

## The First Sunday of Advent

### Romans 13:11-14

Here it comes again, the time we love so much. It is Christmas. It has been for a couple of days now, now that Thanksgiving is over with, and it is time for us to move on to the next steps of our early winter routines and start shopping for something else, and singing Christmas songs, and baking Christmas cookies instead of pumpkin pie.

For some, I have learnt, many years ago, and not here, it is also time to take up another routine and complain about our Pastor, that he is so dense, so slow to notice that it is Christmas, that he makes us sing something other than Christmas songs in Church, and do other things than Christmas stuff...

Some Pastors are indeed somewhat slow to notice that it is Christmas. And when they are that, there is a reason; and the reason some Pastors are so slow to notice that it is Christmas is that it is *not*; because it *is* not; not in Church it is not, not quite, not yet.

With the wisdom God gave her, and the understanding she has gleaned from Holy Scripture of who God is, and what is His truth, the Church of Christ has made for a period of *preparation* to go before the feast for the coming of the Christ; or rather: before the feast for the *nativity* of the Christ, or His *birth*. For Christmas is *not* really the feast for the *coming* of the Christ; after all, He had come into the world already approximately nine months prior to His birth; as all human beings come into being as human beings before they are born, which is one reason why it is evil and abominable in the sight of God to kill living human beings not yet born.

And before the great feast for the nativity of the Christ goes a period of *preparation*, during which His Church and His Christians meditate upon His *coming*, or His *advent*, as it is in Latin. And this period of preparation serves us well in helping us to see beyond the premature Christmas celebrations of the world around us, and shallow, so that Christians may remember, and unbelievers realise, and all embrace, that which is the reality of Christmas, which is the reality of *Christ*.

During Advent we remember that there was a time when He had not yet come. We are reminded how His people of old longed for His appearing. We are reminded that the salvation for which the fathers looked with longing, that it has come. And we are reminded that He who came shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and so we, also, learn to long for His coming.

And the point of all this is to *prepare* us for His coming, that we may remember and realise and embrace that which is the reality of Christmas, which is the reality of Christ, and be ready to meet Him when He comes.

It is to this the Apostle admonishes his readers in what we hear today, and by having had what he wrote preserved in Holy Scripture God Himself admonishes Christians of all all ages and in all places: to realise that, as the Apostle writes it, *salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.*

With this the Apostle refers to the day when Christ shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead; that day is nearer to us now than it ever was before. Of course it is; that is how time works. It is twenty years nearer than it was twenty years ago, and a hundred years nearer than it was a hundred years ago; and when I am done preaching today, it will be a whole lot nearer than it was when I began, as I am sure that you are very well aware.

*Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed;* it is really a statement of the obvious, is it not? But still this statement of the obvious stands as a powerful reminder to us that this it is all *for real*, that the day of judgement shall come, when all evil shall be done away with and destroyed, as shall all who are evil.

This also means, though, that *we need to be prepared* if that day is to be for us a day of deliverance and joy rather than a day of judgement and doom.

And in order for us to be prepared for the coming of the Christ, the Apostle admonishes us today, as does His Master, and ours, *to walk properly as in the daytime since the night is far gone and the day is at hand*, and to *cast off the works of darkness*; in other words, or Lord Jesus calls us no longer to live as if He did not matter to us, and that He has come; *to walk properly as in the daytime*, as the Apostle writes it, *not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy.*

In the days of the Apostle, orgies of drunkenness and sexual immorality were common culture; Christians were looked at with surprise and suspicion when they would not take part in them. This is not so much the case today, although a culture of sexual immorality obviously is on the rise. And a culture of sexual immorality does represent a temptation to Christians; even if we have no wish to actually engage in it, we are easily influenced by a such culture in our hearts and minds, so as to lose sight of the Word and will of God in terms not only of how we are to live and behave ourselves, but also in terms of how we are to believe and think about things.

