



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the First Sunday in Advent – November 28, 2021

“My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”

St. Matthew 21:13b (NIV)

A Sunday School teacher challenged her class to take time at home that Sunday afternoon to write a letter to Jesus. The children returned with their letters the following Sunday, and one little boy had written:

“Dear Jesus, We had a really good time at church today – wish You could have been there.”



Four Sundays before Christmas Day, a newly-minted deacon was nervously trying to give his very first children's talk on the “Advent wreath”. The young deacon took pains to explain to the children what the three purple candles represented, and then asked them:

“Does anyone know what the pink candle means?”

A terrible and absolute silence ensued until – after what seemed like an eternity to the young deacon, who was growing more anxious by the second – a little girl raised her hand and in a quiet voice asked:

“Is someone expecting a girl?”



I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone reading this message a most blessed and:



Because today (being the “First Sunday in Advent”), marks the start of a new Church year – a good time to remind ourselves, as Christians, that we should seek to share in the Church’s preparation for:



the coming Christmas feast of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



(Which is why we use Advent candles, by the way.)

However, today we should also be reminded that:



Jesus Christ is coming again with power and with great glory.

And nothing in the history of this planet will be able to compare with

the majesty of that day! Bearing this in mind, St. Paul gives us a “foretaste” of sorts (1 Corinthians 15:51-52):

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

Thus, today – **right now**, in fact – we should **resolve to consecrate** the entire coming year to God. As St. Paul exhorts us (2 Corinthians 6:2b):

“...now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.”

Now, I fully realize that this may sound a bit like an invitation to make a New Years’ resolution – because, in fact, it is! Accordingly, this First Sunday in Advent, let’s resolve that the whole of the coming year may be one of:



sincere worship;



daily prayer;



devoted Scripture study;



frequent fellowship;



willing obedience; and



loving service

all performed to the Glory of God.



But where to begin?

Perhaps it might make sense to take stock of our own situation. Let's earnestly ask ourselves whether we are making progress in our own spiritual journeys (that is, our earthly walks with Jesus Christ). And to help us in this endeavour, let's take a moment and think back to this day one year ago. Indeed, so much has happened since then, but:



Has our prayer life deepened?



Do we read our Bibles more frequently and with greater interest?



Do we make every effort to come together for sincere worship?



And for hearty fellowship?



Do we seek the best for ALL others - both Christian and otherwise?



Are we doing everything in our power to live lives worthy of being called disciples of Jesus Christ?



Are we turning to Jesus more and more when we fail?



Do we seek more often His will for our lives?



Are we striving to bring other people to meet Jesus?



So, how are we doing - compared to one year ago?

As part of today's Epistle Lesson (Romans 13:8-14) St. Paul provides us (in verses 8-10) with a good checklist of sorts:

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law."

Yet, St. Paul goes further – for he gives us not only the reasons **WHY** we are to love, but (in verses 11-14) he also shows us **HOW** to love:

"And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

In this passage, the certain coming of the end of the present age is given by St. Paul as a **motivation for godly living**. In short, then, let's make no mistake about it:



Jesus IS coming back – and sooner than we realize.

And so the question remains:



Will we be ready?



Or will we be more like the dove sellers and the moneychangers in God's temple in Jerusalem in today's Gospel Lesson (St. Matthew 21:1-13)?

You see, all the buying and selling that we read about took place in the large, outer "Court of the Gentiles" (because non-Jews – being so inferior, or "dog-like", to the Jewish mind – were not allowed closer access to the temple itself). The "Court of the Gentiles" was huge – covering several acres, in fact; thus, it easily accommodated a large number of visiting "pilgrims". Unscrupulous merchants sold doves at greatly inflated prices to these pilgrims, or "out-of-towners", most of whom had travelled long distances to worship and make sacrifices at God's temple in Jerusalem and, therefore, were unable to bring their own animals to sacrifice. Similarly, the moneychangers did not give fair exchange on the foreign currency of these pilgrims so that they could buy the doves they needed to sacrifice. Hence, both the merchants and the moneychangers were, in effect, **ripping off God**.

And what was His (that is, Jesus') reaction?



He immediately hurled them out of His temple.

Correspondingly, what St. Paul has to say to us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) should serve as a stern warning to those who choose to desecrate God's temple today:

"Do you not know that your body is a TEMPLE of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Consequently, I really need to ask:



Do we honour God with the temple He has given us?



