

Insights into Liturgy

Who Cares About the Parousia?

By FATHER BENEDICT EHMANN

Our Christian task in Advent is not to celebrate the Nativity, but the Expectation. The song of Advent is not Adeste Fideles, but O Come, Emmanuel.

If Advent is nothing but an anticipated Christmas, we rob ourselves and (even worse) our children of the precious experience of "waiting for Christ," the Hebrew experience of "listening to the prophets," the desert experience of John heralding the Lord's coming, the maternal experience of Mary pregnant with the Messiah.

Every Christian must be in the number of those who are waiting for Jesus, a waiting which is a deep-down inner eagerness for the promised Lord to come. We're grateful that he has come. We're joyful that he comes now. But we need to be eager for when he will come again -- the Bridegroom at the door, ready to take us to his home in glory.

To make Christmas out of Advent is to arrest and stunt our Christian growth. It's like wanting the

summer without winter and spring. It's being greedy for the harvest without the labor of the sowing.

The Lord said, "Seek and you shall find." Advent is the seeking time. He said, "Knock, and it shall be opened." Advent is the knocking time. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." But the Nativity graces will fall on barren, thorny ground, without a genuine Advent to dilate us and prepare the ground of our being. Isaiah yearned for "the earth to be opened up and bud forth the Savior." However, there can be no opening up of our earth, if we make Advent topsy-turvy with Christmas.

Christmas is not a has-been story. Only. It is now. It is still to be. In his famous Christmas tale, Charles Dickens summons up before Scrooge the miser the Spirit of Christmas Past, the Spirit of Christmas Present, and the Spirit of Christmas To Come. Our little Pauper-King, born in the Bethlehem stable, told us before he returned to his Father, that he was going to return, and that all of us had better be waiting for him.

Only a few people were waiting

for the Messiah when he came the first time -- Mary, of course, and Joseph, Zachary and Elizabeth and John, Simeon and Anna, and those few other folks who were called the Poor Ones (anawim) of Israel. For all the rest, it was business as usual, with nothing much expected, nothing more cherished in the heart than the hope to get rid of the bitter oppression of the Roman occupation.

Jesus warned us it will be the same when he comes again. He will not be expected, except by the devout few, as of old. They will not be surprised; they will rejoice to see him, because they had always been waiting for him.

Advent is to prepare God's People for the Second Coming. It is to rehearse us to become a "waiting" people. It is to teach us how to live with Jesus now, so that we may be ready to meet him then.

However, all this is bound to be drowned out in the whoop-de-do of all the so-called Yuletide partying and hectic merchandising in the Advent weeks. We may fairly wonder how much, in all of this, Jesus is being remembered, to say nothing of his being expected.

The Coming and Presence of Jesus among us is called the Parousia. This is a word consecrated by the long usage of the Church from the earliest days. Once conceived in the womb of Mary and born in Bethlehem, the Son of God permanently involved himself in the destiny of mankind. This is his Parousia -- not a once-for-all kind of event, but a continuing one. It began in Nazareth when Mary said, "Be it done to me according to your word." It continues through the ages, now and into eternity. It is a being-with-us, but also a being-within-us.

For each one of us, our entry into Jesus' Parousia was at Baptism. It moves forward in us, growing from more to more in the measure of our daily waiting and welcoming, in hope and prayer. It will arrive at its consummation on our dying day, when Jesus will reveal himself to us, saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." It will be the Second Coming for each person, one by one.

But then, for all the world, at the end of time, sooner or later, the Parousia will be consummated in glory and triumph. In that great Second Coming, the lambs will be separated from the goats, the wheat from the chaff. Jesus' kingdom will be complete. He will present it to his Father. We shall reign with him for ever and ever.

