

**ADVENT I - 2013**  
**SERMON-CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER JOHN ALTBERG**  
**COLLECT, ROMANS 8.8, MATTHEW 21. 1**

✠

**NEWSFLASH...CHURCH YEAR 2014 AND THE PENITENTIAL SEASON OF ADVENT IS UPON US...**

Accordingly, we note change...*subdued* is the appropriate descriptor...vestments have changed to purple, flowers do not appear, hymns are more quiet...the Gloria has gone missing...we quite rightly describe Advent as SERIOUS...Penitential seasons call us to consider serious matters...BUT they are NOT seasons of punishing deprivation, but rather seasons of Preparation/Opportunity ...WHAT does THAT mean...? ask many

Answer: Consideration of our lives...focusing FIRST on the Four Final/Last Things...First! No, that does NOT refer to attending the NBA Final Four basketball playoffs! The message of the Advent Collect we use every day until Christmas spells out the process...

*GOD HELP US STOP BEHAVING BADLY...DOING THINGS WE TRY TO HIDE, HELP US DO THINGS WE WANT PEOPLE TO SEE...THINGS JESUS TEACHES SO WHEN HE COMES BACK TO JUDGE BOTH THOSE ALIVE AND THOSE WHO HAVE DIED, ALL MAY BE READY AND ABLE TO SEE YOU IN HEAVEN.*

While we prefer the “nicer” version Archbishop Cranmer composed for the BCP...it’s prettier, gentler...the paraphrase removes any doubt about what we must do...**Get Our Lives in Order.**

Yes, we are in recovery from Thanksgiving, have Christmas shopping to complete, social obligations, decorations to find, a house full of people arriving in just over three weeks...now add ‘Life Orderliness’...? You must be nuts...might readily be your ready response! Answers...well YES YOU SHOULD AND NO...I’M NOT...!

Getting ready for has no greater demand than making certain we *abandon disorder*; certainly physical readiness is critical...provided it is for the right reasons. Those involve personal discipline in how and why we go about getting ready. Abandonment of physical preparation to devote all our time to spiritual preparation would undermine the purpose and have a decidedly negative effect on, at minimum, all around us.

If the concept of Advent is READINESS and this is a beginning, what, then is this point about LAST THINGS FIRST? The Collect speaks to the four final

things Advent calls us to consider. These are DEATH, JUDGMENT, HEAVEN AND HELL. While we don’t find it very comforting and we’d prefer not to think about it, death is something we shall all face...heaven is something for which we all hope. Judgment is something we shall all face...hell is the alternative to heaven. Many in our increasingly secularized society have bought the concept that there is neither God nor life beyond that which they know today.

Of great concern to many – I include myself – is the resulting escalation of apostasy...humankind dismissing God...turning a blind eye toward suffering and the common good.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *SAVED BY HOPE* strongly criticized this escalating rampant atheism. He profoundly stated it has led to some of the "greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice" ever known. At the same time, he notes, despondency leads only to self-destruction.

Today’s Epistle underscores in pragmatic terms Benedict’s forceful analysis...WORKS OF DARKNESS and why they must be countered.

Taking seriously his comments and the Epistle facilitates both physical and spiritual readiness for Christmas...if we focus on St. Paul’s checklist we find ourselves naturally prepared on all fronts. Failure to follow will render us ill-prepared...in a hopelessly messy state.

If the Epistle speaks directly to our preparation, what then, is the Gospel about? Though clearly the setting is Passover, this is the prelude to the judgment described in the Collect. Jesus arrived up in Jerusalem and was angered at the corrupt moneychangers and pigeon peddlers at the Temple. They had seized opportunity and made a mockery of religion. One can readily conclude that the moneychangers were not comforted by his visitation.

There’s good reason to believe Jesus would equally displeased with people behaving like moneychangers. Advent tells us to be ready when the King arrives...houses and behaviors in order.

Take note of the Rubric following the Collect...*THIS COLLECT IS TO BE REPEATED EVERY DAY, UNTIL CHRISTMAS.* We are called to take seriously both the Collect and those instructions...every day of Advent...the result can be remarkable...!

✠