

SAMPLE

WAITING FOR CHRIST

*Meditations for Advent
and Christmas*

Introduction

“A man of discernment if thou find, wait on him at daybreak, and wear out his door-step with thy frequent visiting.” This sage advice, from Ronald Knox’s translation of Sirach 6:36, captures the purpose of this book, which is to give its readers the chance to start each day of Advent in the company of a man of great discernment, so that Christmas will “find us more and more like him, who at this time became a little child for our sake, more simple-minded, more humble, more holy, more affectionate, more resigned, more happy, more full of God.”¹

The most celebrated of modern converts, John Henry Newman (1801–1890) was for many years a clergyman in the Church of England before being received into the Catholic Church in 1845. During his Anglican years, he won accolades for his preaching, which was as inspiring and challenging as it was captivating. Chesterton once credited Newman’s style with “a magic that is like a sort of musical accompaniment,” and he was afterwards lauded as “one of the greatest masters of quietly exquisite prose that the world has ever seen.”² As to his sermons’ quality as reflections on the Gospel, Richard Church, onetime Dean of St. Paul’s, penned their finest praise: “They made men think of the things which the preacher spoke of, and not of the sermon or the preacher.”³ Newman’s preaching realized St. Augustine’s prescription that eloquence ought to be wisdom’s unobtrusive companion, so that in hearing the good preacher,

¹ John Henry Newman, “The Mystery of Godliness,” below at page 103.

² G. K. Chesterton, “The Style of Newman,” *The Speaker* (1904), 130–31; George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prose Rhythm* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 388.

³ R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement: Twelve Years, 1833–1845*, ed. G. Best (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 92–3.

“you could almost imagine wisdom stepping out from her own house, that is from the breast of the wise man, followed by eloquence as her inseparable, even if uninvited, lady in waiting.”⁴

To take the modern scalpel of the word processor to sermons of this “much-loved father of souls” may be thought an unforgivable act of trespass.⁵ It may perhaps be observed, however, that it is better for Newman to be read in part than not at all, and better that he should be appreciated by the current generation than set aside as antiquated or too difficult to be read with pleasure. My aim in presenting selections from his sermons has been to offer their essential teaching—entirely in Newman’s own words—in a length and form that will make them attractive as spiritual reading. The changes I have made have chiefly consisted in selecting portions of the sermons, removing paragraphs that contained illustrations or applications ancillary to Newman’s main point, bringing his text into conformity with American conventions of spelling, and changing most of his quotations of Sacred Scripture from the *King James* or *Douay-Rheims* Bibles to the *Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition*. In addition, I have taken liberties with his punctuation, often preferring the period to the semicolon, and have on a few occasions changed a word of his to one that I thought would be more easily understood. Most of the sermons were chosen from the eight-volume Longmans’ edition of his *Parochial and Plain Sermons*; some have come from other collections, such as his *Sermons on Subjects of the Day*, *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, and *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*. It is hoped that the reader of this little book will desire to read the original sermons in their entirety,

⁴ St. Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1996), 206.

⁵ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass with the Beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman (September 19, 2010).

and will find in Blessed Cardinal Newman a worthy friend and guide for life's journey back to our Father in Heaven.

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St. Andrew

The World's Benefactors

St. Andrew, who was already one of St. John's disciples, was attending on his master with another, when, as it happened, Jesus passed by. The Baptist, who had from the first declared his own subordinate place in the dispensation which was then opening, took this occasion of pointing out to his two disciples him in whom it centered. He said, "Behold the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29). On hearing this, the two disciples immediately left John and followed Christ. He turned round and asked them "What do you seek?" (Jn 1:38) They expressed their desire to be allowed to wait upon his teaching, and he suffered them to accompany him home and to pass that day with him. What he said to them is not told us, but St. Andrew received such confirmation of the truth of the Baptist's words that in consequence he went after his own brother to tell him what he had found.

