

SALVATION'S ADVENT

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

And with this, all of you know the season, that hour has come [in which] all of you were raised from sleep. For now, for us, the salvation is nearer than when we believed.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Today we celebrate Salvation's Advent. The season of hope, peace, joy, and love begins today in Christ's Church. It is a new year of our Lord. Beginning today, the Sunday readings will lead us to hear of Christ's comings, in the past, in the present, in the future. Today we celebrate Jesus' coming into Jerusalem to show true love for His neighbors – all of humankind. To cries of Hosanna, "Save Now," Jesus rides to do just that – but not in the manner which the crowds heralding Him expect. How does Jesus show His love for those whom God has given to Him who have a need – His neighbors -- that only He can meet?

Jesus answered the crowds' cries of Hosanna! He answered your songs of Hosanna. Think about where you traditionally chant that word... It is in today's Divine Liturgy, the public service of the Lord to His Church... Twice today, you will sing a threefold "Hosanna," declaring "Save Now" before the Lord. In the Sanctus – the Holy, Holy, Holy -- you sing to the Lord of the Angel Armies after hearing the proclamation of the Word, the preaching of the Good News, and offering the sacrifice of prayer. You sing Hosanna as you are prepared by the Word of God to receive the Real Presence of the

¹ Romans 13:11.

Lord who comes to you in, with, and under the elements of Bread and Wine. Jesus, Who comes each Divine Service in Word and Sacraments is heralded with “Save Now” by His people. He enters among them Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day because He has, in time, fulfilled the crowds’ expectant demands, “Hosanna!”

Most of you know when Jesus “Saved Now.” Just days after His triumphal entrance, after being heralded as King, albeit an humble King, Jesus died on the cross. In effect, in “saving now,” Jesus did first all the things which God, through the words of St. Paul, indicates you do as you await the Lord Jesus Christ’s coming. Because He did them, and due to the heavenly reality that you who are baptized are one with Him, you do them. Simply put, when you look up here to the Second Table of the Law, and see its commands, you are free in Christ to know, understand, and believe that He is working all those words in you – even when you are not aware of keeping them. St. Paul writes of the work God does in the faithful (the word order of this translation rings strange in our ears, but the order is important):

Nothing to no one all of you owe, except to continue to sacrificially love one another, for the one sacrificially loving the other (the) Law has fulfilled.²

That passage draws its strength from the fact that Jesus perfectly paid the debt of the Law – the burden sin demands, for all who continue to believe in Him. It cannot be kept by those who are outside the Church. Rather, it proclaims that which Christ does, through His Word, in sinner/saints such as you and I. Because you are in Christ, you are free *nothing to no one to owe*. The phrase begins with that emphasis – that

those who are truly in the Church owe no debt under the Law of God other than the debt of sacrificial love. The Holy Spirit desires that you clearly hear, understand, and believe that the Christian is a free lord of all – owing nothing to anyone for his or her salvation, forgiveness, and life everlasting. The Holy Spirit wills that you clearly hear, understand, and believe that the Christian is a bound servant of all – owing the debt of true divine love, that which dies to self and lives for neighbor.

When you look to the tables of the Law hanging here, and truly desire to fulfill the First – your love to God, the Word of God for today directs you to the Second – your love for neighbor. To owe the debt of love to your neighbor – who is defined as anyone God has given to you with a need you can meet – is to love God. This first day of the Advent of our Lord for 2011, you are being called to await the coming of the Lord by unconditionally, sacrificially loving those people whom God brings into your life who have needs you have the time, skills, resources, wisdom, and so forth, to meet.

The Spirit of the Lord declares: *the one sacrificially loving the other (the) Law has fulfilled*. Again, the word order is important, for the emphasis in that phrase is in the last words – *has fulfilled*. Those who desire to keep God's Word have completed it in His sight when they, you, sacrificially love your neighbor. How has that been working out in your life?

Now, this text is not calling you to sentimentally, emotionally, react to every person that you see who has a need. It is not calling you to drop all your free change in

² Romans 13:8.

the buckets of those who practice “decision theology.” No, it is calling you, through the Advent of our Lord, to sacrificially love those whom God places in your life – one on one – who have true needs that God has given you the means to meet. Today’s text speaks of caring for those individuals who have entered, or will enter, into your presence, and for whose needs God has given you that which you need to care for them.

So, if you have a neighbor, a person in need, who is in your life, and for whom you do not have the skills, funds, emotional strength to help, you are free to get them to someone who does. God, through the Holy Spirit, has given all His gifts to the Church: He has simply not given them all to you as an individual! Today’s text is not calling you to be the savior of all who come near you. In fact, the readings make clear that Jesus is the One Who came to be the savior of all. The Holy Spirit declares:

For the night advanced, but the day draws near. We may, then, destroy the works of the darkness, and we may be clothed by the weapons of the Light.³

Even as Jesus long ago triumphantly entered the Holy City, the darkness of sin, death, and the devil was advancing. In time, in less than a week from Jesus’ Advent into Jerusalem, He would be led outside its walls. There His bruised, bloody, and beaten body would be nailed to a cross. There, He would be hung high enough for all to see the punishment meted out for the crimes of “sedition, terrorism, proclaiming oneself King.” There His triumph would be raised over the earth, as His blood flowed down, and He breathed out His Spirit.

