

# St. Leo the Great –Sermons 12 & 16 (Season of Advent)

## Sermon 12

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### **I. Restoration to the Divine image in which we were made is only possible by our imitation of God's will**

If, dearly beloved, we comprehend faithfully and wisely the beginning of our creation, we shall find that man was made in God's image, to the end that he might imitate his Creator, and that our race attains its highest natural dignity, by the form of the Divine goodness being reflected in us, as in a mirror. And assuredly to this form the Saviour's [grace](#) is daily restoring us, so long as that which, in the first [Adam](#) fell, is raised up again in the second. And the [cause](#) of our restoration is naught else but the mercy of [God](#), Whom we should not have loved, unless He had first loved us, and dispelled the darkness of our [ignorance](#) by the light of His [truth](#). And the Lord foretelling this by the [holy](#) Isaiah says, "I will bring the blind into a way that they [knew](#) not, and will make them walk in paths which they were [ignorant](#) of. I will turn darkness into light for them, and the crooked into the straight. These words will I do for them, and not forsake them. [Isaiah 42:16] And again he says, "I was found by them that sought Me not, and openly appeared to them that asked not for Me." [Isaiah 65:1] And the Apostle John teaches us how this has been fulfilled, when he says, "We [know](#) that the [Son of God](#) has come, and has given us an understanding, that we may [know](#) Him that is [true](#), and may be in Him that is [true](#), even His Son" [1 John 5:20], and again, "let us therefore [love](#)

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21 [God](#), because He first loved us” [1 John 4:19]. Thus it is that [God](#), by loving us,  
22 restores us to His image, and, in order that He may find in us the form of His  
23 goodness, He gives us that whereby we ourselves too may do the work that He  
24 does, kindling that is the lamps of our minds, and inflaming us with the fire of His  
25 [love](#), that we may [love](#) not only Himself, but also whatever He loves. For if  
26 between men that is the lasting friendship which is based upon similarity of  
27 character notwithstanding that such identity of wills is often directed to [wicked](#)  
28 ends, how ought we to yearn and strive to differ in nothing from what is pleasing to  
29 [God](#). Of which the [prophet](#) speaks, for [wrath](#) is in His indignation, and life in His  
30 pleasure , because we shall not otherwise attain the dignity of the Divine Majesty,  
31 unless we imitate His [will](#).

32 **II. We must love both God and our neighbour, and our neighbour must be**  
33 **interpreted in its widest sense**

34 And so, when the Lord says, You shall [love](#) the Lord your [God](#), from all your heart  
35 and from all your [mind](#): and you shall [love](#) your neighbour as yourself  
36 [Matthew 22:37, 39](#), let the faithful [soul](#) put on the unfading [love](#) of its Author and  
37 Ruler, and subject itself also entirely to His [will](#) in Whose works and judgments  
38 [true justice](#) and tender-hearted compassion never fail. For although a man be  
39 wearied out with labours and many misfortunes, there is [good](#) reason for him to  
40 endure all in the [knowledge](#) that adversity will either prove him good or make him

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41 better. But this godly [love](#) cannot be perfect unless a [man love](#) his neighbour also.  
42 Under which name must be included not only those who are connected with us by  
43 friendship or neighbourhood, but absolutely all [men](#), with whom we have a  
44 common nature, whether they be foes or allies, slaves or free. For the One Maker  
45 fashioned us, the One Creator breathed life into us; we all enjoy the same sky and  
46 air, the same days and nights, and, though some be good, others bad, some  
47 righteous, others unrighteous, yet God is bountiful to all, kind to all, as [Paul](#) and  
48 [Barnabas](#) said to the Lycaonians concerning God's Providence, who in generations  
49 gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. And yet He left Himself  
50 not without [witness](#), doing them good, giving rain from heaven and fruitful  
51 seasons, and filling our hearts with food and [gladness](#). But the wide extent of  
52 [Christian grace](#) has given us yet greater reasons for loving our neighbour, which,  
53 reaching to all parts of the whole world, looks down on no one, and teaches that no  
54 one is to be neglected. And full rightly does He command us to [love](#) our enemies,  
55 and to [pray](#) to Him for our persecutors, who, daily grafting shoots of the wild olive  
56 from among all nations upon the [holy](#) branches of His own olive, makes men  
57 reconciled instead of enemies, adopted sons instead of strangers, just instead of  
58 ungodly, that every knee may bow of things in heaven, of things on earth, and of  
59 things under the earth, and every tongue confess that the [Lord Jesus Christ](#) is in the  
60 [glory](#) of [God](#) the Father [Philippians 2:10-11](#) .

