We are very grateful to Mother Louise Marie and all the Sister Servants of the Eternal Word for singing vespers with and for us this evening, as the sun sets on the second Sunday of Advent. Our celebration began with the majestic English hymn, “Lo! He comes, with clouds descending”, written by the great Charles Wesley. Even though he was ordained for the Church of England and a part of the Methodist movement, the theology that he crystallized in his beautiful poetry, in this and so many of his other popular hymns, is quite lapidary; then, the majestic tune HELMSLEY that sustained the text surely caused our spirits to soar all the more.

This hymn speaks of Christ’s return in glory, which every eye shall see – including those destined to reign with him in glory, as well as those who never accepted his grace of conversion and must bewail their loss for all eternity. It draws upon imagery from the Book of Revelation, depicting also the heavenly liturgy where, with rapturous happiness, we will sing of God’s glory. Thus it is, as it were, a song that sings of singing. That all the great truths of our faith can be surrounded by such beautiful poetry and music is one of God’s wonderful gifts to us, to console us and sustain us through the vicissitudes of our life’s journey here below.

The antiphons for the two psalms and the canticle this evening also spoke of Christ’s coming. The second one is especially important for our reflection: “If he seems to delay,” it said, “keep watch for him, for he will surely come.” We wish to be found ready for that moment, even as we trudge along wondering when it will be. At the same time, we have our hopes, our life projects; we have an idea of how we would like things to go, and how long we hope to be here to fulfill our dreams. Somehow, we must reconcile our vision with the Lord’s plan, so that we can leave all to go join him on the clouds of heaven when he sounds the trumpet for us.

Thus our Blessed Mother reassures us of the Lord’s mercy in the Magnificat, which the Sisters will chant in a few moments: “Misericórdia ejus a progénie in progénies” – “His mercy is unto every generation”. We know that only with the help of his mercy can we truly be ready for him, whenever he comes. Indeed, we will also soon pray, “Lord show us your mercy and love. And grant us your salvation…” Advent is a season of mercy – a time to make a good confession, to practice the works of mercy, to get ourselves ready spiritually. And with two more Sundays until Christmas, we may still take advantage of this season’s grace, which the Lord offers us all.