St. John the Evangelist, who has been guided to preserve various notices concerning the separate apostles which are not contained in the first three Gospels, speaks of Andrew in two other places and introduces him under circumstances which show that, little as is known of this apostle now, he was, in fact, very high in the favor and confidence of his Lord. In his twelfth chapter, he describes Andrew as bringing to Christ certain Greeks who came up to Jerusalem to worship and who were desirous of seeing him. And, what is remarkable, these strangers had first applied to St. Philip, who, though an apostle himself, instead of taking upon him to introduce them, had recourse

to his fellow-townsmen, St. Andrew, as if, whether from age or intimacy with Christ, he was a more suitable channel for furthering their petition.

These two apostles are also mentioned together at the consultation which preceded the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and there again Andrew is engaged, as before, in the office of introducing strangers to Christ. "There is a lad here," he says to his Lord, a lad who, perhaps, had not courage to come forward of himself, "who has five barley loaves and two fish" (Jn 6:9).

The information afforded by these passages of St. Andrew's special acceptableness to Christ among the apostles is confirmed by the only place in the other Gospels, besides the catalogues, in which his name occurs. After our Lord had predicted the ruin of the Temple, "Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will this be?'" (Mk 13:3), and it was to these four that our Savior revealed the signs of his coming, and of the end of the world. Here St. Andrew is represented as in the special confidence of Christ, and associated too with those apostles whom he is known to have selected from the twelve, on various occasions, by tokens of his peculiar favor.

Little is known of St. Andrew in addition to these inspired notices of him. He is said to have preached the gospel in Scythia, and he was at length martyred in Achaea. His death was by crucifixion, that kind of cross being used, according to the tradition, which still goes by his name.

Yet, little as Scripture tells us concerning him, it affords us enough for a lesson, and that an important one. These are the facts before us. St. Andrew was the first convert among the apostles; he was especially in our Lord's confidence; thrice is he described as introducing others to him; lastly, he is little known in history, while the place of dignity and the name of highest renown have been allotted to his brother Simon, whom he was the means of bringing to the knowledge of his Savior.

Our lesson, then, is this: that they are not necessarily the most useful in their generation, nor the most favored by God, who make the most noise in the world, and who seem to be principals in the great changes and events recorded in history. On the contrary, that even when we are able to point to a certain number of men as the real instruments of any great blessings given to mankind, our relative estimate of them, one with another, is often very erroneous. So, on the whole, if we would trace truly the hand of God in human affairs, and pursue his bounty as displayed in the world to its original sources, we must unlearn our admiration of the powerful and distinguished, our reliance on the opinion of society, our respect for the decisions of the learned or the multitude, and turn our eyes to private life, watching in all we read or witness for the true signs of God's presence, the graces of personal holiness manifested in his elect, which, weak as they may seem to mankind, are mighty through God, and have an influence upon the course of his Providence, and bring about great events in the world at large, when the wisdom and strength of the natural man are of no avail.

Why indeed should we shrink from this gracious law of God's present providence in our own case, or in the case of those we love, when our subjection to it does but associate us with the best and noblest of our race, and with beings of nature and condition superior to our own? Andrew is scarcely known except by name, while Peter has ever held the place of honor all over the Church; yet Andrew brought Peter to Christ. And are not the blessed angels unknown to the world? And is not God himself, the author of all good, hid from mankind at large, partially manifested and poorly glorified in a few scattered servants here and there? And his Spirit, do we know whence it comes and whither it goes? And though he has taught me whatever there has been of wisdom among them from the beginning, yet when he came on earth in visible form, even

then it was said of him “the world knew him not” (Jn 1:10). His marvelous providence works beneath a veil, which speaks but an untrue language; and to see him who is the truth and the life, we must stoop underneath it, and so in our turn hide ourselves from the world. They who present themselves at kings’ courts pass on to the inner chambers, where the gaze of the rude multitude cannot pierce. And we, if we would see the King of kings in his glory, must be content to disappear from the things that are seen. Hid are the saints of God. If they are known to man, it is accidentally, in their temporal offices, as holding some high earthly station, or effecting some mere civil work, not as saints. St. Peter has a place in history, far more as a chief instrument of a strange revolution in human affairs, than in his true character as a self-denying follower of his Lord, to whom truths were revealed which flesh and blood could not discern.