

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Collect

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray,
to attain the joys of so great a salvation,
and to celebrate them always
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Commentary

- In this prayer our attention shifts toward the coming feast of the Lord's Birth or Nativity.
- The prayer is drawn from a fifth- to sixth-century scroll, originally from Ravenna, which contains forty prayers. Over a dozen of its prayers were included in the Advent Christmas cycle of the 1970 Latin edition of the *Roman Missal* and thereafter.
- In this prayer we are aware that God is looking at us, as we look forward to the approaching feast of the Lord's Nativity. So this prayer gives us the opportunity to consider how the members of the Sunday assembly look forward to Christmas.
- This prayer is offered by the whole Church, which includes children, adolescents, adults and seniors. Yet, both the prayer and the feast of the Lord's Nativity have different meaning for a person over the course of one's lifetime.
- Children may be introduced to this mystery by celebrating the birthday of Jesus. This prayer does not focus on the historical birth of Christ, but on its meaning for us today, much as a child's birthday celebrates the life of the child with us.
- As we mature in life we may begin to discover new subtleties in this prayer. As adolescents begin to appreciate the ways in which we are saved, they come to name and to celebrate the joys of our salvation in Christ.

- Adults, through their commitments to others and professional contribution to society may come to share in many ways in the generativity of this feast and may learn from the humility of the Savior.
- Seniors may reflect upon the many Christmas feasts they have celebrated to realize that they have indeed attained the joys of their salvation. They may become aware that all is gift and as of yet incomplete.

Prayer over the Offerings

May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray,
be offered to you unceasingly,
to complete what was begun in sacred mystery
and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work.
Through Christ our Lord.

Commentary

Our sacrifice of worship brings to completion the divine plan of salvation in Christ and accomplishes God's saving work in us.

Originally assigned to a Mass for the September fast in a sixth-century Roman collection of Mass booklets, by the seventh century it was transferred to the Advent season for use in the Roman parish tradition.

The phrase sacrifice of our worship evokes the evening offering of incense and prayer recorded in Psalm 141:2: Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening sacrifice (*New American Bible*). Using incense during the preparation of the gifts reinforces this image of offering a sacrifice of praise. The phrase also evokes a familiar line from Eucharistic Prayer III, which is drawn from the word of the Lord recorded in the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my

name is great among the nations; And everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name, and a pure offering" (*New American Bible*).

The letter to the Hebrews, 13:15, mentions the sacrifice of praise: "Through him (then) let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name." This prayer does just that when it gives the divine name, Lord.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also describes the Eucharist as a "sacrifice of praise', spiritual sacrifice, pure and holy sacrifice" (n.1330).

When we offer a sacrifice of worship the Lord works in us and accomplishes in us our salvation thereby completing in us the sacred mystery. We offer our sacrifice of worship unceasingly, that is, during the liturgy and in daily life.

Prayer after Communion

We implore your mercy, Lord,
that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults
and prepare us for the coming feasts.
Through Christ our Lord.

Commentary

This prayer suggests how the whole liturgy helps us to prepare to celebrate the coming feasts.

In seventh-century Roman parish practice, this prayer, which then included a reference to fasting, was assigned to Tuesday of the second week of Lent, but

the Roman papal practice of the same time assigned this prayer, without the reference to fasting, to its current place on the third Sunday of Advent.

The divine sustenance refers most immediately to the Communion we share in the body and blood of Christ. We share one loaf and one cup and are made into one Body in Christ. This sustenance, then, is also our communion with one another in the Church.

The Prayer After Communion, however, not only concludes the Communion rite, but it also concludes the whole liturgy. In this light, the divine sustenance also refers to the Word of God proclaimed in the scriptures and followed by personal reflection in silence and a common reflection in the homily. The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword and accomplishes its task. We prepare for the coming feasts by gathering as the Body of Christ, by reflecting on the word of God proclaimed in the liturgy, and especially by the Communion we share.

This divine sustenance the body and blood of Christ, our communion as Church, reflecting on the word of God proclaimed these all cleanse us of our faults. We prepare for the coming feasts by being cleansed of our faults and by making amends for our faults. Many parishes provide the opportunity for the Sacrament of Penance in preparation for Christmas.