

Laudario di Cortone ANGELUS
Intro.

On this day, Dec. 2nd, a little over 4 centuries ago, on an island not very far away from HK, a man lay dying, with his greatest dream just beyond his grasp, unfulfilled. He was waiting for a chance to be able to go to Canton, to bring the message of Christ to China. As he waited, around the Pearl River estuary, in those days a few years before Macao became a Portuguese settlement, he almost certainly spent some time in what we now HK waters, and probably landed briefly on the north-western shore of Lantau island. In a few short years he'd travelled extensively from India through Malaya, Indonesia, to Japan and back, preaching, teaching, baptising. The methods of St Francis Xavier may not be either possible or approved of today, (though he did have some lasting influence on the presence of Christianity in these parts), but no one can deny his enthusiasm & zeal, his 'divine impatience' to be the herald, messenger of Christ's coming. Tomorrow is his feast-day: and coming at the beginning of the Advent season which is meant to focus our religious attention on preparing and being prepared for Christ's coming, the feast of St Francis Xavier may be a reminder of one, admittedly extraordinary, man's dedication to bring himself to the Advent of Christ for millions of people. As we recite our prayers at midday for Advent, let's also ask the intercession of St Francis Xavier for something of his enthusiasm in making God's love better known in this city that has grown here since Xavier came this way.

PRAYERS

For a prayer in music today, I've chosen this old Italian ^{song} ~~carol~~ on the Annunciation - it's part of a Christmas cycle of popular songs which were really forerunners of what we think of as carols now.

Laudario

'Advent', from the Latin word, means coming. It's in fact synonymous with the Incarnation of Christ, first of all, and then with the feast which commemorates and celebrates the Incarnation, the feast we call Christmas in English and which other languages simply call 'the Birth', Nativity. The name Advent was originally applied to the feast itself, and only gradually came to mean the time before Christmas, after that day had become universally celebrated throughout the Church - which was in fact a later development than the rest of the Church year. The origin of Advent as a special period goes back also to the fasting and penitential exercise in preparation for Epiphany, which in some places was a baptismal feast. But Advent as it appears today in the Church's life is primarily a liturgical, not a penitential season: and its celebration (if you look at the scripture texts & readings for the season in the liturgical books), is a compendium of a number of different emphases, from different sources, which make Advent particularly rich in meaning. The new selection of readings for Mass during Advent, as well as the two new Advent prefaces for the Eucharistic Prayer, all re-inforce this multiple, simultaneous emphasis of the Advent celebration. Since St Bernard's time, Christian spirituality has maintained

an insistence on taking 'Advent', the Coming of the Lord, in the very fullest sense of coming - past, present and future. None of those aspects can properly be left out of account in our celebration of Advent - it's a celebration of the historical birth of Christ in Bethlehem; it's a celebration of the same Christ, still with us in His Church, coming to us, being, so to say, incarnated in all His faithful when we're gathered together for the celebration of the Eucharist and being witnesses to His love in our care for all men; it's a celebration of the Day of the Lord which has still to come, when Christ returns in glory for the completion, consummation of the work of the new creation of everything, which He began while He lived in Palestine and carries on through those He has sent in His Father's name to be the continuation of His reconciling all mankind with His Father's love. Of course at different times in history, the focus will be more on one aspect than on the others. Today, in preaching and writing, possibly as a reaction to the commercialising of Christmas as a simple anniversary of an event which many people anyway don't believe ever took place, the Advent emphasis is more on the 2nd, final coming of Christ. And this is something very real which Christians nowadays, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin lamented, don't seem to pay enough attention to - it isn't the vision and inspiration it should be, and as it was for him. Maybe this is something we could all we think and pray about this Advent as we prepare ourselves for the more social, material, entertainment enjoyment of the coming celebration of Christ's first coming, in birth at Bethlehem.