



Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 21, 2025

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Rorate Caeli

Today is the shortest day of the year — the winter solstice. In technical terms it means that at exactly 3:03 PM UTC or 10:03 Eastern Standard Time, the sun reached its southernmost declination in the sky. Experientially, this is a moment of deepest darkness for us in the Northern Hemisphere. Darkness is for most of us a fearful thing — ask any child. We are most afraid of what we cannot see. Turn on a light and many of those fears go away. But what do you do if there is no light to turn on? We used to go caving as Boy Scouts and the guides would inevitably ask us all to turn off our flashlights and experience the profound darkness in the bowels of the earth. Talk about the stuff nightmares are made of! We could only imagine what it would be like if we couldn't turn those lights back on! How easily we would get disoriented. How easily we would get discouraged. How easily fear and anxiety would creep in and even overwhelm us.

Even without going into a cave, many people still feel how the absence of light affects us. Many suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, a condition in which the lack of sunlight disrupts the body's normal production of hormones such as serotonin and melatonin, leading to depression and imbalance. In response, physicians prescribe light therapy — lamps that simulate sunlight to help restore internal harmony or supplements like melatonin to regulate or rhythms to match the natural cycle of waking and sleeping.

This biological reality points to a deeper spiritual truth: we were made for light — not merely physical light, but the Light of life and truth. When this light is absent, disorder sets in. In our own day, we find ourselves in a profound cultural and spiritual darkness. The human heart knows that it is made for something greater than this world can give, yet our eyes are blinded by sin and our desires are corrupted by the delusions of wealth, pleasure, power, and autonomy.

Our souls exhibit a kind of spiritual Seasonal Affective Disorder. Our hearts crave meaning and seek to remedy that in the world's false promises that cannot deliver the uncreated light we were made for. The verdict given by Saint John's Gospel is stark: "The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). This is the diagnosis of an age that prefers flickering shadows to the brilliance of truth. We need a remedy, a cure, a medicine to alleviate our diseased souls.

But this is precisely the moment that God intervenes. The Divine Physician knows our illness, hears our cry, and comes to our aid.

The Introit, or Entrance Chant, on this Fourth Sunday of Advent calls upon heaven to intervene with the ancient Advent prose, *Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant justum*: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down the Just One." It is the same text prayed yesterday at the traditional *Rorate Caeli* Votive Mass during Advent. In that tradition, we offer Mass in the early morning, while it is still dark, and the church is lit entirely by candlelight. We enter in darkness as a recognition of our fallen state. But then we receive our light from the Light of Christ at the Altar as a testimony of our faith that Christ is our Light. After keeping vigil in this darkness and praying for the coming of the light we watch the light of day stream into the Church from the rising sun. It reorients our hearts back to God and gives us renewed hope and direction as we journey through the dark valley of this life. There is a famous hymn called the *Rorate Caeli* that takes up this same theme. It embodies the human experience of darkness and recognizes that our sinfulness keeps us from God and expresses a longing for God to save us. The verses of the *Rorate Caeli* hymn go on to confess our sin — "We have sinned and are become as one



unclean.... We all fall as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind have carried us away” — But then God responds with divine consolation: “Be comforted, be comforted, my people: thy salvation shall speedily come.”

This text does not shy away from our darkness — it names it. But it also does not let us remain there. Like the Church’s Advent liturgy itself, it moves from petition, through repentance, to consolation. It is both a confession of longing and a proclamation of redemption: Christ is the answer.

The Just One whom we implore the heavens to send is Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. He is the Light of the world: “I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Light here signifies the presence of God, who illumines every human heart with truth, righteousness, and love.

This is where we come in: the Church’s mission is to be a bearer of this light. The Church is not the source of light in herself; she is the mirror and custodian of the Light — the Body of Christ in the world. She is salt, leaven, and especially light, oriented toward the true North of our destiny — heaven. Humanity was made to worship the One, True God, yet in sin we worship false gods that cannot save. Christ alone enlightens us to worship the one true God in spirit and truth. In Jesus we will never fear the darkness of the cave or sadness of soul because of the lack of light.

This Advent is an invitation to unite our longing with the ancient cry of the *Rorate Caeli* — to ask heaven to drop down the Just One into our world and into our hearts. It is a plea that moves from lamentation to consolation: “Be not angry, O Lord... behold, Thy salvation shall come.” This is the good news.

Today we stand at the threshold of Christmas. The Light has come. And once the Light has come, the world does not return to darkness as before. From this moment forward, the days lengthen. That is not accidental. It is a sign written into creation itself. Christ does not merely visit the darkness; He overcomes it. And He does so through His Body, the Church, which now bears His light into a world that still stumbles in shadow. Do not despair in the darkness, especially when you can see the stars. Without the darkness, we wouldn’t be able to see the stars, much less be able to comprehend that there are galaxies more numerous than the sand on the shores of the sea. In like manner, the presence of Christians in the world opens those who are dwelling in darkness to the higher life of heaven to which all humanity is called. I invite you to open your hearts to receive Him and to let that Light shine through you into the darkness.