Drunkenness, also, represents a danger of losing sight of the faith. It may lead us into doing and saying things we should not do or say; it may get in the way of living a decent and responsible life in accordance with the Word and will of God, tending to your responsibilities at work, and at home, and in Church. At worst, drunkenness will take power over you and cloud your mind and make you to forget the faith, and forget that the faith is for real.

And although we do not engage in actual orgies, a life in luxury, that is: in orgies of *enjoyment*, can also be detrimental to your life with God, tending to your duties to your Church, not only in terms of time for worship attendance and service at Church, but also financially, so that your Pastor is not treated with the loving care that Christians owe to each other, and particularly to the man God has given to them to give His salvation to them and guide them in their life with God. Worse than that, though, like drunkenness, luxurious living might make us to *fall asleep*, to lose sight of what life is about, and lose sight of our Saviour, and be lost to His salvation!

A culture of *quarrelling and jealousy* might very well do the same thing to a Christian, particularly if he or she encounters a such culture *in Church*, or brings it to Church himself, or herself. A culture of quarrelling and complaining can be detrimental to the life of a congregation, and also to the faith and salvation of the individual Christian in the congregation. For quarrelling and complaining breed resentment, which is but another word for *hatred*, and hatred has no place in the Church of Christ, or in the heart of a Christian.

An attitude of resentment when things are not done exactly as I want them done, and *when* I want them done, with no regard for others, is contrary, not only to Christian love, but to the faith itself; so is the arrogance of assuming that what I know about things is all there is to know; as is the attitude that everybody has to not only *know* the rules I have made up in my mind as to how things must be done, no, everybody else also has to *obey* them.

To gratify such attitudes is to make *provision for the flesh*; it not only destroys your congregation, it shuts your heart off to the love of God, the faith becomes merely your opinion and belief system, rather than the love of God alive in you.

*The hour has come for you to wake from sleep*, writes the Apostle, as we hear it today. And it has. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Let us no longer live as if Christian love did not matter to us, or the love of God, or God Himself; let us not live so as to lose sight of our Saviour and His salvation and be lost, again, to His love.

*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, we hear today that the Apostle writes. Now, this is not really an admonition to pull ourselves together and be on our best behaviour and bring out our best; rather, what it is is a call to live in the salvation that has come to us, and to live in *Him* who has come to us, with salvation, and still does.

Yes, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed, not only in that the day of judgement is drawing ever nearer; salvation is *here!* *The night is far gone*, as we hear it today that the Apostle writes it; *the day is at hand*. He who was to come, with salvation from God, He has come, and He has brought the salvation of God to completion. The Son of God, God Himself from eternity, has had Himself born into our kind, and baptised with the Baptism of sinners, to take our sin upon Himself and bear it for us, and His judgement against it. He who shall come to judge the living and the dead, He has Himself borne all judgement for us, and paid the price and penalty for the sin of all sinners, for all evil and impurity and ungodliness and imperfection, in our hearts and minds, and in our lives.

And He who was to come, with salvation from God, and has come, He comes to us still, and is with us, with salvation from God. He lives in His Church, in the Word of His salvation, which is the worship of His faithful Church, and gives Himself to us, with His salvation.

With His Word of His love, what He did and suffered to make us His own, He claims us as His own, and makes us to be that. He claims us for His Kingdom, and promises that we shall not perish and die in His judgement on account of our sin, rather, on account of what He has done for us we shall live and be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And with His Word He breathes His Spirit into us, when we hear it, His very own life, and His love, so that He Himself lives in us, and His love, and we believe in Him, and belong to Him.

*The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.* Therefore He calls you, today, to hear His Word of salvation and take it to heart and surrender to His love, rather than to ignore it and let it pass you by as something that does not matter. He calls you to take His promise to heart, that the day of judgement shall be for you the day of deliverance and joy.

Blessed is He that comes, in the name of the Lord. *Amen.*