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61 **III. We must be thankful, and show our thankfulness for what we have**  
62 **received, whether much or little**

63 Accordingly, as God wishes us to be good, because He is [good](#), none of His  
64 judgments ought to displease us. For not to give Him thanks in all things, what else  
65 is it but to blame Him in some degree. Man's folly too often dares to murmur  
66 against his Creator, not only in time of want, but also in time of plenty, so that,  
67 when something is not supplied, he complains, and when certain things are in  
68 abundance he is ungrateful. The lord of rich harvests thought scorn of his well-  
69 filled garners, and groaned over his abundant grape-gathering: he did not give  
70 thanks for the size of the crop, but complained of its poorness. And if the ground  
71 has been less prolific than its wont in the seed it has reared, and the vines and the  
72 olives have failed in their supply of fruit, the year is accused, the elements blamed,  
73 neither the air nor the sky is spared, whereas nothing better befits and reassures the  
74 faithful and godly [disciples](#) of Truth than the persistent and unwearied lifting of  
75 praise to [God](#), as says the Apostle, Rejoice always, [pray](#) without ceasing: in all  
76 things give thanks. For this is the [will](#) of [God](#) in Christ Jesus in all things for you  
77 [1 Thessalonians 5:16](#) . But how shall we be partakers of this devotion, unless  
78 vicissitudes of fortune train our minds in constancy, so that the [love](#) directed  
79 towards God may not be puffed up in prosperity nor faint in adversity. Let that  
80 which pleases [God](#), please us too. Let us [rejoice](#) in whatever measure of gifts He

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81 gives. Let him who has used great possessions well, use small ones also well.  
82 Plenty and scarcity may be equally for our good, and even in spiritual progress we  
83 shall not be cast down at the smallness of the results, if our minds become not dry  
84 and barren. Let that spring from the soil of our heart, which the earth gave not. To  
85 him that fails not in good will, means to give are ever supplied. Therefore, dearly  
86 beloved, in all works of godliness let us use what each year gives us, and let not  
87 seasons of difficulty hinder our [Christian](#) benevolence. The Lord [knows](#) how to  
88 replenish the [widow's](#) vessels, which her [pious](#) deed of hospitality has emptied: He  
89 [knows](#) how to turn water into wine: He [knows](#) how to satisfy 5,000 hungry [persons](#)  
90 with a few loaves. And He who is fed in His poor, can multiply when He takes  
91 what He increased when He gave.

### 92 **IV. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three comprehensive duties of a** 93 **Christian**

94 But there are three things which most belong to religious actions, namely [prayer](#),  
95 [fasting](#), and almsgiving, in the exercising of which while every time is accepted,  
96 yet that ought to be more [zealously](#) observed, which we have received as hallowed  
97 by tradition from the [apostles](#): even as this tenth month brings round again to us the  
98 opportunity when according to the ancient practice we may give more diligent  
99 heed to those three things of which I have spoken. For by [prayer](#) we seek to

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100 propitiate<sup>1</sup> [God](#), by [fasting](#) we extinguish the [lusts](#) of the flesh, by [alms](#) we redeem  
101 our [sins](#): and at the same time God's image is throughout renewed in us, if we are  
102 always ready to praise Him, unfailingly intent on our purification and unceasingly  
103 active in cherishing our neighbour. This threefold round of duty, dearly beloved,  
104 brings all other [virtues](#) into action: it attains to God's image and likeness and unites  
105 us inseparably with the [Holy Spirit](#). Because in [prayer](#) [faith](#) remains steadfast, in  
106 [fastings](#) life remains innocent, in almsgiving the mind remains kind. On  
107 Wednesday and Friday therefore let us fast: and on Saturday let us keep vigil with  
108 the most blessed Apostle Peter<sup>2</sup>, who will deign to aid our supplications and fast  
109 and [alms](#) with his own [prayers](#) through [our Lord Jesus Christ](#), who with the Father  
110 and the [Holy Ghost](#) lives and reigns for ever and ever. [Amen](#).

