

24th and Last Sunday of the Liturgical Year

Beloved in Christ, today we are poised at the end of one liturgical year and the beginning of another. The gospel of this last Sunday after Pentecost is a grave, if not frightening, reminder that God intends to bring time itself to a close; that He will come again to judge all men on the basis of their lives: their actions, their moral choices, their fidelity – or lack thereof – to Him.

Today's collect reflects this theme: *Excita, quesumus, Domine, tuorum fidelium voluntates ... Stir up O Lord, we beseech Thee, the wills of Thy faithful people ...* It is a cry that God should come to us, now, with the help of His grace. This cry rises to the same God Who will come at the consummation of this age – not in mercy and in love this time – but in a severe and exacting judgment of men and their moral dispositions.

The fearsome quality of this second Advent is tempered and rendered comprehensible by its intimate relationship to the Lord's first coming to this world.

Next week the liturgical year begins anew. The rehearsal of God's mystical and saving work in the magnificent world He so lovingly created, once again, will be set before our hearts. The season of Advent will open with that great collect: *Excita, quaesumus Domine, potentiam tuam et veni ... Stir up, O Lord, Thy power and come!*

Nothing is so poignant – or characteristic of the Latin liturgy – as this parallelism in its sacred texts. It is no accident that the Church's year should begin with a prayer whose style, content and rhythmic meter is so closely patterned after the prayer appointed for its final Sunday. For the one calls God to stir up *Himself* and come – to the end that He should save us from our sins, while the other begs Him to stir up *ourselves* – so that we may more readily respond to His grace by cooperating in performing good works conducive to our salvation. This juncture in the calendar, therefore, marks both an end and a beginning in our life of grace.

Like so many other aspects of our faith these two Sundays are at once separated by an entire year and fall together without fail. So, too, the mysteries of our faith may be separated for examination and knowledge, while the unity – the reality of the Christian life and religion – is but a single fabric. Now we walk in time, but God *in Who we live and move and have our being* encompasses all things, rather, in a single, incomprehensible instant of infinite, timeless love, mercy and justice. And it is to Him – fidelity to His teaching – that we are called and for which we will certainly be judged at His second Advent.

The junction of the old and new year this Sunday and next gives us occasion to reflect on the immensity of our Catholic faith, its unfathomable richness, the limitless power of its capacity for transforming our lives and its clarion call to repentance. For this religion is like none other: it has sprung from the heart of God Himself and is *His* work in us. It is not of man's creation. The apostolic Catholic faith has been given by God through the revelation of Jesus Christ so that we might be transformed from death unto life, that we may become more and more conformed to the *likeness* of God in Whose image we have all been created.

Every Sunday throughout the season of Pentecost the Church has intoned in its concise and magnificent Latin the Preface of the Most Holy Trinity. Man can never have learned of the Triune nature of God by the power of reason alone. It required the Father's own revelation to us regarding Himself. And so, in time, He

sent His Son into this world and the Church repeats His teaching without abridgment or shame. The Infinite God, the all perfect, all knowing, all seeing God – that source of all light and life – is of one divine substance, itself simultaneously a community of Three Persons, equal but dis-tinct. The Second Person of this divine Trinity has descended into the very world God created. Jesus Christ is none other than the eternal Wisdom of God Himself come into our very flesh. The reason for which the Lord Christ, God, has come is that we, creatures made in His image but now corrupted by sin and death, might be transformed into His likeness and brought to eternal safe harbor with Him in glory. The question we must ask ourselves daily, moment by moment in each day is “Will we be found faithful to His divine love on the day of His divine judgment?”

Excita quaesumus Domine potentiam tuam et veni! Stir up we beseech Thee O Lord and COME! – so that we may deserve by Thy protection to be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins.

The Lord Who came once in time, born of gentle Mary and laid in a manger, has come for love of us and our redemption. This same Lord comes to us daily through the presence and ministry of His Church. He comes, now, in time, through grace. This present Advent is indispensable to man in the changeable-ness of his living in time and temptation.

Dearly beloved, as this present liturgical year draws to its close and another dawns anew, let us turn our hearts, with confidence and filial trust, towards Him from Whom all goodness comes. Let us live and love as did Mary – with hearts undivided in reaching towards Him, with salutary fear for the judgment which awaits us all. Let us turn back to God with a complete surrender of our wills and bodies. This we can do under the impulse of divine grace in a humble, confident following of Jesus, Our Lord and God.

If we would only turn our hearts more and more to Him, if we would but give our lives to *God* – without hesitation or compromise – His grace would form us ever more perfectly to His own image. Our sufferings would find their divine sense and resolution in the abyss of His providential love, and we would be ever more perfected unto that image in which He has created us. If we would love others in this way – because they too are made in His image and are our brothers on the road towards eternity then we will have nothing to fear when Christ comes again as our most just Judge.

Let us, therefore, beloved in God, *walk worthily of God and please Him in all things* as the Apostle Paul bids us to do. May our every action be strengthened by Christ unto perfection and long suffering so that, in time, we may come to behold Him forever – face to face – in the perfect bliss of Heaven. It is for this that we were created and for this that Christ has lived and died. It is in view of this that we will stand, humbled, when He comes to judge the living and the dead.