

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Philippians 4:4-7

I do not know if anybody here would know what an *Advent snob* is, other than myself. I came upon the term in an article I read last year during Advent written by somebody who confessed to being one, an *Advent snob*, that is, and explained why he did not want to be quite so much one of those any more.

I understood right away what an *Advent snob* would be. You see, I have myself been one for decades, and struggled myself not to be one quite so much.

Now, what is an *Advent snob*? Show of hands, how many of you here would have an idea what it means to be one of those; well, one of us?

An *Advent snob* is someone who knows that according to the Church Calendar it is not really Christmas yet, not until sundown on Christmas Eve, rather, it is *Advent*, and someone who knows this so well that he or she will frown upon and perhaps even sneer outright at the slightest hint of Christmas celebrations and any or all references to Christmas prior to sundown on Christmas Eve, be it Christmas Carols or Christmas cookies or Christmas decorations or Christmas parties, and not only in Church, but also out there among the *real* people.

If you have never come upon an *Advent snob*, you are fortunate; but then, if you are here, you are listening to one right now; if you are listening, that is; or rather, you are listening to a *recovering* *Advent snob*. So I shall rephrase: if you have never *noticed* the *Advent snobbery* of this particular *Advent snob*, or of another, *then* you are fortunate. For *Advent snobbery* does little more than to take the joy out of preparing for Christmas; except that it might actually take the joy also out of Christmas itself, if nothing else, then for the *Advent snob* himself, or herself. A such attitude of *Bah! Humbug!* is really not much different from that of an Ebenezer Scrooge, although in a supposedly pious version. And a such attitude of resentment against any hint at premature or misguided Christmas celebrations will easily overshadow the joy of celebrating the birth of the Christ even in authentic and focused Christian Christmas worship.

Some of us have noticed this in ourselves. And some of us have realised how unreasonable it is of us to force our grumpiness upon others and rob them of their actually rather innocent Christmas pleasures. That is why some of us are *recovering* *Advent snobs*.

And that is why some of us, although we might find ourselves unable to let go completely of our Advent snobbery, nevertheless do our best to keep it in check so as not to be actively practising Advent jerks.

But enough about Advent snobbery. It is but an addiction of the few.

Much more common, though, particularly in our day and age, is a much similar attitude against anybody and everybody who do not know all that I think I know, and do not believe all that I believe, and do not see things exactly the same way as I see them, and are not aware or observant of all the rules I have made up in my mind as to exactly what is good and right, or the rules recently made up by the group with which I identify, which we now enforce rigorously and vigorously on everybody else. Those known not to agree with me are not allowed to eat in my restaurant, or to enjoy a quiet meal in any restaurant, or enjoy peace and quiet anywhere without being shouted at and threatened, not even in their own homes, nor are their families, or those merely assumed not to see things the way I see them. I, on the other hand, am entitled to a *safety zone* where nobody says or does anything I do not agree with. We have seen this attitude on the rise on the political left, particularly in recent years. And this is not a fringe phenomenon; it is encouraged and enforced even in established institutions, in colleges and in courts and in Congress.

A such attitude, though, does not exist only on the left. Even among Christians is it becoming common culture to whine about being a victim whenever I encounter something I do not agree with or approve of, and responding aggressively whenever somebody does not show appropriate awareness of exactly what I deem to be appropriate and in accordance with my beliefs, so that the sweet little girl at the cash register with the lip rings and the tattoos, who does not know any better, well, she have better make sure not to make the mistake of saying *happy holidays!* to me, or she will get her head bit off - as my testimony to the faith, and to the love of Christ. That ought to win her over. Well, there is a better way.

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone, writes the Apostle, as we hear it today. That would be a better way, would it not? Well, it would.

To accept others as they are and be kind to them, that is a better way to make them care about what you think, and want to listen to your testimony than being unkind to unbelievers and everybody else who does not know better, now, is it not? Well, it is.

And to insist that everybody must know and acknowledge all details of your belief system, and all your rules for what you will accept before you will share the world with them, that is not exactly being *reasonable*, now, is it? Well, it is not.

Let your light shine before others, says our Lord Jesus, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father, He who is in Heaven. And: this is the will of God, He has had His holy Apostle Peter write, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Now, obviously, as you will know, if you have ever bothered to try, this is not always going to work. But that is beside the point. For as is usually the case, when it comes to the Word of God, there is more to what we hear than what immediately meets the ear.

Blessed are you, says our Lord Jesus, when others revile you and persecute you and falsely speak all kinds of evil against you on my account.

Those who will not know of God and His love will always hate those who know Him and love His love. They will always revile us and speak all kinds of evil against us. There is not that much we can do about that. Nevertheless, it is our duty to make sure that they have to *lie*; that when they speak all kinds of evil against us, they must do so *falsely*.

When our Lord Jesus has had His Apostle teach us to *let your reasonableness be known to everyone*, as we hear it today, He also has more in mind that the effectiveness of our testimony. What He has in mind is our spiritual health, that we be conformed to His own goodness, and grow in His love. Or as we also hear it today that He has had His Apostle write it, that *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. When this happens, then we will also act out His love in our life with others. To be unkind to unbelievers and others who do not know better, that is not to act out His love; it goes against His love.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, as He has also said it, that you may be sons of your Father, He who is in Heaven; for He makes His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust.

Yes, the Apostle teaches us of greater things today than our life with unbelievers. He is teaching us about our life with God: *Rejoice in the Lord always, as he writes it; again I will say: Rejoice. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

The Lord is at hand; the Lord has come. And this means that we have *no need* to be anxious about anything. For the Lord has come to us *with salvation*; and His salvation is full and complete.

The Son of God has come to us, who is Himself God from eternity, and has Himself suffered for our sin, and the sin of all sinners. He has Himself borne His own judgement and paid the price and penalty, in full and in abundance, for all evil and ungodliness and impurity in our hearts and in our lives. And so our sin is dealt with and done away with, and it is no more before Him. We are righteous before His judgement, and right with Him, all on account of what He Himself has done for us. And with His Word of His love and what His love has done for us He claims us as His own, and so we are that, for He has Himself paid the price for us to be that.

The Lord is at hand, His Apostle reminds us; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

The Lord is at hand. In the Word and worship of His salvation He Himself is with us, and gives Himself to us, and all that is His, His righteousness and holiness, that is: His full and complete goodness and innocence before God, and His heavenly Kingdom, and His eternal life in the glory of God.

And so He has His Apostle remind us to rejoice in His Word and worship, to surrender and submit to His goodness and commend ourselves to His goodness in the assurance that when His love is upon us, then we can lack nothing; except that we have nothing to lose. In all things He will work to make all things well for us, even through actual and real persecution, if such should ever fall upon us, as it very well might. And so we can let go of that fear of persecution which might motivate us to be resentful and unpleasant against those who do not know Him and His love, and He calls and commands us to, and to let go of all arrogance and unpleasantness against those who do not know better, and do not know all that we think we know, or even all that which we actually *do* know.

God rest you merry, gentlemen, and ladies; let nothing you dismay; for Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas day. There, I said it, Advent snob though I am, even though it is yet but Advent. See, I am recovering. As all Christians are recovering sinners, and shall recover fully and finally when the Lord comes in glory, from all arrogance and anxiety and all other unbelief and evil, and be fully conformed to His goodness, and be with Him forever in the fullness of His glory.

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