

## Praying with The O-Antiphons

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Hello everyone, and welcome to this session of our Advent Retreat. Today we get to dive into the O Antiphons. In Advent, we long for the coming of Jesus, and the church grants us these O Antiphons is a way to express our longing. So let's tell Jesus about our longing together now.

### Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Lord, You are the giver of life and we love You. We desire You, Lord. We want more of You to come into our lives and to our world. So Jesus, as we look at the O Antiphons, we ask that you direct our attention to the one or two that maybe You want us to see the most. Maybe You want to speak something to our hearts about that particular title, about that particular scripture verse. So we just open our hearts to the movement of the Holy Spirit, that we may see what You want us to see and learn what You want us to learn. And we ask all these things in great joy and hope, Lord, amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

### A Prayer Tradition

Okay, so the O Antiphons are a prayer tradition that have been around since about the sixth century. So this is a very longstanding prayer that we have in our Catholic tradition, and we pray them from December 17th through the 23rd. So there's seven antiphons, and we pray them as a church. They're even the gospel during the gospel acclamation during mass, during this final lead up to the day of Christmas. And I love this tradition at with my children as well because it's a way to celebrate in a very small amount of time.

So if you have children, especially young children, there were many years of newborn babies and toddlers where this was probably the biggest thing we were able to do for Advent because each prayer just takes about 15 seconds for those seven days of the O Antiphons. So if that's your season right now, then just tuck this away because it really may benefit you and your family.

And so, like I said in our prayer too, as we go through each of these antiphons. I would love for you to write it down. Write them all out, and then maybe star or circle one or two that stand out to you the most. What is striking your heart the most about these? And then take that list and take it to your prayer later and ask the Lord, "Lord, what do You want to say to me through this?" Or, "What do You want me to continue exploring about this?" So I think that what we talk about in our short time together today can actually give you lots of good fodder for your prayer and meditation later.

So the O Antiphons might be familiar to you because we sing them in the classic Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel". So if they start to sound familiar as I go through them, that's probably why, because you've probably heard them many times before. And so

we're going to walk through each of the seven antiphons, which are really titles, names given to Jesus. Now, a title or a name given to our Lord is so important because it reveals something about who He is. So when we call Him something, we are assigning to Him a certain role or characteristic. And that's what the O Antiphons allow us to do, especially in these final days of waiting and longing and leading up to the happy feast of Christmas.

So we'll talk about the title, we'll talk about the scripture verse that this title originates from or is pulled from. And then we'll also look at the meaning that that title of Jesus has in our lives. What does that mean for us as Christians? What does that mean for us in our day to day living? And so, like I said, I hope this just encourages your prayer as you continue through Advent and as we approach closer and closer to Christmas.

## **O Wisdom**

All right, so the first antiphon is O Wisdom. Now we pray this one on December 17th. So the prophet Isaiah says, "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and strength." And then later Saint Paul calls Jesus the wisdom of God. So when we call Jesus wisdom, we are not calling Him... Or we are calling Him the source of all knowledge, of all wisdom, of all righteousness. Jesus is the eternal wisdom. He does order and create according to His wisdom. And so when we cry out to Him, "O Wisdom," we are saying, "Lord, show me the way," which is show me Yourself because You are the way. And so as we pray through this Advent and through our whole lives for wisdom, what we're really asking for is Christ in us, right? Because He is wisdom itself.

## **O Adonai**

All right, the second cry is O Adonai, and we pray this on December 18th. So in Exodus, when Moses approaches this miraculous burning bush that is on fire and not yet consumed, the Lord reveals His name for the first time. He says, "I am who am." And from that, the Jewish people understood that God's name was so sacred that they would not even speak it. And so they called Him Adonai or Lord. And this is a big deal for us because this tells us a lot about the sacredness of names. So when you know someone's name, you have a certain access to them, right? You can call them and expect a response or expect their attention. And so when the Lord reveals His name to us, He gives us access to Himself in a new and intimate way. And so as we cry out, "O Adonai, O Lord," we can remember that Jesus is the one who provides for us, who knows us, and who brings us into deeper communion with God. And you know, God is the one who after He encounters Moses and the burning bush, He's the one who led the Israelites out of slavery. He's the one who parted the Red Sea. He's the one who fed them with manna in the desert. And so as we pray this O Antiphon, we remember that God always provides, He is the Lord who provides. And at Christmas, He does that by coming as one of us as a humble baby. Jesus feeds us. Jesus sets us free from slavery to sin. Jesus parts the seas and allows us to do the impossible in His name for His glory unto eternity. And so all of that, we get to hold in our hearts in prayer as we pray the second O Antiphon, O Adonai.

## **O Root of Jesse**

All right, the third is O Root of Jesse. And we pray this on December 19th. Now, this is a really important prophecy because Isaiah says, "A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom." So what Isaiah is talking about is that at this time, Israel looked totally cut down. They were exiled. They were not living in accordance totally with God's will. And so part of what Isaiah's job was and mission was from the Lord, was to call them back to full and wholehearted service of the Lord. And so the Israelites were desperate. And so what the Lord says to Isaiah is that he is going to bring up a shoot from the stump of Jesse. Jesse was King David's father, King David, the great king of Israel. And so it seemed that everything that had been building for the Israelites was cut down. But God promises no, new life will spring from that cut down stump. And that is where salvation will come. And so this is immensely hopeful for us as Christians because if there's anything in our hearts or in our lives that feels utterly cut down totally destroyed, that everything we were working toward, everything it seemed like our life was building toward is suddenly no more. We have the promise that God can bring new life from that. And not just new life, but abundant life, right? And so we say, O Root of Jesse, because that abundant life is Jesus, and it's made possible by Jesus, and He's coming into our world by taking on our human flesh. And then of course, ultimately through His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. So we pray O Root of Jesse knowing that even when hope is cut down, hope can remain because God will always bring new life from the roots. So I would encourage you to talk to the Lord about that. What does feel cut down in your life? And ask Him, "Lord, bring new life from this and let me have the eyes to see it. Let me have the eyes to see as You're doing that."

