

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent-C**

Prepare the way of the Lord!  
Make straight His paths!  
We have three weeks!

In three weeks, we celebrate the coming of the Lord. According to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Advent must prepare us for three comings of Christ: in flesh in the manger, in spirit and sacrament, and in glory and majesty. Today, I want to look at our own response to each of them.

The prophet Baruch calls Jerusalem — and so too us, for “Jerusalem” in the prophets is a call to the entire Church — to take off the robe of mourning and misery. In the modern age, that robe is sin. Which of us has not, at some point, fallen short of the faithful love that God extends to each of us? Paul reminded the Romans (and us) “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Do not be afraid, though. Here, at St. Mary, Mother of the Church, we will have our Advent Reconciliation Service on Friday, December 11<sup>th</sup>. If we haven’t already started to prepare our hearts to celebrate the coming of our Lord, what better way could there be than to go to confession?

The love of the Lord is faithful. God, the Father of Mercies, has sent his Son into the world for the forgiveness of sins, so we come to Him, sinful and sorrowful, to take off that robe of mourning and misery to be made clean in Christ through the ministry of His Church. We are then prepared to celebrate his coming among us in the flesh, in spirit, and in glory.

When Jesus came among us on that first Christmas, the climax of God’s work of salvation — perhaps the longest play in history — began to take shape. A unique moment in history, God took our flesh; the Son became one of us and was like us in all things but sin. It seems like a dream! How can we possibly respond with anything but joyful thanksgiving!?

Our salvation is at hand. In Christ, we have been adopted as sons and daughters of the Father. When we were baptized, Christ came into our hearts for the first time in a very real way. We were grafted onto Christ’s body and filled with the Holy Spirit. This is Saint Bernard’s second coming; Christ dwells in each of our hearts today!

But that second coming is (and must be) ongoing. If we do not let our baptism constantly work in us, if our baptism becomes something only in the past—and let's face it, all of us often let that happen—we again cast off the "splendor of glory from God, the mantle of justice, and the diadem of the glory of the Eternal One." And so we instead willingly clothe ourselves in that robe of mourning and misery. Instead of living in that second coming of Christ, we mire it in the morass of sin; we hide from Christ in our lives, and He becomes obscured in our frantic activity.

We all fall into that, but that is why we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That is why the Lord continues to make Himself available to us in an ongoing way in the Eucharist. This is St. Bernard's second coming of Christ: the constant working of Christ in the world, coming into our hearts in Spirit, Truth, and Sacrament.

When a person receives communion just before they die, we call it viaticum, the food for the journey. But each time we receive the body and blood of our Lord, when we approach the altar in the Mass as we will do in a few minutes, it is also food for the journey, food for our pilgrimage on earth, our journey to God's Kingdom so that, at Christ's third coming, we can meet him with joy.

It is in that pilgrimage of life that we look to the One who, in baptism, began the good work in each of us will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus, the third coming for which we prepare, His coming in glory. Today we sow in tears; we suffer and fight through this life. But, when Christ comes again, we will reign with Him, and then our mouths will be filled with laughter. If we persevere, our tongues will sing for joy. If we hold fast, we shall see the salvation of God.

We have to steer clear of the trap in which Advent is just about waiting for Sweet Little Baby Jesus on Christmas. It certainly is that, but it is so much more. This preparation in Advent is the time for us to heed the words of the voice of one crying out in the desert – and our world certainly has become a howling desert:

Prepare the way of the Lord,  
Make straight His paths,  
and make the rough ways smooth.

That is why — Today. Right now. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Not as a New Year's Resolution. Today — each and every one of us must cast off our old lives, reconcile with our Heavenly Father, go to confession if we have serious sin on our conscience, and so cast off the robe of mourning and misery, so that we may put on the splendor of glory from God, wrap ourselves in the mantle of His justice, and don the diadem of the glory of the Eternal One. Not only for the joyful coming of Christ in a manger, but for His glorious return, the end purpose of our faith, "The blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

The Lord has already done great things for us.

Will we be ready to greet him with cries of joy and thanksgiving when He returns to take us home?

- Fr. David M. Chiantella