

## SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT 2016

### SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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#### *THE COLLECT JEREMIAH 23.5*



Another Church Year has come and gone. It's time to get "stirred up" and get ready for Advent and the beginning of a new Church Year on Advent Sunday.

The Sunday Next before Advent is the last Sunday in the Trinity Season, which was especially long this year. It's also the Church's New Year's Eve. At secular New Year's Eve celebrations we make resolutions...the challenge is always to see just how long we can keep them.

The Collect gives today its unique Anglican nickname "Stir up Sunday". The opening words...*stir up*...come from the Latin *excita*. *Excita* is also the root word for our English word *excitement*...to have great *enthusiasm* and *eager anticipation*. We are asking God to "stir up" our wills so we may produce good works...and get ready for Jesus' arrival on Christmas Day.

We are asking 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 must 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.

"Stir up Sunday" is also the time to put all the ingredients together for the Christmas pudding...so it will be ready to serve on Christmas Day. The whole family gets involved and everyone gets a chance to stir up the pudding.

About 700 years before the birth of Jesus the prophet Jeremiah tried to get the wills of the people stirred up to doing what was right and pleasing to God. In 597 BC, Zedekiah, king of Judah, ignored Jeremiah's warning and signed a pact with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and agreed to work for him. Zedekiah soon double-crossed Nebuchadnezzar and the consequences were disastrous.

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.

Jeremiah told the people things were going to get better 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 simple task of doing. The doing of good works and seeing positive results is the only reward we should be asking God to give us.

We will soon focus our attention toward the most important event in human history: the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. It is God's direct interjection of himself into human history, as a baby in a manger, at a specific time, in a specific location, with a specific purpose...to reconcile humanity to himself. It is God's love revealed to us in the flesh and blood of Jesus the baby, Jesus the King.

Secular New Year's Eve resolutions are good only if 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.

The Collect is about us making New Year's Eve resolutions of the Godly kind: asking God to stir up our wills...to get us excited about the work we are doing...to help us to be enthusiastic in telling others about the gift of his Son, Jesus, whose birth we will soon celebrate...to make the work we do truly pleasing to him and a reflection of his love.

What are we waiting for? Let's get stirred up!