³ Romans 13:12.

The night advanced to the triumph of our Lord – suspended between heaven and earth – dead in our trespasses and sins. The darkness seemed to have conquered as His lifeless body rested in the grave. Even the land was darkened at Jesus' Advent into the realms of death.

But, out of that, the Day of the Lord draws near. For, on the third day, Jesus had another Advent, that from death and the grave. He rose victorious as the new Day of salvation began. That is your proof that the works of darkness have been destroyed. It is the reality that the Light of Life has overcome the darkness of sin, death, and hell that gives the Apostle the power of God to declare: *We may, then, destroy the works of the darkness, and we may be clothed by the weapons of the Light.* To be clothed with the weapons of the Light means nothing other than to be clothed with Christ. Other passages speak of these weapons of the Faith, we will not study them now.

What we will do is recall how we receive the weapons of the Light, how we are clothed in Christ. There is a baptismal link or two in St. Paul's words for the first day of Advent. That tie is actually "acted out" in our midst during baptisms here. For, if you will recall, after the candidates are washed with the washing of regeneration and renewal, with God's baptism which now saves them, they receive a burning "torch" and a white robe, bib, and napkin. These all symbolize that in Holy Baptism, God clothes you in the Light, and in that Light you continue to live in His Presence until such time as you see Him face-to-face. In Word and Practice in congregations like this one, these Holy Words are recalled:

*For the night advanced, but the day draws near. We may, then, destroy the works of the darkness, and we may be clothed by the weapons of the Light.*⁴

While we have no baptisms here today, we do have other reminders that we Christians have been freed by God to put off the works of darkness, summarized today by the Apostle: *adultery, murder, steal(ing), covet(ing); carousing, drunkenness, unlawful sexual intercourse, debaucheries, strife and jealousy.*⁵ Before you are visual reminders that, in the Light of Christ, you have been freed from such works of darkness. The circular form of the wreaths can bring to your mind the orbit of the earth and the seemingly ceaseless flow of time. The wreaths can be seen as forming unending halos, in particular the one with cut greenery, which symbolize mortal life's shortness. The colors of the candles which adorn the Advent Wreath are given too to remind you of hope, peace, joy, love, all summed up in Christ. The purple ribbons can be said to represent the penitential theme of Advent, as we remember that we have not sacrificially loved those whom God has placed before us, and whose needs we could actually have met. St. Paul proclaims:

*For sacrificial love for the neighbor does not continue to work bad; fulfillment, therefore, of the Law is by sacrificial love.*⁶

Where you find you have failed to fulfill the Law of God, repent! Confess your sins to God, even as you did at the Preparation of this Lord's Service. Receive His blood-bought forgiveness. Turn from your sins and walk in newness of life. Christ Jesus has come, comes, and will come to deliver you from sin and all its effects. That is the meaning of the season of Advent, whose beginning is marked with these words:

⁴ Romans 13:12.

And with this, all of you know the season, that hour has come [in which] all of you were raised from sleep. For now, for us, the salvation is nearer than when we believed.⁷

The hour in which the Church first began to believe began as Jesus breathed out His last on the cross. There, at His feet, stood a soldier, a pagan, who, in that Spirit, was led to confess Jesus as the Son of God. We today, who have been raised from the sleep of death through our baptisms into the Light, know that our Salvation is nearer than when God gave the gift of Christ's Faith to us.

Those who truly desire to keep the Advent season, understand that Christ's hour has come. We who keep the Advent seriously are truly being prepared for the Nativity of our Lord, the Christmas. In our homes, as in the Lord's Services where He gathers His people around His pure Word and rightly administered Sacraments, the emphases of the season are to be proclaimed- the coming of Jesus to die as the world's Savior; the coming of Jesus the Christ on the Last Day; the coming of Jesus on the earth as the Christ (the anointed One of God); the coming of Jesus to be baptized with the sins of the whole world. All of these lead us to Jesus' on the Last Day, as we confess in the Creeds. That Day, dear ones, is far more near in time than it was when St. Paul first recorded the Word of God. Those who faithfully keep the Advent of our Lord learn anew each year how much Christ's coming means. The final salvation of our God is nearer than when we first believed. And, in that we, you, are free to share God's sacrificial love for your neighbors and thus fulfill the Law of God.

⁵ *Romans* 13:12-13.

⁶ *Romans* 13:10.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Advent I (LSB one-year series)

Jeremiah 23:5-8; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 21:1-9

November 27, 2011

Pastor Michael L. Merbauer

SOLI DEO GLORIA

NOTES:

But, all of you must be clothed by the Lord Jesus Christ, and you must not continue to do evil of the flesh, into its desire.⁸

⁷ Romans 13:11.

⁸ Romans 13:14.