

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: Stir up, we implore You, Your power, O Lord, and come that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

Luke 21:25-36

"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The Sermon

The Cultural Captivity of the Church

"Give me time!" said Martin Luther at Worms when he was commanded to recant – to take back – all the words he had written in his books. "Give

me more time!” Well, Advent is about time. For there are – and have been – many occasions when time given – was not time well used. It was frittered away – wasted on other things – and sometimes wasted while making busy noises.

We have asked for time – demanded time – been afforded time – and not made the most of it – not used it up – not employed it for the purpose it was taken. And not only do we waste our own time – but somebody else’s as well. So the sin of waste can be a double sin – for which on occasions we are twice guilty.

Advent is supremely the season to think about time. It is the beginning of the Church’s Year. It is the season to **think** – not emote – to **plan** – not react. It is the season – **not** for sleeping – but for waking – not for **wasting** time – either your own or other people’s – but for **redeeming** the time – not for **relaxing** – but for **readying**.

For **at hand** – we are reminded – **at hand** – is the arrival of something of eternal significance – that **has to be prepared for**. The Scriptures say – in both Old Testament and New Testament: *“Prepare the way of the Lord! Arise! Shine! For your light is come!”* **If the Church ignores Advent – that does not happen!**

The event of eternal significance – is the vindication of Christ’s sovereignty over everything upon this planet. It is the great Day of the Lord – when Christ’s rule will be acknowledged – and everyone will *“confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”* (Phil 2:11)

It is a time when man’s stewardship shall cease – and the **accounting** for it begins – a time when all possessions will be seen in terms of a **brief borrowing** – a time when earthly power and prestige will no longer be thought to be an individual’s **private property**. It is a time when human wisdom and knowledge and expertise in manipulating nations by political theories – will be weighed in the balance- and their plausible truths found **wanting**.

It is a time when history – will be discovered to have been **inaccurate** – if not downright **misleading** – a time when *“the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed.”* All that is not a **threat**. It is a **promise**. And we are the

inheritors of that promise. We are involved – as fellow heirs – with **big** expectations.

What the Church has done – to be faithful to her side of the promises – is part of the accountability – we must share – as member of the mystical Body of Christ. It is **us – here – ourselves – in this time and place**. Before us this Advent – is the consideration of the tensions of God’s People – the tensions between the voice and wisdom of our own day in history on the one hand – and the calling of the culture of the Kingdom on the other – a Kingdom beyond history – which yet breaks into history supremely in the coming of Jesus the Christ of God.

That Jesus said: *“You are in the world but not of the world”* (Jn 17) So St. Paul tells the church in Rome: *“Don’t become like the people of this world. Instead, change the way you think.”* (Rom 12:2) Don’t let the world dictate – theology or sacred seasons – to the Church.

Look for example at the Christian way of looking at God: God is a Trinity of Persons: Father – Son – and Holy Spirit. The Church hammered this concept into shape - from what we can read in Scripture – from what Christ tells us of His Father and of the Holy Spirit – and from what He claims to be – in relationship to His Father. The story of this hammering into shape takes many pages of early church history. People argued. They fought. And battles were not unknown as this concept was considered.

The Church used her time – to formulate the truth – into a confession of faith. Luther used **his** time – to formulate a confession of faith. He said: “Unless I am convinced – from Scripture and conscience – **I cannot – and I will not – recant!** Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” That’s a pretty good confession. Indeed – it is considered classic even in the annals of secular history.

But now the culture intrudes upon the Church – to water down the confession. To feminists – the usual masculine attributions of the Godhead – have been the source of constant irritation – and so the pressure for inclusive language has been persistent enough – for some people to discard the descriptions of the early Fathers of the Church – and to substitute for them – **three – entirely new – nomenclatures:** Creator – Redeemer – and Sanctifier.

Those titles ascribe roles – roles that **reduce** – the individual competence of the three Persons of the Godhead. Those titles – actually **narrow** our understanding of God. **Trying to keep Advent – as Advent – has just as much spiritual significance.** Advent is a time to warn the Church – that superficial acceptance of what is palatable to that world out there beyond those doors – can be a **capitulation** – to modern culture.

And the Church needs to look to this – for she **is** accountable – **we are accountable** – to Christ – our King and our Judge – for the way we use our time during Advent. For He **is coming** – and not just at Christmas. He will come again – in His flesh – in all His glory – to be our Judge – and our Deliverer – on the Last Day. And He comes in every sermon. And He comes in every Baptism. And He comes in every celebration of His Holy Supper.

And He says to us again this day – as He has in every Advent season for two thousand years: *“the earth and the heavens will disappear – but My words will never disappear. The Son of Man is coming in a cloud with power and glory. When these things begin to take place – stand up with confidence! The time when you will be set free is near.”* (vv. 27-28) Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!