### 111 **Sermon 16**

#### 112 **I. The prosperous must show forth their thankfulness to God, by liberality to** 113 **the poor and needy**

114 The transcendent power of God's [grace](#), dearly beloved, is indeed daily effecting in  
115 [Christian](#) hearts the transference of our every desire from earthly to heavenly  
116 things. But this present life also is passed through the Creator's aid and sustained  
117 by His [providence](#), because He who promises things [eternal](#) is also the Supplier of

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<sup>1</sup> To win or regain the favor of, to calm God

<sup>2</sup> See hyperlinks on Fasting at the end of this document (Source: The Fatima Center)

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118 things temporal. As therefore we ought to give [God](#) thanks for the hope of future  
119 [happiness](#) towards which we run by [faith](#), because He raises us up to a perception  
120 of the [happiness](#) in store for us, so for those things also which we receive in the  
121 course of every year, God should be honoured and praised, who having from the  
122 beginning given fertility to the earth and laid down [laws](#) of bearing fruit for every  
123 germ and seed, will never forsake his own decrees but will as Creator ever  
124 continue His kind administration of the things that He has made. Whatever  
125 therefore the cornfields, the vineyards and the olive groves have borne for man's  
126 purposes, all this God in His bounteous goodness has produced: for under the  
127 varying condition of the elements He has mercifully aided the uncertain toils of the  
128 husbandmen so that wind, and rain, cold and heat, day and night might serve our  
129 needs. For men's methods would not have sufficed to give effect to their works,  
130 had not God given the increase to their wonted plantings and waterings. And hence  
131 it is but godly and just that we too should help others with that which the Heavenly  
132 Father has mercifully bestowed on us. For there are full many, who have no fields,  
133 no vineyards, no olive-groves, whose wants we must provide out of the store which  
134 [God](#) has given, that they too with us may bless God for the richness of the earth  
135 and [rejoice](#) at its possessors having received things which they have shared also  
136 with the poor and the stranger. That garner is blessed and most worthy that all  
137 fruits should increase manifold in it, from which the hunger of the needy and the

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138 weak is satisfied from which the wants of the stranger are relieved, from which the  
139 desire of the sick is gratified. For these men God has in His [justice](#) permitted to be  
140 afflicted with various troubles, that He might both crown the wretched for their  
141 patience and the merciful for their loving-kindness.

### **142 II. Almsgiving and fasting are the most essential aids to prayer**

143 And while all seasons are opportune for this duty, beloved, yet this present season  
144 is specially suitable and appropriate, at which our [holy](#) fathers, being Divinely  
145 inspired, sanctioned the Fast of the tenth month<sup>3</sup>, that when all the ingathering of  
146 the crops was complete, we might dedicate to God our reasonable service of  
147 abstinence, and each might remember so to use his abundance as to be more  
148 abstinent in himself and more open-handed towards the poor. For forgiveness of  
149 [sins](#) is most efficaciously [prayed](#) for with almsgiving and [fasting](#), and supplications  
150 that are winged by such aids mount swiftly to God's ears: since as it is written, the  
151 merciful man does good to his own [soul Proverbs 11:17](#), and nothing is so much a  
152 man's own as that which he spends on his neighbour. For that part of his material  
153 possessions with which he ministers to the needy, is transformed into [eternal](#)  
154 riches, and such [wealth](#) is begotten of this bountifulness as can never be  
155 diminished or in any way destroyed, for blessed are the merciful, for God shall

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<sup>3</sup> Jewish tradition of Tevet (10<sup>th</sup> month) Fasting; recalling the 10<sup>th</sup> day of tenth month the beginning of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem, and the eventually destruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Temple and the start of the Babylonian captivity; see Esther (for the joy of their release) also after prayer and fasting.



