



Homily for 12/22/2019

Fourth Sunday of Advent – More Ancient Form

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The Advent wreath is now fully lit. We have called unto the Lord and kept this vigil for three weeks and now we begin the fourth and last before His coming. This means our Lord is near, as we sing in the Gradual for today's Mass, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him." To mark this nearness, starting on December 17, Mother Church gives us the famous "O Antiphons" that form the verses of the well-known hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel". For the seven days preceding Christmas Eve, we are called to meditate on the imminent coming of Christ in the Flesh, and in the Liturgy of Vespers we mark what this means by naming who Christ is: O Wisdom from on High, O Lord of Might, O Root of Jesse's stem, O Key of David, O Radiant Dawn, O King of all the Nations, O Emmanuel, God with us. It is curious to note that these titles, named in Latin in the Great Antiphons of Advent, form an acrostic. In Latin they are: *O Sapientia, O Adonai, O Radix Jesse, O Clavis David, O Oriens, O Rex Gentium, and O Emmanuel* – this last being sung on December 23. Taking the first letter of each and reversing the order you come up with the phrase, "ERO CRAS", meaning, "Tomorrow, I will be." How wonderful that the Liturgy of the Church is able to sing so beautifully and even mysteriously of the coming of the world's Savior. I invite you to meditate on how the Lord has formed an acrostic out of your own life by means of the various times you have encountered him along the journey, even if only in hindsight. How many times have we encountered His Divine Providence and not fully realized that it was the Lord? But these tiny hidden gifts of His almighty arm spell out the message to us of a Loving God who cares for us as His very own children.

But we must join with the Church in willing and wanting God's salvation to come to us even here and now. Our hearts sing with the Introit, "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down the just one; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior." These words sing poetically about the coming of Christ as a shoot in a garden that has been watered by rain from above. On a spiritual level, our hearts are to be the fertile ground into which Christ is planted and watered in our souls like a seed at our baptism. We pray for the Glory of God to drop down into our own minds and hearts to give us new life.

However, we have to guard against the weeds that can get in and choke out this new growth; to guard against all that will prevent this new birth in our souls. The Collect bids us pray, "Stir up thy power and come, we pray thee, and with great might succor us; that our deliverance, **which our sins impede**, may be hastened by the help of thy grace and the forgiveness of thy mercy." We have to do our part to cooperate with God's Grace. Our sins impede and hinder God's saving work in us. Now is the time to repent and to bear the cross of suffering as we die to our old sinful ways. Relying on God's mercy for our past failures and cooperating with His grace in the present we must strive to increase in virtue, to till the garden of our soul, so to speak; to prepare a good seedbed for God to bear the fruit of holiness in us.

We rightly speak of good fruit as the end for which God has saved us. In the Offertory, we will sing, "Hail Mary, full of grace: The Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." But Mary is not the only one called to bear fruit; she is simply the first. Mary conceived Christ in her womb so that all humanity might conceive Christ in their souls by faith. Mary bears Christ to the world so that all humanity might bear the fruit of holiness now in the world by means of her only begotten Son. This is the Church's earnest prayer, and we will repeat this desire in the Postcommunion prayer, "Having received thy gifts, we beseech thee, O Lord, that with the frequentation of the mystery, the work of our salvation may increase."

Today, as we pray and offer the Holy Sacrifice of the New Covenant to God, may we rejoice in His saving work among us and make straight the paths in the valleys and hills our hearts for our Lord to come!