

Sunday Next Before Advent 2022

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

The Collect Jeremiah 23.5-8

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It's that time of the Church Year for us to get stirred up...or more precisely to ask God to stir up our wills to do good works and to be "plenteously" rewarded.

The Collect for the Sunday Next Before Advent is one of the oldest in the Book of Common Prayer. It can be traced to the 10th Century. The opening words "Stir up" (in Latin, *excita*), gives today its popular Anglican name "Stir up" Sunday".

In his commentary on the Collect, Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *American Prayer Book Commentary*, writes the fruit of God's work and the fruit of our good works are not exactly the same thing, but there is an intimate connection between them.

When we ask God to stir up our wills we are acknowledging his will and our wills are not always in sync. We want our wills to conform to his...that is the only way we can do the good works he wants us to do.

In Victorian times, people would go to Mass and hear the opening words to the Collect. It would remind them to stir up the ingredients to the Christmas pudding. Most recipes call for the pudding to be made well in advance of Christmas...so the pudding has time to mature.

We can apply the decidedly incarnational image of the Christmas pudding maturing to our own spiritual lives. The Sunday Next Before Advent is the Church's New Year's Eve. The Collect is our New Year's Resolution...to ask God to stir up our spiritual lives so we can mature...and get ready for the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day.

About 700 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Jeremiah wrote that God was going to send a king who was a

descendant of David, and his name would be "*The Lord Our Salvation*". He would be the one who would put things right again between God and his people. He would bring them back from all over the world to live in their own land again.

The Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament, is full of God interacting with his people through prophets like Jeremiah. Christians understand his prophecy to be talking about Jesus.

God's love for us is not an abstract idea or thought; it is an action. God revealed his love for the Jews by doing things for them, either directly, or through people like Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others.

We experience God's love through the people we come into contact with in our daily lives...especially those who have had a positive influence on our lives and helped us mature spiritually.

We are about to turn our attention toward the most important event in human history. That event is the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. It is God's interjection of himself in human history, as a baby in a manger, at a specific time, and in a specific location. It is God's love for us in the flesh and blood of Jesus. It is about our redemption and final maturity when we get to heaven.

The coming of the promised Messiah, is expressed so well in the great hymn "*O come, O come, Emmanuel*". Hurry up, hurry up, and get here, God with us. Jesus is coming soon. That is really something to get excited about.

Stir up our wills, Lord! Get us excited about the work we are doing. Help us to be enthusiastic in telling others about the gift of your Son, Jesus, whose birth we will soon celebrate, and make the work we do truly pleasing to you.

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