



Homily for 12/1/2019

First Sunday of Advent

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Advent is divided into two parts. A celebration of the First Coming of Christ at Christmas is the most obvious of the two to us. But the early part of Advent is dedicated to preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church we hear:

§524 When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming."

We see the theme of the Second Coming clearly in the Readings given to us this Sunday:

"The night is far spent, and the Day is near at hand," says St. Paul in today's second Reading. The Gospel describes to us what that "day" will be like. It will be all of a sudden and it will be unexpected, like a thief in the night.

This Second Coming fits seamlessly with the end of the liturgical year, culminating with the Feast of Christ the King of the Universe. However, it is also a theme that makes many of us uncomfortable and a bit squeamish. Humanity in general, and especially our comfort laden affluent world, is somewhat averse to thinking too much about our own mortality. But Christians are invited to keep death daily before our eyes, and it makes us stand out a bit to those who would simply "eat, drink, and be merry." We know that our time on earth is short. We know that our true happiness will not be found here. We understand that justice and pwill not be accomplished under the reign of death that has claimed this world. Our hope lies in "That Day" when Christ will come again. There are technical words that we use that every faithful Catholic Christian should know. One is the Greek word "Parousia". This is a word that means the "Arrival" or "the Coming" and not just the arrival of anyone, but the Arrival of a King or an Emperor. It is translated into Latin as "Adventus", from which we derive the name of this season, "Advent".

The second word we should know is, "Eschaton", another Greek word meaning, "the last day". From it we derive studies such as Eschatology, meaning the study of the end times; or Eschatological, meaning connected with the End Times.

The Last Day for the Catholic Christian should be approached with a reverential fear mixed with hope in what God has in store for His faithful ones. The reverential fear should stem from our sinfulness and the general fallen state of humanity. We believe that Jesus Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. This is what we call the Final Judgement. To this side of the Last Day the Church sings her famous hymn about the End Times called the *Dies Irae*:

Day of wrath and doom impending,
David's word with Sibyl's blending,
Heaven and earth in ashes ending.

Oh, what fear man's bosom rendeth,
When from heaven the Judge descendeth,
On whose sentence all dependeth.

Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth;
Through earth's sepulchres it ringeth;
All before the throne it bringeth.
Death is struck, and nature quaking,
All creation is awaking,
To its Judge an answer making.



Lo, the book, exactly worded,
Wherein all hath been recorded,
Thence shall judgement be awarded.

We should not go into “That Day” with pride or the thought that we could stand on our own before the *Rex Tremendae Maiestatis* - the King of fearsome majesty. But to the reverential fear of “That Day” we attach, by necessity, the theological virtue of hope. We who believe that Jesus Christ came to save us have a cause for rejoicing. The Church continues to sing:

Think, kind Jesu! – my salvation
Caused Thy wondrous Incarnation;
Leave me not to reprobation.

Faint and weary, Thou hast sought me,
On the Cross of suffering bought me.
Shall such grace be vainly brought me?

Through the sinful woman shriven,
Through the dying thief forgiven,
Thou to me a hope hast given.

This is our hope, too. But our hope continues, in that, beyond our personal sanctification, God has beautiful plans in store for all of creation. In the reading from Isaiah today we hear about what Christ’s judgment will mean:

“He shall judge between the nations,
and impose terms on many peoples.
They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
one nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.”

In other words, it will be an end to all war and violence. The New Heaven and new Earth inaugurated on ‘That Day’ will be a time of peace and not of warfare. We should definitely want that and pray that it may come quickly!

So, for these reasons Advent give us the theme of preparation, readiness. What do you do when you know a guest is coming for dinner? And not just any guest, but God Himself means to dine with you, as Jesus dined with the sinner Zacchaeus. If you knew when the thief was coming, you would stay awake and not let your house get broken into. What do we do when a guest is coming? We do know that God is coming and wants to be a guest, not a thief, in your house and in your heart. What steps do you need to take in the way your life is lived to be ready for Him to come at any time? The Christian life should be characterized as vigilance for this Second Coming.

Advent reminds us that we need to be people who have our household in order. By household, I of course mean our affairs in this world: our relationships with other, pure and chaste, our dealings with our neighbors, fair and honest, our participation in society just, kind and charitable. But it also means that we have to have the interior life of the heart in order. Social justice is empty without the essential personal justice that forms the foundation of our relationship with God. Is our heart oriented towards God in all things? Do we ponder on His law in our hearts day and night? Do we commune with Him in prayer? Do we climb the Lord’s Mountain to the House of the God of Jacob that He may instruct us in His ways, and we may walk in His paths?



This is the day, then, for us to begin our preparations. And we do it in the best possible way here in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Again, the Catechism tells us:

§1325 The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit.

§1326 Finally, by the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all.

Grateful, then, for this time of preparation for the Parousia, the Advent of the King of Tremendous Majesty, we are called to train for the Eschaton, the Last Day, to come. To this end it is worth repeating the prayer that we offered at the beginning of Mass: “Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.”