

ADVENT 1

IN THE MEEKNESS OF HIS COMING

Text: Matt. 21:1, Romans 8:8

“All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the fold of an ass.”

As we anticipate the coming of our Lord on this the first Sunday of Advent, I pray our hearts will be filled with the joy of the celebration of the birth of Our Lord, for in Him is our hope, our trust, our salvation and our obedience. AMEN

What an entry! Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Shouts from the crowd of “Hosanna to the King of David and Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” This was His triumphant entry into the Holy City. This was His coming in glory to those He loved. Yet, a short time later, the shouts would turn to jeers and the cries of “Crucify Him!” would replace the calls of Hosanna. Soon He was to begin the journey on the road to Calvary and His death upon the cross for us.

What does this have to do with Advent? Is this not a season of happiness? A time of rejoicing? For all of us, there needs to be a realization that the road to Calvary did not begin with our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem but with His birth. The laying of a little child into a manger of wood would lead to the nailing of our Lord to a cross of wood. The sacrifice of our Lord for us needs to be in the forefront of our minds in the joy of this season. It is not the gifts at Christmas, but our Lord’s gift on Good Friday that needs to be understood in our celebration of this season.

Jesus came to us as a child to fulfill the Law. St. Paul in His letter to the Romans says that “we owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law....if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in his saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is fulfilling of the law.” The love of Christ for us was demonstrated by His hanging on the cross for us to pay the debt of our sins. Our joy in His coming should be in our full recognition of what He has given us in that sacrifice.

They took our Lord and they scourged Him, beating Him with whips until He was so weak He could hardly stand. The soldiers who beat Him, placed a crown of thorns on His head, and a fake scepter in His hand. They mocked Him: “Hail, King of the Jews,” they called out to him as they spit on Him and bowed in false reverence. Jesus stood there in front of Pilate and heard the crowd call for Barabas’s release. He heard the crowd shout for His crucifixion. These were the people He loved, had healed, had fed and had blessed with His message of God’s love and peace. These were the same people who were now looking to see Him die a gruesome death. He dragged Himself to Calvary, He lay there bleeding as they drove the spikes through His wrists and feet. They lifted Him up as He said they would. He hung there, gasping for breath. As the blood flowed from His body, and life slipped away, He asked our Father above to “forgive them for they did not know what they were doing.”

In our moment of salvation, He cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” For in that moment, God turned His back on His own son for us. To all His children, then, now and through the ages, was given the gift of eternal life through that terrible moment of sacrifice. All of this because of His love for us. That is the fulfillment of the law that God gave His people. So that in the words of Isaiah, that “we should be comforted.”

Who knew but God that His beautiful birth would lead to this terrible death? Who knows, but God, where our own lives will go? But in His love for us, we are not asked to go it alone. Too often we find ourselves confronting pain, suffering, sickness or death and wonder how we will survive, how we will deal with what life has given us, how will we make it. No burden was greater than our Lord’s suffering for us, He gives us peace in our hearts in our own sufferings. To the faithful He promises to ease our burden, to hold us up and to embrace us with His love. When we put our trust in Him, we are never alone, never

forsaken and never abandoned. In our love for Him, in our thanksgiving for the blessings He fills our life with, we should ask, what can we offer Him for all He has done for us?

We know there is nothing we can do to repay Him for His sacrifice for us. We know there is nothing we can do to earn salvation. But He does offer us a clear picture of God's expectations as we seek to do His work because of our faith.

In the Gospel of St. John, those gathered around Christ ask Him, "what must we do to do the work God requires?" Jesus replies, The work of God is this, to believe in the one He has sent." (John 6:28-29).

To believe! To accept without question, to put our trust in Him as a child puts his or her trust in their own parents. But sometimes that task is so much more difficult than we think. Too often we are confronted with the harsh realities of life. We sometimes allow these to draw us away from God and overshadow His promises to us.

I have spent a fair amount of time with people facing their death. Death is certainly something we fear for many reasons but most of all because it challenges our faith. As we watch those we love die, we feel the emptiness that comes upon us but how often do we ask ourselves the question, "is it all true? Is our loved one truly in God's hands? Do I really believe in all the promises that God has made us?" Of course its true. Through Him, we can face all that life throws at us without fear. That is when we know we have developed the faith of a little child.

But never let ourselves think ourselves righteous because that is when evil can grab hold of us and separate us from God. Speaking of those who believe they have all the answers or place themselves above God, St. Paul tells us in Romans, "No one is righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves, their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is in their lips, their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery are their ways, and the way of peace they do not know, there is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:9-18)

Jesus saw that in the cleansing of the temple. Religion had become a business, the desire of God had been replaced by the desire of man. "My house shall be called a house of prayer, yet you have made it a den of thieves." How often we see this in our churches and denominations that have abandoned God and placed the will of man in the center of their religion. The Bible has been relegated to a book of stories, the creeds to guidelines, worship to entertainment. God no longer remains the center of faith, man is. Is there any wonder why so many are lost, so many feel abandoned, so many have turned from God. How often the true measure of God's love for us is replaced by man's vision of himself. That is when love fails, because man fails.

"Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind and with all your soul, this is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

There is nothing complicated about love. There is nothing complicated about God's love for us. There should not be anything complicated about our love for one another. That is the true mark of Christianity. To love without judging, to love unconditionally and to love without question. That is the example God has given to us. When we fail to do that, we ignore what our Savior is trying to teach us and we turn from Him.

As we ponder His coming, let us ponder our commitment to Him. What is the true measure of our dedication to God in our appreciation for all that He has given us. What shall we bring to the stable in Bethlehem? In the practice of our faith, let it be no less than ourselves, our souls and our bodies, to be a living sacrifice to Him.

True commitment on our part to love Him, trust Him, put our faith in Him and in our unworthiness, to accept Him and the gift of salvation poured out on us through His grace. As He committed Himself to us in His birth which would lead to the cross, let us walk with Him again, beginning this Advent season, with all that we have to offer. May each day bring us closer to Him in our repentance and our recommitment of ourselves. May we be shining examples of all the love He has bestowed on us. And as our prayers this morning ask of Him, may He give us “grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light.”

To Him, may all honor and glory be given, by each of us, today and always. AMEN