

Sunday Next Before Advent 2020
Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
The Collect Jeremiah 23.5-8



"*Old habits die hard*"...is an expression often used when describing a person who vigorously resists change. According to the on-line resource *Book Browse*...the first-known citation in the USA was by Benjamin Franklin in an article printed in the *London Chronicle* in December 1758.

Today is the final Sunday of the long Season of Trinity. The 1892 *Book of Common Prayer* restored the present title *Sunday Next Before Advent*, taken from the *Sarum Missal* developed in Salisbury in the late 11th Century. The 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Anglican Missal* have their roots in the *Sarum Missal*.

The Collect begins with the words "Stir up"...*excita* in Latin...giving today its informal name "Stir up Sunday". In Victorian times...people would go to Mass and hear the words "Stir up" in the collect. It would remind them it was time to put together and "stir up" the Christmas pudding...so it would be ready in time for Christmas.

Today is not about stirring up the Christmas pudding...as much as we might look forward to those tasty seasonal treats. We're celebrating the Church's New Year's Eve...and we're asking God to "stir up" our wills. Advent Sunday...New Year's Day for the Church...is just around the corner. It's time to get rid of those old habits that keep us from loving God and other people...and take on some new habits...that will produce the kind of good works we're asking for in the Collect.

All of us agree this past year has been challenging and frustrating...even for those of us in the Church who look forward to our time together each Sunday to praise God, receive the Blessed Sacrament and fellowship with each other. Most of us have experienced times when the only thing we're "stirred up" about is getting out of the house. Given the uptick in numbers...we need to prepare ourselves for the possibility we will once again have to suspend in-person Mass. How are we supposed to do what we're asking God to help us do when we're sheltering in place? .

In the Collect we ask God to stir up both his power and our wills...without his power...our wills are often somewhere other than where they need to be. Where they need to be is in the business of doing good works and seeing the results of our works grow and prosper...getting other people "stirred up"...of pleasing God...and getting ready to welcome Jesus on Christmas Day. We can do this...with God's help...in Church or at home. We can begin by committing ourselves to a personal prayer life...making it a new habit that will last and sustain us during these difficult times. In everything we do we want to try to get our wills to conform to God's will

In the Lesson for the Epistle, Jeremiah tries to get the people to please God and do what's best for others. They resisted. In 597 BC, Zedekiah, king of Judah, signed a pact with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and agreed to be his puppet king...with disastrous results. Zedekiah double-crossed Nebuchadnezzar and in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, took its people into slavery, and killed Zedekiah's family.

But Jeremiah told 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 RIGHTEOUSNES**. He would do what no human king could do, 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. It is his Advent...his First Coming...we are preparing to celebrate at Christmas. And we need to remind ourselves the real meaning of Christmas goes beyond the Christmas trees, lights and decorations. It's the welcoming of Jesus our Savior into our hearts.

There is no doubt Advent and Christmas will be different for us this year. This is the Church's New Year's Eve...and we can ask God wherever we are to "stir up" our wills to get rid of those old habits holding us back.

And we should pay attention to what Jeremiah wrote...we must endure our hardships with patience...we are people of hope...and we hope for a brighter future.

