

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome to the Basilica of St Gregory the Great here at Downside.

A few minutes ago, we listened to a beautiful setting of *Veni Redemptor Gentium* from the Mixed Chamber Choir to open our Advent Carol Service. We faced east, *ad orientem*, awaiting the Sun of righteousness, praying deep in Advent; *Come, Thou redeemer of the earth*. In the darkness of this basilica, we stood like God's people of old, walking in darkness, with expectant hope that the Light would come. Addressing the Christ child of Bethlehem, the choir sang: *Thy cradle here shall glitter bright, and darkness breathe a newer light, where endless faith shall shine serene, and twilight never intervene*. And all sang: *Rejoice, rejoice*: as the lights came on.

The beginning of St John's gospel identifies the Light of the World, God's Word who from the beginning was *a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower*.

On the darkest day of the year, traditionally monks have chanted from this sanctuary in their evening prayer: *O Oriens: O Rising Sun, you are the splendour of eternal light and the sun of justice. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*.

Yesterday a member of the third form asked me whose saint's day it was. In fact we celebrated St Lucy's day on the eve of the Carol Service. Her name means light, she is remembered every December 13th, a date that used to be the shortest and darkest day before the Julian calendar became Gregorian. John Donne wrote in remembrance of St Lucy –

*Since she enjoys her long night's festival,  
Let me prepare towards her, and let me call  
this hour her vigil, and her eve, since this  
both the year's, and the day's deep midnight is.*

Owing to the manner of her martyrdom, Lucy's iconography depicts her carrying her eyes. Our eyes enable us to perceive light; and Lucy is the patron saint of the blind. But while Lucy lost her physical sight, and made the ultimate sacrifice, the closing words of our next Schola item by Manz resonate with Lucy's longing for light, and the heartfelt longing of all Christians, singing that: *night shall be no more, they need no light, nor lamp, nor sun for Christ will be their all*. May our Advent prayer place the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, at the heart of our longing. *Hail, thou heaven-born prince of peace, hail, the Sun of Righteousness. Light and life to all he brings. Risen with healing in his wings*.

At the conclusion of tonight's service, we will kneel in adoration of the Dayspring from on high that is Christ Our Lord, as the Blessed Sacrament is placed on the altar in preparation for Benediction. Now, let us stand and pray.