

# SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## Collect

Almighty and merciful God,  
may no earthly undertaking hinder those  
who set out in haste to meet your Son,  
but may our learning of heavenly wisdom  
gain us admittance to his company.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

## Commentary

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- In the Gospel, this Sunday John the Baptist tells us to prepare the way of the Lord. He is talking not about the babe in the manger but about the adult Christ soon to begin his public ministry. This prayer presents our response to Christ's call to join his company.
- The prayer first appears in the seventh-century Roman parish tradition and in seven subsequent manuscripts before it is lost to the liturgical tradition, until reclaimed for the 1970 Latin edition of the *Roman Missal*.
- As we gather together to meet Christ in the assembly, in the word, in the ministers and in the Eucharist our efforts simply to arrive at church with the proper disposition provide the context for this prayer about hastening to meet Christ. We gather from every walk of life and these earthly undertakings are not cast in a negative light except in their ability to hinder us for our single-minded pursuit of Christ and his company.
- We learn heavenly wisdom in the liturgy of the word when we hear the voice of Christ, the Wisdom of God. This heavenly wisdom, in turn, helps us to conduct our earthly undertakings in a way that does not hinder our single-minded pursuit of Christ and his company.
- We gain admittance to Christ's company when we are baptized as Christians, and time and time again when we join with the baptized in the liturgical celebration where we form the body of Christ, the Church in action. We gain admittance to his company when we share in communion. We gain admittance to Christ's company when we welcome him who comes to us in our neighbor in

their need, which is the only criterion given in the Gospel for the final judgment and admittance to the company of saints.

### **Prayer over the Offerings**

Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings,  
and since we have no merits to plead our cause,  
come, we pray, to our rescue  
with the protection of your mercy.  
Through Christ our Lord.

### **Commentary**

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- The technical language used in this prayer suggests that we stand before the magistrate in need of someone to plead our cause. The merits of our case alone are inadequate to our situation.
- The prayer appears in both the Roman Papal and parish traditions of the seventh century, but only the parish version has the words *of your mercy*, which have been preserved in the current prayer.
- While we offer prayers and offerings however inadequate and ask that the Lord be pleased with these. Our prayers and offerings, however, cannot be used to manipulate God into acting on our behalf, nor are they intended to do so.
- Rather, we stand defenseless and plead that the Lord come to rescue us not out of obligation but because of the abundance of divine mercy. While other prayers over the gifts indicate an ongoing and reciprocal exchange of gifts between God and humanity, this prayer emphasizes the utter gratuity of the divine gift.
- This prayer is offered right before the Eucharistic Prayer begins, and so anticipates the coming of the Lord in the Eucharist who gives his body as our daily bread and his blood as our protection. This bodily self-gift in the form of food and drink that we share rescues us. In anticipation of this utter generosity of the divine gift we offer what we have, prayers of thanksgiving with simple offerings of bread and wine and our ministry of service to our neighbor in their need.
- From this experience we learn that each of us is called to give of ourselves often in relationships that are not mutual and to give not because others have earned what we are capable of giving but because we have learned the ways of abundant mercy.

## **Prayer after Communion**

Replenished by the food of spiritual nourishment,  
we humbly beseech you, O Lord,  
that, through our partaking in this mystery,  
you may teach us to judge wisely the things of earth  
and hold firm to the things of heaven.  
Through Christ our Lord.

## **Commentary**

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- We ask that the communion we have just shared teach us how to conduct ourselves in daily life.
- The early Roman parish tradition assigned this prayer to the first of six Sundays of Advent, but by the time it was included in the seventh-century Papal sacramentary, Advent in Rome had been shortened to four Sundays.
- The prayer begins by reflecting on the communion we have just shared. It is called both food and spiritual nourishment. To partake of the Eucharistic food and drink is to partake in the mystery of Christ's body and blood, and we do so as a community, itself the body of Christ, the Church.
- As we prepare to return to our daily lives, we pray that partaking in this mystery will instruct us in our daily conduct. The Eucharist teaches us that food, as a product of human labor, is intended to be shared, and that this Eucharistic food is at one and the same time the gift of the divine self.
- We learn to value the personal investment inherent in bread and wine and all products of human labor. We learn that offering these simple gifts to God is an expression of offering ourselves to God in response to the personal self-gift of God to us. Thus we partake in this mystery by sharing in this exchange of personal self-gift that is conducted in a community of shared goods.
- The things of heaven include this partaking of communion essential to the Triune Unity of God. We partake of communion in the Church through our vocation, the specific way in which we give ourselves to God and neighbor.
- Partaking in this exchange teaches us to perceive and judge wisely the genuine gift of one's self out of communion with others.