Advent Reflections
on the Collect* of the Mass for the Second Sunday of Advent

The imagery of lines 2 and 3 remind one of the Collect-Prayer of the 1st Sunday of Advent last week. There we prayed for the grace “to run forth to meet...Christ”. Here we pray that nothing on earth will impede us “who set out in haste to meet” the same Christ. The Church isn’t against our having earthly undertakings. Indeed, it would be impossible to live on this earth and not have such activities to take up not a little of our time and effort. What the Church is praying for is perspective: may we not get so caught up in the external glitter and noise of Christmas preparations in the secular world that we miss the whole point of the season of Advent – which is to prepare to meet Christ in a deeply spiritual way, so that our hearts and minds and entire lives may be transformed by our union with Him.

That is why line 4 speaks of “our learning of heavenly wisdom.” Wisdom is a gift which enables one to have great perspective, to not be caught up only in the facts of the present moment. Heavenly wisdom is the kind of grace-filled Gift from God which enables us to have God’s view of things while we are on earth. If we have such a divine view, we will always keep earthly undertakings in their proper place in our lives – important, but also, in the long-term, less necessary that heavenly undertakings.

The primary heavenly undertaking of the season of Advent is to prepare are hearts and minds to receive Christ at His Coming. Yes, that means His Coming in the flesh in Bethlehem, which historical past event the Feast of Christmas commemorates and celebrates. But it also means to prepare us for the Final Coming, when the Last Judgment about all our “earthly undertakings” will be made by Christ. If we can live with our eyes on the final and everlasting goal of Christian life, then we will be the kind of Christians which St. Paul called the Ephesians to be: “I...implore you...to lead a life worthy of your calling. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience.” (Ephesians 4:1) The mention of those virtues puts us in contact with the third Coming of Christ in our lives: through the charity which makes us authentic followers of Jesus, through living each day the sacramental life we first embraced in Baptism and Confirmation.

Living like that here on earth will assure us of admittance into Christ’s company at the Final Judgment – and admittance to be the elect “on his right” (Cf. Matt 25:31ff) for whom eternal joy is prepared as their reward. (line 5) The season of Advent encourages us to set our eyes on such eternal joy, while also doing all the busy work we have to do to make our way through this earthly life. This is the Church’s Prayer. This is the Church’s hope, thanks to God granting us the grace to live thus.

*The Collect is the prayer that comes immediately before the first reading.