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156 have mercy on them [Matthew 5:7](#), and He Himself shall be their chief Reward,  
157 who is the Model of His own command.

158 **III. Christians' pious activity has so enraged Satan that he has multiplied**  
159 **heresies to wreak them harm**

160 But at all these acts of godliness, dearly-beloved, which commend us more and  
161 more to [God](#), there is no [doubt](#) that our enemy, who is so eager and so skilled in  
162 harming us, is aroused with keener stings of [hatred](#), that under a false profession of  
163 the [Christian](#) name he may corrupt those whom he is not allowed to attack with  
164 open and bloody [persecutions](#), and for this work he has [heretics](#) in his service  
165 whom he has led astray from the catholic Faith, subjected to himself, and forced  
166 under various [errors](#) to serve in his camp. And as for the deception of primitive  
167 man he used the services of a serpent, so to mislead the minds of the upright he has  
168 armed these men's tongues with the poison of his falsehoods. But these treacherous  
169 designs, dearly beloved, with a shepherd's care, and so far as the Lord vouchsafes  
170 His aid, we will defeat. And taking heed lest any of the [holy](#) flock should perish,  
171 we admonish you with fatherly warnings to keep aloof from the lying lips and the  
172 deceitful tongue from which the [prophet](#) asks that his [soul](#) should be delivered;  
173 because their words, as says the blessed Apostle, do creep as does a gangrene  
174 [2 Timothy 2:17](#). They creep in humbly, they arrest softly, they bind gently, they  
175 slay secretly. For they come, as the Saviour foretold, in sheeps' clothing, but

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176 inwardly they are ravening wolves [Matthew 7:15](#); because they could not deceive  
177 the [true](#) and simple sheep, unless they covered their bestial rage with the name of  
178 [Christ](#). But in them all he is at work who, though he is really the enemy of  
179 enlightenment, transforms himself into an [angel](#) of light [2 Corinthians 11:14](#). His is  
180 the craft which inspires [Basilides](#)<sup>4</sup>; his the ingenuity which worked in [Marcion](#); he  
181 is the leader under whom Sabellius acted; he the author of Photinus' headlong fall,  
182 his the authority and his the spirit which [Arius](#) and Eunomius<sup>5</sup> served: in fine under  
183 his command and authority the whole herd of such wild beasts has separated from  
184 the unity of the [Church](#) and severed connection with the Truth.

### **185 IV. Of all heresies Manicheism is the worst and foulest**

186 But while he retains this ever-varying supremacy over all the [heresies](#), yet he has  
187 built his citadel upon the [madness](#) of the Manichees, and found in them the most  
188 spacious court in which to strut and boast himself: for there he possesses not one  
189 form of misbelief only, but a general compound of all [errors](#) and ungodlinesses.  
190 For all that is [idolatrous](#) in the [heathen](#), all that is blind in carnal [Jews](#), all that is  
191 unlawful in the secrets of the magic art, all finally that is profane and [blasphemous](#)  
192 in all the [heresies](#) is gathered together with all manner of filth in these men as if in  
193 a cesspool. And hence it is too long a matter to describe all their ungodlinesses: for

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<sup>4</sup> Source: New Advent Encyclopedia: The earliest of the Alexandrian Gnostics; Basilides invented prophets for himself named Barcabbas and Barcoph, and claimed to have received verbal instructions from St. Matthias the Apostle and to be a disciple of Glaucias, a disciple of St. Peter.

<sup>5</sup> Leader of extremist second wave of Arianism called "anomean Arians"; post First Council of Nicaea

