Advent2(2022)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Tuesday is St. Nicholas day. He was a 4th Century Greek saint who lived in Myra on the southern coast of Turkey. St. Nicholas' parents died during an epidemic and he was raised by his uncle, a bishop himself who later ordained him.

When Nicholas became a bishop he was a defender against the great Arian heresy which held that Jesus was the son of God but created by Him and not **pre**-existing. Thus, Jesus was NOT God's equal.

Among many other legends good saint Nick was known to put coins into folks' shoes which had been left outside. This might have also contributed to the beginning of the birth of his namesake: St. Nick, ala Santa Claus. In many parts of the world St. Nicholas day is a day of joy for children. In Germany children typically receive a chocolate St. Nick.

St. Nicholas as well as his relics are associated with many miracles and thus he is often nicknamed: The Wonderworker. He died at the then ancient age of 73. Some of his relics are in Bari, Italy near Naples. The rest, however, are in Venice. St. Nicholas is one of the most popular saints in the Church, both East and West.

*"When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is night at hand." +*

Our lessons and prayers in Advent are ancient. They come from the medieval English *Sarum Missal*, named after Salisbury cathedral in SW England. Other than a slight lengthening of the lessons the English Reformers so no reason to change or alter these at all. Our collect was translated by Archbishop Cranmer himself in the mid 1500s.

While it probably is not readily apparent, the lessons for Advent actually build upon each other. In last week's Gospel when we heard about Jesus cleansing the Temple, which followed the Gospel about his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. So, last week we had a theme of awakening or cleansing our own temple within us. Today the theme is that the dwelling within us of the Word within us is actually ground for hope in this transient life and world.

Our Gospel passage for today comes from St. Luke and is as relevant to us in the 21st Century as to Jesus' Apostles in the First. We each know by our own lives that we live in a fading world. (Certainly this year seems more faded and darker than any I can remember.)

Every day we grow older and closer to our own end. We ponder how much longer we will live where we are; we wonder about what is beyond this life. But we may also wonder what will become of this world, this universe which we each will exit in less than fifty years.

Jesus speaks quite plainly that at some future point there "shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear". He neither speaks conditionally nor uses the subjunctive mood, as we might remember hazily from way back in high school English class. He does not indicate that all this MIGHT or COULD happen implying that the opposite also is possible. No. He says, "there **shall** be signs in the sun, etc."

When you get down to it this is quite an indictment of mankind. The world that was built for us and which once was perfect in harmony for us **and** with us will be destroyed or seriously overhauled. The evil which came into this world in Eden and in which we live and move eventually will lead to our world's demise.

Of course if one knew for certain that that moment were just around the corner no one would bother paying his utility or credit card bills or sending in estimated tax forms next month. Whether folks would party the time away is also unknown, although for the most part I doubt it.

One only has to think of those we have come to know that they are living under a "death sentence" such as cancer. Usually they henceforth lead razor focused lives to the end spending their limited time only with family and the most important things of life.

Just as we do not know the hour of our own departure from this world, it is not for us "to know the times or the seasons" for the departure **of** this world. Yet, in knowing that our own lives fade and that this world's own life fades lies **hope**. It is not obviously an earthly hope, but an eternal hope. It is the hope of a better world for ourselves and for mankind.

The source of this hope is not to be found in **this** world. We can actually learn the source of this hope from, of all places, *Dante's Inferno*. I'm sure we all know the story of Dante's trip through hell with his ever logical guide, the Roman poet, Virgil. (Today it would probably be Commander Data.) Over the entrance to hell is a sign reading, "abandon hope all ye who enter here".

The sign of course obviously suggests that a new arrival is not going to enjoy himself here. But it also suggests the way out. By abandoning hope of getting to paradise all by yourself **without** God you will reach Paradise. Indeed, Satan is at the very bottom of hell frozen in ice caused by his wings flapping trying to carry him back up to the gate. Yet, Dante and Virgil exit from hell into Purgatory and onto Paradise the **other** way, simply by going behind Satan's heels since he is aimed the wrong direction.

So too for us lies hope. Realizing that real happiness, with or without a pandemic, is just not possible in this life but lies beyond and **with** God brings us out of the chaos of our daily life. This awakening is possible only because of Jesus' presence in our souls through baptism. Jesus is the source and seed of our hope in a fading human life and a fading world.

The implications of this are large for us and for the Church. Individually it means we must not be seduced by the world into believing that lasting happiness is possible while our hearts beat. If it were, one bottle of super wine would last our lifetime. As I pointed out several weeks ago, pleasure is sensual and transitory, unlike happiness.

As we know all too well, people seek paradise here by getting what pleases them, that which appeals to their passions usually temporary pleasure; this they obtain by **power** over things, people or objects. Power or influence exists in money, fame, looks, brute force, and what the King James' calls "guile" a/k/a deception.

Yet, all that power obtains is transient. Athletic ability wanes, beauty fades, and great bottles of wine turn into vinegar. In short, nothing of human nature or of human making lasts for centuries, much less forever. This is why hospitals were started, fashions change, and Botox was invented.

Likewise the Church needs to not be lead astray. It should not be seduced into earthly "relevance". Being important in individuals daily pursuits of transient earthly happiness without Jesus... is a false path. Earthly relevance will make the Church **irrelevant** to heaven. No other institution of human beings points otherworldly whether it be legislatures, courts, businesses, or fraternal organizations, only the Church.

In short, the goal for us is also true for the Church: to be IN the world but not OF the world. We and the Church should not ignore problems around us, like Lazarus and the rich man. But, they are not to be the center of our life. Not even family should take center stage in our life. As has often been said, "the danger to the best is always the SECOND best".

As we advance through this Advent and the end of Covid let us ponder the transitoriness of our world, our personal life, and yes, even the mighty Rocky Mountains. This should help us appreciate the threefold coming of Jesus which we actually are witnessing in December.

St. Aquinas noted, in Advent we witness Jesus a) coming in the flesh, b) his coming into our lives, and c)his coming in judgment. With that said we need to conclude that "worldliness", that attribute viewed as **most** important in life, ultimately is foolishness. We and the Church need instead always to keep "other worldliness" forefront in our minds. Amen. +