

I ADVENT 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

THE COLLECT ROMANS 13.8 MATTHEW 11.1

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Wait a minute...it's not Palm Sunday...but here we have Jesus riding into town on a borrowed donkey! What's this all about?

The Palm Sunday Gospel seems out of place for the First Sunday in Advent. After all, aren't we supposed to be preparing our hearts and minds for Jesus' coming at Christmas? The word *Advent*, from the Latin *adventus*, means coming.

In the Collect for Advent Sunday we ask for God's help to turn away from darkness and embrace light...now...as we get ready for Jesus' first coming at Christmas...and look forward to his second coming at the end of time.

In his commentary on the Collect...Father Massey Shepherd writes it is truly remarkable in its antitheses: *cast off dark works...put on light; now in this time...in the last day; mortal life...life immortal; great humility...glorious majesty*.

When we think about what we are asking for in the Collect and in the context of what Father Shepherd writes...the Palm Sunday story makes perfect sense...and an appropriate meditation for the Advent Season. The Collect for Advent Sunday...is a wake up call!

600 years before the birth of Jesus, Zechariah wrote our King and Savior would come suddenly riding on a donkey...and we should rejoice and be happy. About 100 years later...Malachi wrote the Lord would come suddenly to his Temple. The birth of Jesus is in stark contrast to his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday.

If there is one word in Father Shepherd's commentary on the Collect that stands out...that word is NOW...and it ties together the past, present and future. Jesus is coming NOW...now is the time to get ready. Jesus will come again at some future date when history will cease. NOW is the time to get ready for his reentry program. The Advent Collect...is a WAKE UP CALL...we shouldn't wait to get our house in order...we should get things in order NOW!

What the Advent Collect and the Advent Season ask us to consider are the four final things:

- Death...none of us can avoid it...but because we are people of hope...we know death is not the end of things
- Judgment...we can't escape that either...and yes we will be judged by how we treat others...good works as Saint James tells us...show we are serious about our faith
- Heaven...is what the writer of Hebrews says we all hope for but have yet to experience
- Hell...not a punishment...a place for those who choose darkness

It's important for us to remember the baby Jesus of Christmas...and the adult Jesus of Palm Sunday...is the same Jesus. God made himself known to us first as a fragile flame...a baby...then as the all grown up Jesus...ready to finish his work.

What Jesus sees when he rides into town doesn't please him. He sees people who should have known better ripping their own people off...he calls them robbers who have turned God's house into a hideout for thieves.

Advent is a penitential season...that means we get ready for Christmas by taking a look at what we see in the mirror. Where do we need to make changes...for the better? By hurting others in word or action...we dishonor God and the Church...we embrace darkness...we reject the Light.

Saint Paul tells us to wake up and stop acting like people who are asleep all the time. He tells us stop doing things that belong in the dark and to embrace the Light that is Jesus...to conduct ourselves as people who love God and others.

The Advent Collect is a WAKE UP CALL. We can hit the snooze button and stay sleeping...or we can get up...get busy...and get ready to welcome Jesus at Christmas.

Let's not sleep through the arrival of God's greatest gift to us at Christmas...his son Jesus.

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