

Advent 2: Saturday

Christ the Redeemer

15 December 2018

Dear Monsignor Smith, and brother deacons, candidates and aspirants accompanied by your wives and children: dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

It is as always a great pleasure to be with you to celebrate the Eucharist with you – what we can call “the permanent diaconate family.” Truly you are a blessing to the life of our Archdiocese. It is now difficult to imagine how we managed to survive without the presence of the diaconal ministry in our parishes and in the various apostolic works in which deacons are engaged.

I am very, very grateful to Monsignor Smith and his collaborators for the leadership they have demonstrated in setting up and overseeing the permanent diaconate program which, I am convinced, is among the best – if not *the* best – in Canada. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to the diaconate, a ministry which so clearly shows to us the servant ministry of Jesus continued in the Church.

High on the list of those to whom I owe enormous gratitude are you, dear wives of our permanent deacons and of those still in formation. Your support, your prayers, and your many, many sacrifices – which are so often hidden and unrecognized – are deeply appreciated. Without you and your families, we would not have the diaconal ministry would not have sunk such deep roots into the life of our local Church.

Thank you for your patience and standing by your husbands in their long period of formation and in carrying out the responsibilities of their ministry.

Advent

As a liturgical season, Advent unfolds in two steps, both of which are focussed on the coming of our God, though in different ways.

Its early weeks direct us to await with joyful hope the great Coming of the Lord in glory and majesty at the end of the ages. This Coming is what we profess in our Creed, perhaps unknowingly: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” And in today’s Preface we shall pray that as Christian believers we are watching “for that day” – a reference to the Coming in glory – when, as it states, all at last will be made manifest, and we will inherit “the great promise in which now we dare to hope”; that is the Kingdom of God.

In this perspective of looking ahead, to the “not yet” of both personal and collective history, Advent is a time of expectation and hope. It pushes us to reflect on the future, when the history of salvation will finally come to its end when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

Advent, therefore, is a good time for us to ask about what we mean by hope, and I mean a hope that is neither vague nor the unfounded optimism of “sunny ways.” What makes our hope certain and reliable? Advent prepares us for the answer. Because it is “anchored” in Jesus

Christ, the Incarnation of the Son of God made man in Bethlehem of Judea.¹

The latter days of Advent, therefore, switch our attention to this birth in the flesh of this God made man, Emmanuel. First John the Baptist comes to the fore, as we heard once again in today's Gospel. Then Mary appears, gradually replacing both accounts of the coming in glory of the Son of Man and of John the Baptist's cry that we prepare the way of the Lord and make straight paths for the imminent arrival of the Messiah (cf. Mt 3:3-4).

The Preface which we shall use from Monday onwards speaks of Mary as "the Virgin Mother [who] longed for him with love beyond all telling."

These days of Advent, then, look to the past, to a real event in the world's history: the birth of the Child Jesus. It's only because of this event that we can have a sure hope for the Lord's Coming in glory. How could we have that hope, if we were not certain that he had truly lived among us and died for our salvation?

God's Search for Us in Advent

Before a word on the Gospel, just one more thought (always just one more!) about Advent. It is a season of preparation, but not of

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers (1 December 2007).

pretending, not of pretending that Christ is someone absent and humanity is waiting for his arrival.

On the contrary, in the season of Advent we should recall not our search for a distant God, but his search for us. We human beings are not on a journey to find a distant God enthroned remotely in the heavens and found only with the greatest difficulty. Rather, the preparation for Christmas tells us something much more wonderful: that God has come down to us to search for us and to care for us.

Advent, then, is not about our search for God or simply about waiting for his coming. We need not imagine that he is far from us and unconcerned with us. The wonder of the Incarnation tells us exactly the opposite. He is with us in the “now” of every moment of our lives.

The one true God, the living God, is the-God-who-comes-to-us.

“He is a Father who never stops thinking of us and . . . desires to meet us and visit us; he wants to come, to dwell among us, to stay with us. His ‘coming’ is motivated by the desire to free us from evil and death, from all that prevents our true happiness. God comes to save us.”²

Coming Down From the Mount of Transfiguration

Today’s Gospel situates us just after the one recorded episode when three of the disciples beheld the glory of Jesus’ transfiguration.

² Benedict, Homily at Vespers (2 December 2006).

They ask Jesus about Elijah, whom they saw with him on the mountain of Tabor. Indeed, Jesus replies, in line with the teaching of the scribes of his day, Elijah will come to prepare the way for the Messiah. However, Jesus adds, in contrast to the scribes' teaching, "but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him" (Mt 17:12).

Who was this Elijah? It was John the Baptist (cf. Mt 17:13). The people missed his coming. They did not heed his call for repentance.

But notice that even this failure to recognize the signs of the coming of the Messiah, does not compromise Jesus' mission. He goes forward to accomplish what he had set out to do: establish the Kingdom of God. But not in the ways expected. The Kingdom would come through suffering: beheading for the Baptist and the Cross for Jesus.

The point to make here is that the coming of God into our lives, amidst the joy and consolation he gives, also inevitably involves suffering. No good thing, no saving action, is accomplished without some suffering, difficulty or challenge. Advent introduces this note, not as a central theme, but as a reminder of what being a fully committed disciple entails.

Conclusion

As we continue this Eucharist, let us give thanks to the Lord that he has searched us out, that he has enabled us to recognize his presence in our lives and that he has given us a firm hope that his "Coming" both

in glory and in the flesh is a saving action, “for us men and for our salvation.”

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
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