MISSION GIFT

A set of Mass vestments, handmade by Mrs. Carrie La Delfa, was presented to Father Joseph Reinhart at a recent meeting of Court Our Lady of the Cenacle, Catholic Daughters of America. Father Reinhart, diocesan director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, said the vestments would be sent to Kenya, Africa.

were the Messiah. With the humility of Elizabeth, his mother, John indignantly disclaimed the attribution. "I'm not fit," he said "even to loosen his sandal strap." John portrayed him like a judge separating good from bad as the wind separates wheat from chaff that is burned. This approach ignited an immediate reaction.

"The crowds asked, 'What must we do?'"

"Do what you're not now doing," answered John. "Be concerned about the poor."

Even the social outcasts, like tax collectors and soldiers, sought salvation. "What are we to do?"

"Don't take advantage of people," John said.

In a word the Messiah was coming to bring joy to men by teaching them, among other matters, to be good to one another.

When Jesus had left the earth, He sent the Holy Spirit to effect love in the hearts of men. As a stream might owe its existence to a spring welling up from the earth, so love originates not from something outside man, but from a fountain of love within him -- the Holy Spirit. That is why the saints of God, filled with the Spirit, could love everyone, independent of whether or not they deserved it.

Every time St. Paul described his missionary life, he insisted on the many difficulties and obstacles he encountered. When he wrote to the Philippians, he was in chains. Yet this letter is so redolent with joy that the second reading taken from it caused the Third Sunday of Advent to be called Gaudete Sunday, Joy Sunday.

Paul's insistence on his sufferings was done to make it clear that his joy depended not on circumstances outside himself, but on the Spirit of God within himself.

For this reason, joy in trial is precisely the sign of the Christian life, that one is filled with the Holy Spirit. The Christian is not joyful once in a while. The real Christian is always joyful. His joy is constant because it is a joy in the Lord. "Rejoice in the Lord always!" (R1)

WORD FOR SUNDAY. Fr. Albert Shamon. Includes a portrait of Fr. Albert Shamon.

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 3:10-18; (R1) Zep. 3:14-18; (R2) Phil. 4:4-7.

Joy is one of the principal themes of Scripture. God wills the well-being of all men.

In the Old Testament joy emanated from having the basic securities of everyday living. The joy of the harvest and vintage, the joy of the fraternal meal, the joy the fruitful wife brought to her husband, the boisterous joys of the great Israelite feast days -- all these were considered the blessings of God. But as Israel's faith matured she discovered that God does not always reward with temporalities. The securities men naturally seek, that trust in Him was preferable. And her joy deepened.

When Israel's faith slackened and she returned to things for security, prophets arose to warn and to turn her to God. Zephaniah was such a prophet. His message, as a whole, was terribly pessimistic for moral corruption flourished in Israel. From his prophecy, Thomas of Celano created the Latin hymn "Dies Irae" ("Day of Wrath") that used to be sung at funeral masses. When King Josiah (640-609 B.C.) appeared, Zephaniah foresaw a religious reform in the making. So he called upon Jerusalem to rejoice. "Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!" (R1)

This sole joyful segment in the prophecy of Zephaniah was used by Luke as background for the Annunciation story (hence its inclusion in the Advent liturgy). The phrases, "Rejoice," "Fear not," "The Lord is in your midst," are used almost verbatim by the angel Gabriel. They foretell that no longer is joy to be situated in a city but in a person: the Child of Mary.

From Him, joy radiated. At the Visitation, the child in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy. At His birth, angels caroled in heavenly song. In His public life, He rejoiced the sick, the possessed. Hence John's preaching was designated "good news."

People wondered whether John

Right to Life To Show Film

A movie on euthanasia, Who Shall Survive? is scheduled at a Right to Life meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 9 at the new Knights of Columbus hall, 670 Thurston Road.

The meeting is open to the public. Mrs. Jeanne Sweeney of the Right to Life Education Committee and William Polito, chairman of the Right to Life Political Committee are scheduled speakers.

Scarlata's New Year's Eve Party. DELUXE BUFFET. TOM MONTE'S BAND. COMPLETE OPEN BAR. Includes details about hors d'oeuvres, champagne, coffee, and ticket information.

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