

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT 2015

SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

THE COLLECT JEREMIAH 23.5

✠

It's the Sunday Next Before Advent...New Year's Eve for the Church...time for us to make some New Year's resolutions...of the spiritual kind.

Let's consider for a moment the kinds of resolutions we might make at secular New Year's Eve celebrations: Let there be Peace in the World...let's stop behaving like the world revolves around us...let's try to be nicer toward others...let's get stirred up to make some positive changes in our lives.

The Sunday Next Before Advent is all about getting stirred up. The Collect opens with the words...*stir up*...from the Latin *excita*. God stir up your power in us...and stir up our wills...to always say and do what is right?

Excita is also the root word for our English word *excitement*...to have great enthusiasm and eager anticipation. What we are asking God to do is get both our hearts and minds animated and ready to welcome Jesus on Christmas Day and to bless the good works we do.

The Collect also gives today its special Anglican nickname...*Stir up Sunday*. In Victorian times...people would go to Mass and hear the words "Stir up" in the collect and be reminded it was time to put together and "stir up" the Christmas pudding...so it would be ready in time for Christmas.

The Sunday Next Before Advent is a season of preparation for Advent much like the Pre-Lenten Season gets us ready for Lent. Both Advent and Lent are the penitential seasons...the violet colors of the vestments worn by the priest reflect the penitential nature of both seasons. Advent and Lent focus our attention toward the two great events in the life of Jesus...his birth...and his death.

Secular New Year's Eve resolutions are good only insofar as we take them seriously and intend to act on them. Sometimes that takes a tremendous amount of will power and the sincere desire to want to make changes in our lives that produce good results.

We ask God to stir up his power and our wills...because without his power giving us the strength and determination to do what is right and good, our wills just aren't where they need to be. Our wills need to be God-focused and about the business of doing good works and seeing the results of our works grow and prosper...that is what pleases God.

The Lesson from Jeremiah which we heard read today has a decidedly Advent message. In 597 BC, Zedekiah, king of Judah, ignored warnings from Jeremiah and his own family and signed a pact with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and agreed to work for him. As soon as the pact was in place, Zedekiah double-crossed Nebuchadnezzar with disastrous consequences.

Zedekiah's name means "the Lord our righteousness". He was anything but righteous. When he double-crossed Nebuchadnezzar, he showed his true colors. He put God's will aside and betrayed the trust God had placed in him. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, took its people into slavery and killed Zedekiah's family. Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, calls Zedekiah the "last and sorry monarch" of Judah.

But Jeremiah wrote to God's people not to be discouraged and to endure their hardships with patience. There was hope for a brighter future! God would send a savior...and he would be called **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**...and he would do what no human king could do...he would make things right again between God and his people. He would be a descendant of the great King David.

Jesus is **THE RIGHTEOUS ONE** Jeremiah is talking about. He empowers us to recognize our shortcomings and stirs up our wills...to do good works...and reap the reward that comes just from the doing...doing good works and seeing positive results is a reward in and of itself.

It's time for us to take our spiritual New Year's Eve resolutions seriously. Let's get all stirred up to make positive changes in our lives and get ready to go to work.

✠