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194 the number of the charges against them exceeds my supply of words. It will be  
195 sufficient to indicate a few instances, that you may, from what you hear, conjecture  
196 what from modesty we omit. In the matter of their [rites](#), however, which are as  
197 indecent morally as they are religiously, we cannot keep silence about that which  
198 the Lord has been pleased to reveal to our inquiries, lest any one should think we  
199 have trusted in this thing to vague rumours and uncertain opinions. And so with  
200 [bishops](#) and [presbyters](#) sitting beside me, and [Christian](#) nobles assembled in the  
201 same place, we ordered their elect men and [women](#) to be brought before us. And  
202 when they had made many disclosures concerning their perverse tenets and their  
203 mode of conducting festivals, they revealed this story of utter depravity also, which  
204 I blush to describe but which has been so carefully investigated that no grounds for  
205 [doubt](#) are left for the incredulous or for cavillers. For there were present all the  
206 [persons](#) by which the unutterable crime had been perpetrated, to wit a girl at most  
207 ten years old, and two [women](#) who had nursed her and prepared her for this  
208 outrage. There was also present the stripling who had outraged her, and the [bishop](#),  
209 who had arranged their horrible crime. All these made one and the same  
210 confession, and a tale of such foul orgies was disclosed as our ears could scarcely  
211 bear. And lest by plainer speaking we offend chaste ears, the account of the  
212 proceedings shall suffice, in which it is most fully shown that in that [sect](#) no

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213 modesty, no sense of [honour](#), no [chastity](#) whatever is found: for their law is  
214 [falsehood](#), their religion the [devil](#), their [sacrifice](#) immorality.

215 **V. Every one should abjure such men, and give all the information they**  
216 **possess about them to the authorities**

217 And so, dearly beloved, renounce all friendship with these men who are utterly  
218 abominable and pestilential, and whom disturbances in other districts have brought  
219 in great numbers to the city : and you [women](#) especially refrain from acquaintance  
220 and intercourse with such men, lest while your ears are charmed unawares by their  
221 fabulous stories, you fall into the [devil's](#) noose, who, [knowing](#) that he seduced the  
222 first man by the [woman's](#) mouth, and drove all [men](#) from the bliss of paradise  
223 through feminine credulity, still lies in watch for your sex with more confident  
224 craft that he may rob both of their [faith](#) and of their modesty those whom he has  
225 been able to ensnare by the servants of his falseness. This, too, dearly beloved, I  
226 entreat and admonish you loyally to inform us , if any of you [know](#) where they  
227 dwell, where they teach, whose houses they frequent, and in whose company they  
228 take rest: because it is of little avail to any one that through the [Holy Ghost's](#)  
229 protection he is not caught by them himself, if he takes no action when he [knows](#)  
230 that others are being caught. Against common enemies for the common safety all  
231 alike should exercise the same vigilance lest from one member's wound other  
232 members also be injured, and they that think such men should not be given up, in

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233 Christ's judgment be found guilty for their silence even though they are not  
234 contaminated by their approval.

### **VI. Zeal in rooting out heresy will make other pious duties more acceptable**

236 Display then a [holy zeal](#) of religious vigilance, and let all the faithful rise in one  
237 body against these savage enemies of their [souls](#). For the merciful God has  
238 delivered a certain portion of our noxious foes into our hands in order that by  
239 revelation of the danger the utmost caution might be aroused. Let not what has  
240 been done suffice, but let us persevere in searching them out: and by God's aid the  
241 result will be not only the continuance in safety of those who still stand, but also  
242 the recovery from [error](#) of many who have been deceived by the [devil's](#) seduction.  
243 And the [prayers](#), and [alms](#), and [fasts](#) that you offer to the merciful God shall be the  
244 holier for this very devotion, when this deed of [faith](#) also is added to all your other  
245 godly duties. On Wednesday and Friday, therefore, let us fast, and on Saturday let  
246 us keep vigil in the presence of the most blessed Apostle Peter; who, as we  
247 experience and [know](#), watches unceasingly like a shepherd over the sheep  
248 entrusted to him by the Lord, and who will prevail in his entreaties that the [Church](#)  
249 [of God](#), which was founded by his preaching, may be free from all [error](#), through  
250 Christ our Lord. [Amen](#).

251 [References on Fasting (source: the Fatima Center)]

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- 252 - [Part 1: The Purpose of Fasting](#)
- 253 - [Part 2: Fasting in the Early Church through the 5<sup>th</sup> Century](#)
- 254 - [Part 3: Lenten Fasting in the Medieval Church 5<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Centuries](#)
- 255 - [Part 4: Other Fasts in the Medieval Church: 5<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries](#)