

Advent 1 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
Pusey House, 2017 GDW
Micah 4:1-7, Ps. 25:1-9, Romans 13:8-14, St Matthew 21:1-13

And the multitudes that went before ... cried, ... Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.



On the front of your bulletins there is a detail from a mosaic in Monreale, Sicily. On the left, we see a representation of today's Gospel. Christ comes meek and lowly and sitting up an ass. The children cast garments in front of them. One of them is up the tree plucking off palm branches and letting them fall. On the right of the image on the bulletin, we see a small portion of a mosaic of the Last Supper. The halo proclaims that the One who sits at table is not just a human person, but the Living One, the Wisdom of God who 'reaches from one end to another, mightily and sweetly ordering all things'. He stretches out his right hand to bless the bread on the table. The beloved disciple St John leans on his breast, on Him who St John the Gospel-writer describes as 'in the bosom of the Father' (Jn 1.18). These are not simply two scenes from the later part of Christ's ministry, they are not put together by accident. Rather, they represent something of the logic of the Advent Lessons. Christ's coming to the Holy city Jerusalem is not simply a past event. He comes now, he comes to the Church, the Holy City, he comes as it were through that door at the centre of the image of the bulletins where the crowd is gathered to greet him. He comes from eternal communion of love, at the Right Hand of Father, He comes through the door of time and history, and emerges at the Last Supper which is also the Holy Communion. The mosaic shows us what only the eye of faith and wisdom can grasp: the same Divine Son comes today through that door of time and eternity, and He becomes present in the Bread which His word speaks and blesses, He comes in the cup which is the out-pouring of His blood. We do not see the donkey, but we do see the humble symbols of bread and wine. He comes, meek and lowly and sitting veiled in the symbols of bread and wine. Every time

we pray and sing *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*, we are invited to wake up out of sleep, to open our eyes to what is there to be known and received. Christ's presence among us is hidden until the eye of our faith is woken up. Let me encourage you not just to listen to the choir sing *Benedictus qui venit*, but to pray with them. Pray with expectation that the Lord is indeed coming and will come to His Church and to the Temple of your soul. This is not some second-best metaphor since the real thing is over and past. Christ comes, in a different mode to the way he came to the Holy city, but He nonetheless comes to us in the sacrament of his body and blood. He speaks to us in a different mode than that by which He proclaimed His coming in the Temple, but He nonetheless speaks to us in the words which speak one Word. He really does come, He is here, not less real, nor less present. Christ is present by the Holy Spirit which makes every one who is joined to him in faith and in baptism the dwelling place of God: *know ye not*, says St Paul, *that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you*

How does the message that Christ is coming now become real for us? Even the most precious promise which words can convey can pass by us, and leave us cold. Or, to put this another way, what does it mean to wake up? The message of the Advent of Christ is given to us in two ways this morning. One the one hand, we are given a description of Christ coming to Jerusalem in a particular way at a particular time. This history becomes the lens through which we see our own history. On the other hand, this message is given to us in another way: We are invited to love one another, for the one who loves fulfils the law. These two things are really the same message. The message to love one another is the interior reality which the visit of Christ to the Holy city and to the Temple manifests in a different way. This interior reality, the presence of Christ in the soul, the transformation of our interior reality according to the love of God, makes the Advent message real for us. The manifestation in history is matched by the manifestation of the same Word of God in our souls and in the interior life of the Church.

How then does the outward manifestation become the inner reality? The bridge which connects the coming of Christ to the Holy City, and the transformation of our souls in the image of His love, is there in the cleansing of the temple. The visit of Christ to the Temple pictures the re-ordering of love.

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple; and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves

What Christ does in the Temple shows us what St Paul means when he says *owe no man any thing, but to love one another*

The problem our Lord finds in the Temple is not that the people were engaged in trade and commerce, but that a corrupt form of trade and commerce had taken over the life of the Temple: *It is written, by House shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves*. The work of the house and temple of God, the work of the soul, is prayer. Or, to put it another way, owe no man but to love one another. Prayer, 'in its most fundamental sense ... means willing God's will, which is love. Anything short of this is a sort of [robbery]'¹

All our specific or discreet acts of prayer, are a kind of reaching out to God. In that tough exchange between what we seek and what we find, in our hopes and prayers for others, in

¹*Advent Meditations*, Rev'd Dr. Robert D. Crouse, Originally presented for the Prayer Book Society of Canada, Nova Scotia/Prince Edward Island Branch Advent 2002 Institute, held at St. George's Round Church, November 30, 2002.
<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/advent1/Crouse1to4.html>

our listening to a biblical message which does not just console and inform but also challenges, knock us about, and sometimes just confuses us, in our attempts to walk in the way of love and to fulfil the commandments, and in our failures to do the same, in all these ways how we love, and what we love is shaped.

