

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Nov 27th 2011



As we begin the season of Advent we ask for the grace to stay alert and watchful. We stand in awe of God's coming to us - and we give him thanks. It is right and just.

Welcome to Advent - and welcome to the new missal! I would like to begin by practicing the introductory dialogue to the Preface.

Priest: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Priest: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God

People: It is right and just.

As at the beginning of Mass, we have the apostolic greeting, "The Lord be with you" followed the response, "and with your spirit." Then the priest says, "Lift up your hearts." The Latin is "Sursum Corda," - Hearts on high! In the third exchange, I say "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God." And you respond, "It is right and just."

This succinct phrase then becomes the subject matter of the Preface. The Preface gives a short declaration about why it is right and just to praise God. For example, this Sunday we hear how God took on the lowliness of our human flesh. It's like a Redwood being reduced to a tooth pick. In Jesus, God humbled himself (as the Preface states) to open the way to eternal salvation.

The Preface then indicates our response to what God has done: We "watch for that day" as we look forward to the "promise in which now we dare to hope." The Preface concludes with an invitation to join the angels - the "hosts and Powers of heaven" - in their hymn of glory. We then sign the hymn based on the prophet Isaiah's vision: "Holy, Holy, Holy..."

Today's Scripture readings have themes similar to the Preface. Isaiah - the same man who had the vision of the heavenly court - speaks about the distance between God and man. As Isaiah says: He is our father; he forms us like a potter molds clay. We have no righteousness before him. Even our good deeds are like "polluted rages." Those are hard words, but we need to realize that Isaiah does not say them so we will become discouraged. No he wants us to experience awe before God - especially considering that he would come to us.

In the second reading St Paul speaks about exactly that: God comes to us in Jesus. Paul asks God for strength so that we will persevere until "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." St. Paul had seen people grow cold and weary. He knew that only by grace can we continue on - right up to "that day."

Now, St. Paul did not invent the idea of the "day" - the Second Coming. He received his message from Jesus. We can see that in today's Gospel. Jesus speaks about his return and he tells us, "Be watchful. Be alert."

So, as we begin the season of Advent we ask for the grace to stay alert and watchful. We stand in awe of God's coming to us - and we give him thanks. It is right and just. Amen.

Fr. Phil Bloom