

II Advent 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

The Collect Romans 15.4-13 St. Luke 21.25-33

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God has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.

The Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent was written for the seminal *1549 Book of Common Prayer*. It reflects Paul's teaching in his Letter to the Romans...everything that was written before was written for our learning. The "everything" Paul is referring to is the Hebrew Bible...what we call the Old Testament...without which everything in the New Testament would make no sense. Christianity is ultimately dependent upon the prophecies of the Old Testament being fulfilled in Jesus.

The language of the Collect is vivid...the image of being fed and nourished with God's Word which sustains us and keeps us strong in our faith is rich. We eat food to stay physically healthy. Reading the Bible keeps us spiritually healthy. We begin each Sunday Discussion Group with this collect. It should come as no surprise it is my favorite collect in the Prayer Book. It gives this day a special name..."Bible Sunday".

When the Collect was written only about 30% of the population in England was literate. Things were improving...more people were learning how to read and write. But how do you get the people to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the words of Holy Scripture when they hear the words spoken at Mass in Latin...a language most people didn't understand.

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) was the Archbishop of Canterbury at the time of the English Reformation. Archbishop Cranmer believed the Liturgy and the Scriptures played a large role in shaping peoples lives. He wanted the Liturgy and the Bible presented to the people in a language they understood. The result was the *1549 Book of Common Prayer* and the *Great English Bible of 1539*. The Liturgy and the Bible continue to shape our lives today.

In the Collect we ask God to help us listen to the words of the Bible we hear read in church; to read the Bible for ourselves; to remember what we have heard and read; to keep the words close to our hearts; and to let the words of the Bible keep our faith firm and strong, as we wait for Jesus to return as he promised he would one day.

Making reading the Bible part of our daily routine requires discipline. It might seem like an overwhelming task. After all, the Bible contains 66 books. If we include the Apocrypha, which Jesus and the Apostles may have alluded to in their teachings, there are 80 books. That makes the Bible is a Big Book. How do we make daily Bible reading a part of our lives?

The Lectionary in the front of the *Prayer Book* gives us a neat and orderly way of reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting the words of the Bible over the course of the Church Year. Advent is the season when we prepare to celebrate the First Coming of Jesus on Christmas Day. It's also the season we talk about his Second Coming at the end of time. The lessons from Isaiah lead us from prophecy to fulfillment in the birth and life of Jesus. The lessons from Revelation give us a healthy dose of the end times from John's startling vision.

When we read the whole Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, we see how God has been interacting with his people from the very beginning. We begin to understand what Saint Paul tells us in the Epistle...everything in the Bible was written to teach us and to give us hope. God's plan for us and our hope came true with the birth of his Son, Jesus. At a specific point in the history of humankind, God became like us and learned to walk among us so we one day could walk with him in heaven.

The Gospel tells us that when Jesus returns it will be apparent to everyone what is happening. We want to be prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus now by reading the Bible and applying its teachings to our lives. Jesus tells us familiar things will fade away, heaven and earth will be gone, but his words...which are true...will never fade away.

Hearing, reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the words of Holy Scripture is not a priest-only thing. We do this together. The Bible is the Word of God to guide and strengthen everyone. Advent is a good time to begin reading the Bible...the Prayer Book Lectionary makes the task easier.

Happy Bible Sunday!

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