



Advent and Lent online Resources in the Spirit of *Laudato Si'*



The grace of God is one - no one liturgical season is without prayer that acknowledges God the Creator. However, since the Pope's encyclical, no liturgical season can ignore the call to *ecological conversion* in Christ or ignore the *ecological vocation* of all the baptised.

Over millennia believers have created various Catholic Rites. Gospel proclamation interacted with local cultures to form particular incarnations of Christian practice in a process now named as *inculturation*. Liturgical history tells many stories. Some liturgical practices withered but others blossomed as distinct Christian Rites – Antiochian, Coptic, Orthodox, Ambrosian, Latin and others.

Practices that developed in preparation for the great feast of Easter, but also Christmas, grew to become the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent. They were marked by a spirit of repentance and consciously turning to God. Preparations for both seasons included fasting and giving alms to focus the mind in prayer. It was only logical that the shape of these practices drew heavily on Scriptural stories about conversion and the physical signs of repentance. In the current Lectionary the Scriptural selections nominated for Lent and Advent carry a penitential tone, but importantly, they are set in the broader context of salvation history, the big story of the outreach of God over cosmic and human time.

ADVENT AND LAUDATO SI' RESOURCES

The liturgical season of Advent was at first seen as a period of fasting for monks leading up to the celebration of Christmas. The practice spread to all the baptised. The weeks that became December were observed throughout the Christian world as a month of prayer, fasting and alms giving. The Council of Tours in 576 wrote about Advent. However, the season grew most fully within the Rites of the western churches. In the middle ages, St Bernard of Clairvaux wrote about the three comings of Christ ('adventus' in Latin) - at his birth in Bethlehem, in human hearts and at the end of time.

An integral characteristic of Advent is that it carries a tone of *time out of time*, a time between the first and second comings of Christ, between the first revelation of God in Creation and the final completion of the Last Judgement. It oscillates between dream and reality. With such a rich background the liturgical season of Advent has many overtones that can be brought to prayer, including creation awareness.

The Scripture readings designated in the Catholic Lectionary for Advent over a three year cycle form the basis for Columban Mission preparing Advent Resources. The tone set by the Advent Scriptural Readings - waiting, longing and watching - is central.

Most religions tell stories of searching for meaning to human existence. This sense of searching is powerfully expressed in the traditions associated with nature religions as they observed the rotation of the seasons in nature, winter and summer solstices and the like. Recognising these natural cycles lead many religions to express in prayer this strong religious bond between Earth cycles and human existence. In the current environmental crisis which Pope Francis wants us to face, the designated Advent Scriptural readings carry major lessons about the call for Christians to be converted and follow the path of dialogue -

dialogue with scientists who love Earth, dialogue with groups searching to spiritually reconnect with Earth and dialogue with other faiths. Mission takes on deeper meaning.

Traditions are multiple. Local churches developed particular Advent practices such as making a wreath with four candles lit on successive Sundays. Many composed hymns particular to the season to amplify prayer. Protestant churches have largely retained the liturgical season of Advent and it begins the liturgical year in most western Rites. By way of contrast, the liturgical year for eastern Orthodox Rites begins 1st September but they observe Advent.

To help Catholic communities prepare for Advent, Resources based on the Catholic Lectionary are available on the Columban Mission website. The Resources offer suggestions over the three year liturgical cycle to grow the Scriptural tone of waiting, longing and watching. God is to be searched for and can be found in the revealing Earth. God is active in cosmic as well as human history.

YEAR A: Lead Kindly Light - <https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/educational-resources/2016-advent-catholic-resource-lead-kindly-light-year-a>

YEAR B: Whispers of God - <https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/educational-resources/advent-resource-whispers-of-god>

YEAR C: Pathways: Hope for the Journey - [https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/educational-resources/advent-resource-pathways-hope-for-the-journey-\(year-c\)](https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/educational-resources/advent-resource-pathways-hope-for-the-journey-(year-c))

The style of the suggestions for each Sunday offered in these Advent Resources is similar to the style of the September Creation Season Resources in this book. Each begins with extracts from the designated Scripture readings of the Catholic Lectionary for a particular Sunday. These Scriptural extracts are read with ecological eyes as the starting point to draw out implications concerning creation. They indicate a grace to remember about God's outpouring of love in creation, what to give thanks for and suggest a basis for petitions.

To support the Scriptural insights for each Sunday that remember God reaching out in love, there follows a number of short paragraphs to help with liturgical preparations:

- The spirit of Advent within Salvation History,
- Ecological insights,
- Prayers of the Faithful suggestions,
- Stories of searching by holy people,
- The mission impulse of Advent,
- Quotes from *Laudato Si'*
- Suggestions for action.

LENT AND LAUDATO SI' ONLINE RESOURCES

Lent began as a preparation for celebrating new Life as a follower of Jesus at Easter. It was the natural season of the new life, Spring



in the northern hemisphere. Conversion, turning to God and baptism into Christ are characteristic of Easter celebrations. Scripture abounds with 40 day conversion stories culminating in the experience of Jesus for 40 days in the wilderness. Prayer, fasting and giving to the poor were prominent in these stories as they focus the heart and mind in the process of preparation for conversion. Lent became a liturgical season formed in this spirit.

Since the revival of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) after the Second Vatican Council, the meaning of Lent for Catholic communities has also been renewed. Lent has become even more deeply focused on turning, or returning, to God with all our mind and heart. It is about conversion to Jesus Christ and about baptism into a community of believers, his Body the Church.

Sixty years after Vatican II Pope Francis has given new meaning to conversion and baptism into Christ when he writes in his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*:

'ecological conversion', whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them (LS #217) ... We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart (LS #218) ... We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements. (LS #3).

Lent means evaluating our values and life style in the modern world. This means more than some little self-centred action like giving up chocolate or losing weight. Pope Francis wants us to look at the big picture as he laments humanity's abuse of Earth:

"to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God (LS #8) ... defend the environment ... These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered ... [they] become intense spiritual experiences (LS #232) ... A misguided anthropocentrism leads to a misguided lifestyle ... the practical relativism typical of our age is "even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism" (LS #122).

The environmental challenge Pope Francis articulates has led Columban Mission to prepare Lenten Resources for Years A, B and C. These resources are available on the Columban website. The phrase 'The Grace of ...' introduces the three different Resources for the liturgical Years

YEAR A: The Grace of Earth. <https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/educational-resources/the-grace-of-earth-lenten-resource-year-a> This Resource explores six Earth *life-support systems* on which all life depends, including human life. Salvation history embraces the Big Story of 13.7 billion years of creation.

YEAR B: The Grace of Forests. <https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/educational-resources/the-grace-of-forests> Each Australian forest type – acacia, eucalypt, casuarina, melaleuca, mangrove, rainforest – is unique and a religious symbol as they perform life giving functions in our natural environment.

YEAR C: The Grace of Place. <https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/educational-resources/the-grace-of-place-lenten-resource-2017-year-c> We know that an awareness of place is more than about survival – wild places, rural places, coastal places, urban places, sacred places, my place – God is present there.

The Resources for the six Sundays of Lent each year are guided by the designated Scriptural readings for the Sunday. They particularly focus on the environment itself so that a deeper awareness can nourish our call for ecological conversion from a local Australian perspective. They express ecological conversion under the triple banner of *God revealing, God inspiring, God challenging*.

