

Advent 1

I take as my text today from the Collect:

....give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility....

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, my Lord and my Redeemer.

Here today, we are beginning a new year in the life of the Church, and, as with any new year, there are expectations — a better life, prosperity, good health, new friends, not unlike a secular new year, though our focus is on the spiritual — a new year brings with it many expectations as we move from the past to the future.

Soon, we will experience the excitement of our secular new year different in tone; but, from our Christian standpoint, should it be?

Should our expectations be different, simply because one celebration is religious and the other, for all practical purposes, secular?

As Christians, we experience life in two worlds, spiritual and physical — our Christian Duality — and it is an ever increasing secular world.

We Christians constantly strive to maintain a balance between the physical and the spiritual; between the secular and the religious; between here and hereafter. Essentially, we go through life as if it were a balancing act.

And, in the midst of this balancing act, there stands a truth, an immutable truth. The Collect for this First Sunday in Advent alludes to it. St. Paul, in the passage from Romans, is more pointed:

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Indeed, as we begin a new Christian Year, we must pause and take time to reflect on what we are constantly sidestepping — our own mortality.

The Collect for this Sunday, the Epistle and Gospel, each serve in some sense to focus us on that one aspect of our humanity, what all of Creation faces, that we are mortal beings; our earthly, physical existences is temporary. As the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, we are here today and gone tomorrow.

That is a very basic, stark reality — we do not know the time that we will depart from this earthly life, not the year, much less the day, hour, and minute. It could be right now, or years from now.

Thus, as we begin this ecclesiastical new year, the question that we must face is: are we prepared for that moment?

Not a material or physical preparation where we consider our estates, our wills, our, quote, “preparation for death”; no, it’s a spiritual preparation, though we cannot fail to take into account our dual nature as both physical and spiritual beings.

Indeed, as we go through life, we are continually performing a balancing act that keeps our two natures in accord with each other — the spiritual and the physical.

The Christian year serves to keep us focused on who we are and what we are: sojourners making our way home to be united with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It’s a journey of love and expectation, the way made straight by our Lord through His great Sacrifice on the Cross.

In a sense, the *Season of Advent* refocuses us on our duality as Christians, bringing to our attention that all important basic finality we must face: our mortality; while, at the same time, provides clues on how to keep our lives in balance.

During Advent, we prepare ourselves spiritually to celebrate two momentous events: the *First Coming* of our Lord, and His *Second Coming*. We celebrate the past and the future.

With the first, we celebrate a loving Saviour and Redeemer; with the second, we celebrate a loving Judge.

Through His *First Coming*, Jesus Christ showed us the way to live a balanced life in this world while, at the same time, preparing for the second.

St. Paul puts it very simply, “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.” By imitating the life of our Saviour, to the best of our ability, we will bring our lives into balance, the balance beam being love.

Love — that is what keeps us whole in both our natures, the physical and the spiritual.

As we prepare to celebrate the past, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, we will be celebrating the revelation of the *Love of God* to all mankind. Through his Son, God revealed to the world the extent of his love for all his Creation, and to what lengths he would go to reconcile us to him.

This reconciliation was to be different from what mankind could ever imagine: it is based on love and all its attributes, on God’s *Gift of Grace*; it is the shedding of a new light on and in the world.

That light shined forth from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to encompass all God’s Creation. For us, it is a matter of putting on the *Armor of Light* that will protect us from the world and light our pathway through life itself.

In the Collect, we beseech God to clothe us in the *Armor of Light* so that we may cast away the works of darkness; thus clothed we will be prepared for the Second Coming, the Loving Judgment, that awesome moment when our souls will be required. There will be no fear, for we will be in the *Light*, our dual nature united.

In darkness there is fear; but love, joy, and eternal bliss abide in the *Light*.

The armor of light is Jesus Christ Himself; putting on the armor of light is to become like Him. He is to be our pattern for life, our example. Our Lord is the opposite of darkness, being temperate, chaste, pure, peaceable, and meek. To put on Christ, as we would a garment, is to imitate Him, to become ourselves temperate, chaste, pure, peaceable, and meek.

This leads us to the beginning of this particular passage from Paul's Letter,

OWE no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Our only debt should be "love." It is a debt that can never be discharged. We should feel that we owe this debt to all mankind and that it is ever with us so long as there is an opportunity to do good, to show kindness, to do no ill to our neighbor.

The power of love becomes so apparent in this passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

We were created out of love; we were redeemed out of love; and we will be judged on the final day out of love.

Advent is a reminder that we must not lose sight of the Second Coming and that we must keep it in proper perspective with the great event we are to celebrate at Christmas. In one we commemorate the past, in the other the future.

The great beauty and comfort of this hope of the Church is in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is He that came into the world to save; He who shared our humanity; it is He who will be our judge. In His divinity we can be assured that He will judge us fairly; and in His humanity, we can be assured that He will judge us tenderly.

Here, during Advent, we are able to contemplate a dual reality of our faith and hope in the Church:

First the reality that Jesus Christ came in great humility as Saviour of the world, taking our flesh, our humanity upon Himself;

Second, the reality that Jesus Christ will come again, at His second Epiphany, “with power and great glory’ at the day of the general Resurrection when we shall be judged with God's perfect justice, and with man's perfect sympathy.”

These few weeks of Advent are an appropriate time to re-examine ourselves, to look within; look into our minds, our hearts, and our souls. Have we incorporated Jesus Christ into our inner being? Not, do we just know in our minds that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour, but in our hearts, down deep in our souls, do we feel He is present? How well do we reflect God’s love revealed through his Son who is the Light of the World?

...now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.