylor, ca. 1899, oil on canvas, 76.5 x 61 cm, private collection. Image in the public domain.*