## **O Key of David**

Okay, the next antiphon, our next cry as we lead up to Christmas is O Key of David. And we pray this on December 20th. So like we talked about, David was the great king of Israel. And all the prophecies about the Messiah talked about how the Messiah would sit on David's throne. He would be a descendant of David, and He would be a ruler like David, but He would rule all the nations, which we get to talk about in just a moment. And so when we call Jesus, O Key of David, we actually refer back to one such prophecy from Isaiah. He says, "I will place the key of the house of David on his shoulder. What he opens, no one shall shut, what he shuts, no one shall open." So God affirms, "I'm going to give the key of David, the throne of David, the house of David to the Messiah." Now in the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, Jesus Himself echoes this. He says, "I hold the keys to death and the netherworld."

So Jesus, He's got the keys. He holds the keys, the key of David. He is the one who sits on the throne. He is the one who opens the gate of heaven. And so we know too from the gospels that if Jesus holds the keys, who does He give them to? He gives them to Saint Peter. You know, "I give you the keys to the kingdom of the heaven. What you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. What you loose on earth shall be loose in heaven." So as we pray this antiphon, consider what might need unlocking in your own heart. Is there a place that's maybe closed off to the Lord? Cry out to the key of David and He will come to you, and He will come in.

## **O Radiant Dawn**

The next antiphon we pray, is on December 21st, and it's O Radiant Dawn, sometimes it's said, O Dayspring. So in Isaiah, he talks again. He says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." Who is that light? It's the Savior. It's Jesus, the light of the world. And even Zechariah in the gospel of Luke says, "The dawn from on high shall break upon us." There is something to that, isn't it? When you're in a time of darkness and suddenly the light comes, right, and your eyes adjust and you can see again, you can see everything. That is what Jesus does when He comes into the world, when He comes into our life. Jesus is the true light that scatters the darkness. And so as we pray this antiphon, we can say, "Jesus, come and be my light." Where is there darkness in my heart or in my life and my relationships? And where do you want to light up that darkness and dispel it? How can you be more of the light of my life?

## **O King**

The next O Antiphon that we pray is O King of Nations. And we pray that on December 22nd. So we're going back to the idea of the prophecy, that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David and rule the whole world, not just Israel, but the whole world. And that is what Jesus does. Jesus rules the universal, the Catholic church. He rules the entire world. Isaiah again prophesies, "For unto us a child is born and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." So these titles of royalty or assigned to the coming Messiah because it was understood that the Messiah would come and rule forever. Like His rule would be without end. He's kingly, God is our king.

And even during His passion, you know, I can't help but think about how Pilate questions Jesus on His kingship. Remember Pilate as a Roman was not necessarily concerned with the religious or spiritual aspects of what someone claiming to be the Messiah meant. What he was concerned about was earthly rule. So he questions Jesus, "Are you claiming to be a king? Because that is an issue, right? Because then that is a threat to our rule." And what does Jesus say in reply? He said, "His kingdom is not of this world." So He doesn't deny His kingship because He is the King of nations, but He underscores it's so far beyond the kingdoms of this world. And so where do we need Christ to be king of our hearts this Advent? Can already think of a few places where I'm tempted to just put myself on the throne of my heart or other people or other things. And I don't want that. I want Jesus to be the king of my heart, just as He is the king of the nations. So as we pray that antiphon, as we cry out, we can ask God to let that begin in our hearts.

## **O Emmanuel**

Okay, the final antiphon, our final cry, which we cry out on December 23rd is O Emmanuel. And how beautiful, right, that we get to end with this title of Jesus. Once again, we see in Isaiah that the prophecy is a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call His name Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God with us. And how amazing that we can think of that as a nice thought or a sweet sentiment. But that was not God's intent. God meant, "I will literally

be with you. I will literally come to you. I will enter the confines of human body and space and time in order to be right there with you so you can see my face, so you can hear my voice. I've loved you with a human heart." How wonderful is that? He really is God with us. And so as we pray this antiphon, we understand that Jesus is coming. The coming of the Messiah is one that radically transforms everything, even the smallest, quietest, most hidden details of our life. He remains in those with us. He comes at Christmas for the salvation of the whole world. And He also comes at Christmas for the salvation of you, just you, as if it were only ever you, and all that is involved in your heart and your life. He comes as Emmanuel to be with you.

## **Closing Prayer**

Why don't we turn our hearts to Him now. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Lord, you are Emmanuel. You are with us. Thank you for these beautiful traditions of our faith that always point us back to You, that always teach us something that is true about You. Lord, may we meditate on these titles that You have as we get closer to Christmas. May they sink deeply into our hearts. May we be so convinced of them, Lord, and may they help us follow You more closely and more wholeheartedly. And we ask all this in Your holy and powerful name, Jesus. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.

So once again, I just want to encourage you, if one of these O Antiphons stuck out to you in particular, or if one of the scripture passages really struck your heart, I encourage you to go back, maybe listen to that section again or write it in your journal. Take it to Eucharistic adoration and let the Lord teach you more about it. Let Him speak to that, and you speak to Him. And I think that what you'll find is, that's going to bear a lot of fruit in your personal prayer in your soul as you round out the Advent season. Thank you so much for listening and for being with me. It was such a pleasure to pray with you. God bless you.