

Advent 1, 2019
Advent Preparations
Romans 13:8-14/Matthew 21:1-13
St. Andrew's Church, Jacksonville, OR
By Fr. Bill Baker

"...now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11).

Day by day we get closer to that greatly anticipated day of reckoning when our greatest hope will become our eternal reality; an unending joy in the everlasting presence of our Father in Heaven. And so St. Paul encourages us to not be idle with the time given us, but to be awake and tuned in to the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

And in the Gospel of Matthew we heard these powerful words today, *"Tell ye the daughter of Sion, behold, they King cometh..."* *"And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord..."* The Gospel of St. Matthew records these words describing Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! You may be interested to know that the word 'Advent' means 'to come to'. And the day is fast approaching; the King of Kings is standing at the threshold! Are you ready! Many in Jerusalem were not. As St. Luke records the events of this same day we see Jesus stop before entering the city and weep because of the unpreparedness of those he came to save.

Are you preparing yourselves for the birth of the Christ into our midst? I hope not...because that event has already happened. Advent is not about preparing for the birth of Jesus but a time in which we prepare for the celebration of such a wonderful gift of grace and mercy; a gift, wrapped in the swaddling clothes of humility. And there is a difference. Advent is not a time to prepare for an event that has already transpired but a time to ready ourselves for a celebration of that which has already come to pass. Advent is a penitential time of transition from what was meant to be to what will be for those who let the gift of Jesus Christ enter in. Love came down because sin entered in. There is no

pretending that will come from this altar. Things are real; sin is real and forgiveness is real. Jesus is the ultimate hope for our lives. It is in him that Christianity means anything at all. In Christ we can agree with St. Paul as he writes to the Galatians, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20). The weakness of mankind has been overcome and the Incarnate Creator has purchased that which was lost.

The Triumphal entry serves a greater purpose for us in this season of Advent. Jesus comes to us as a humble king...a sacrificial savior with the gift of eternal life. We are to ready our hearts, our souls and minds for the salvific gift of the King of Kings, being careful not to let worldly pageantry replace such a monumental act on the part of our Father in heaven; the Incarnation was a calculated step leading to God's ultimate expression of love...the Cross!

It is one thing to look forward to our Christmas celebrations; the gifts, the food, lights on the houses, visiting family and friends. Even in the church we find ourselves enamored by our imaginations as we visit Bethlehem, listen to the Angels, and travel with the Magi in their great endeavor. This is all well and good but let us not forget the greater message of this season...you are part of and connected to every event that has come to pass in God's plan and God is not done with us yet! We are not just preparing for the celebration of Christ's birth but looking for and readying ourselves for his second coming...His triumphal entry as redeemer and judge.

"...now it is high time to awake out of sleep, (Paul warns us) for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Romans 13:11).

The warning is clear and St. Chrysostom echoes Paul in one of his own homilies, *"The day of resurrection and of the terrible judgment is fast approaching...If you have done everything that was asked of you and are prepared for it, then you have nothing to fear, but if you have not, then look out!"* The Penitential nature of Advent puts us on our knees in a most humble gratitude that goes beyond words. Love came down...and for a purpose...and that purpose is you...

Christianity is different than every other religion out there. Pick any other religion and you will see a self-serving quest to achieve paradise on your own merit, ascending to god's presence based on your own power, devising your own doctrinal belief system that gives you confidence that you will achieve that which lies beyond this life. This is the ladder that Fr. Chris spoke of last Sunday...a ladder that will crumble and fall because of basing salvation on anything you can do to earn it. If we could earn it Jesus would not have had to become one of us...but he did; Jesus would not have had to pay the penalty require for sin and die upon a cross...but he did; and Jesus did not have to prepare a place for you...but he did.

In chapter 10 of Paul's epistle to the Romans we hear so clearly the Advent message, *"But the righteousness based on faith (Paul instructs) says, "Do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven or who will descend into the abyss?" But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:6-9).

And so, we rejoice in the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, a physical place and a spiritual embodiment of every believer. Jesus Christ continues to come in great humility offering grace and mercy to a human race entrapped by sin.

And this is our hope this Advent season, leading us in our Christmas celebrations and carrying us through our Lenten appeals and Easter joys. Jesus Christ is our sure hope in death and in eternal life. *"Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee"* (1940 hymnal; hymn #1).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.