This love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling, it has a content and a reality. The content of this loving is Christ, the one who perfectly loves the Father and who so perfectly loves the world. The love which we are called to live is a participation in this reality. Human loving which shares in God's good purposes is nothing less than a sharing in the communion of eternal love by which the Son loves the Father in the bond of Love which is the Holy Spirit.² 'The love that fulfils the law is not a matter of sentiment, or emotion, or affection; it is a matter of will. To love one another is to will the eternal good of another, as that eternal good is objectively manifest and understood in the clear light of the Advent of the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ.'

The tables need to be turned upside down, the wrong things which we want, or which preoccupy us, need to be cleared away so that the good things which God wants for us and for the world can be properly placed and ordered.

Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet.

We may not kill, but in the life-giving light of Christ we can recognize how hatred or resentment poisons and kills. We may not bear false witness exactly, but the perfect Truth of Christ reveals the way little lies and exaggerations corrupt or break down trust. We may not commit adultery exactly, but the self-giving love of Christ shows us the different ways we can use others to get what we want.

And if we have killed, or committed adultery, or borne false witness, or coveted, then the Word of God speaks to us also, and offers forgiveness and restoration. The coming of Christ is not a threat, it is a promise. That is also the message of sacramental confession. The world which does not wish to limit the content of love is also quick to condemn and destroy. Christ comes not just to overturn tables, but also to set them aright and to furnish them with nothing less than all the fruits of His endless life. Holy Wisdom has not only '***killed her beasts***', hers is not just a work of judgement, ***she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.***³

It is a very counter-cultural thing to keep these weeks leading up to Christmas in any way as a season of repentance and reflection.⁴ There are some materials on the table in the cloister which you are welcome to take, which may help us to connect the outward manifestation with the inner reality.

Christ comes through the door of time and eternity to be present in the Sacrament of His body and blood. He does not simply reorder from the outside, he works on the inside, the food and light of our souls. Christ speaks in the words of the Scriptures which bear witness to him, and which help us to recognize his grace and his truth in all the different situations of life. In the exchange of hope and fear which goes on within us, in the shaping of our conscience, Christ comes and speaks to us. His life and His love is shaped within us as we are shaped in the love which loves God perfectly and which loves our neighbour perfectly.

²Robert Crouse, Sermon 2 for Advent 1, Lectionary Central.

³***She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table*** Wisdom 9.2

⁴Indeed, a Church that encourages such an inward turn can look churlish or grumpy. On the other hand, this turning over the tables is not a kind of stamping out of celebration. Rather, the shaping of our souls according to love and wisdom is a way to enter into the joy of the feast. But that is too soon. First, we are simply asked if we can recognize ourselves in any way in the description of Christ's coming which we have heard today. But whatever we do, we need to know that even the message of promise cannot be imposed on us from the outside.

I have said that this loving is not just a warm fuzzy feeling, it is not sentiment, but it is sweetness and light. In the words of Julian of Norwich:

But when our courteous Lord of His grace sheweth Himself to our soul, we have that [which] we desire.

[The soul] is oned into the sight and beholding of Him to whom we pray; marvellously enjoying with reverent dread, and with so great sweetness and delight in Him ... And well I [know]⁵, the more the soul seeth of God, the more it desireth Him by His grace.

... And then shall we all come into our Lord, our Self clearly knowing, and God fully having; and we shall endlessly be all had in God: Him verily seeing and fully feeling, Him spiritually hearing, and Him delectably in-breathing, and [of] Him sweetly drinking.⁶

The advent of Christ is not a threat, it is a promise.

Let us pray: Visit and cleanse, we beseech thee, O Lord, the hearts of thy people, that when thy Son of our Lord Jesus Christ comes, today, and at His second coming to judge the quick and the dead, He may find in us a mansion and a temple prepared for Himself, through the same thy Son JC our Lord, who with thee and the H.S. liveth and reigneth one God, world w/t end. Amen.

⁵ 'wot'

⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, chp XLII