Do we see all others as temples of God's Holy Spirit?



Do we believe that *ALL OTHERS* were made in the image of God?

If not, the message to us, then, is quite clear:



When Jesus returns a second time, we will have our own temples...um...“cleansed”.



For like I said, this is Advent – the season observed as a time of **preparation**, not only for:



Christmas (that is, the birth of Jesus Christ),

But also for:



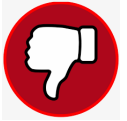
the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as *JUDGE* at the Last Day – His “Second Advent”.

Thus, Adventide should be a good time to take stock of where we are in our earthly walk with Jesus. More to the point, Advent is an

excellent time to examine and to make spiritual resolutions about the things that are weighing us down and causing us to avert our eyes from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as He urges us on to take the next step. So, we have a choice to make, don't we? Either to:



shape up; or



be shipped out.

And yet, we can't undo what's already been done (even if we'd like to!), so what are we to do? Ah, that's the million dollar question. But the good news is, there is only **one** answer **and His name is Jesus**. He Who is to be our **Judge** is also our **Saviour**. Simply put, Jesus allows "**do-overs**" for the truly penitent – for His is the Gospel of the "**Second Chance**". Accordingly, Adventide is the "Prime Time" to ask a forgiving God for a second chance.



Call it a New Year's "do-over", if you will.



Or, better still, let's ask God for a Divine "make-over".

But just where do we start?



I think that the heart is as good a place as any.

In the very first stanza of the Christmas carol, "Joy to the World", we are urged to:

“Let every heart prepare Him room.”

As we know, the first time He came to earth, Jesus was born in a manger. In other words, the Omnipotent (or “All-Powerful”) God:



Who could not be hurt,

(that is to say, could not feel any:



hunger, or



thirst, or



pain),

willingly chose to leave the splendour of Heaven to be born of:



a teenage girl;



as a weak, defenseless, flesh-and-blood baby;



in a smelly, stable-like grotto; and



laid down in a sullied feed trough – for *animals*.

A baby in a...a...*manger*?!? The very thought of it pains my spirit.



More to the point, it causes my heart no end of grief.

Nowadays, most expectant parents take great pains to prepare where they are going to lay their precious new baby:



they clean,



and sterilize,



and pad,



and protect,



you name it.

And here Mary, **barely more than a baby herself**, had to lay her new infant, “The Salvation of Mankind”, in a dirty, smelly, old feed box.

Now, I know firsthand – from having to clean them out – that, over time, mangers can become filled with things that shouldn’t be there. Animals, you see, aren’t too clean or intelligent. Animals, though, are excused – **we are not**. And that’s why God came to earth – **to DIE for us, miserable sinners all**. (True, Jesus was raised on the third day so that those who believed in Him would inherit eternal life; but first, before He could be raised to new life, **Jesus had to DIE**.)

So, let us take a few moments to picture it:



a weak, defenseless baby,



in a soiled manger,



in a malodorous cavern,



Whose sole purpose in life was to die - *for US.*

Now, let us honestly examine our own hearts, shall we? In the course of **the past twelve months alone**, we've managed to fill them with a whole lot of things that shouldn't be there, haven't we?



We've thought things that were better left unthought.



We've said things that were better left unsaid.



We've seen things that were better left unseen.



And we've done things that were better left undone.

And the sordid memories of all these failings we've crammed deep down into our hearts; as a result, they have become no better than:



soiled feed boxes



in smelly, old barns.

So, let us, “with one accord”, fall down on our knees and – with all the gratitude we can muster – heartily thank Almighty God that 2,000 years ago He chose to be born in a feeding-box.

And while we’re down there, let us, with upraised hands, joyfully praise Him, fully knowing that today He still chooses to be born there, so that we – sinners all – might be **reborn**.



Therefore, this “First Sunday in Advent”, this very first day of the “**New (Church) Year**”:

Let us resolve to prepare the “mangers of our hearts” to receive our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – whether again, or for the first time.

And let us ask the “God of the Second Chance” for a divine “do-over”, and clean out, with His Omnipotent help, all the garbage that we’ve collected during this past year that pollutes us and weighs us down.

Truly, then, let us each seek a Holy “make-over”,

To be cleansed by the “God of the Second Chance”,



And to be made READY.

For He is coming back – and soon.

“Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.”



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