

Second Reading: Paul's prayer for his faithful neophytes as earnest preparation for the Coming of Christ is that the Lord Jesus himself grant them a constant progress in 1) mutual brotherly love which is at the same time all-embracing, and 2) deep, interior holiness uniting them more and more with God. Paul also exhorts them to hold fast to the teachings received from him, which he in turn received from the Lord Jesus or the Apostles. This is Christian oral tradition.

II. HOMILIES

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

November 1, 1976: Solemnity of All Saints

The Human Situation: That our present human existence will be transformed completely into a glorified and wonderful new existence in heaven, is best illustrated by the transformation of a big green caterpillar into a large, beautiful, many-colored moth. The caterpillar is earth-bound, it eats continually till its course is run; then it either burrows into the ground to form a pupa or spins a cocoon around itself. There takes place then a marvellous metamorphosis, so that the identical caterpillar comes forth a winged creature of superb beauty. Now it no longer is tied down to earth but flies wherever it pleases. It is no longer concerned with eating and growing, but its joy is in flight, and it is invariably drawn toward the light. This is one of the wonders of God's nature.

The Good News: One of the most consoling truths of our holy faith is the resurrection from death to life of those who have followed Christ. Our dearly beloved ones who have departed from this life have joined the communion of saints and are very much alive in Christ. "God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him" (Wis. 2:23). Once he has been given existence by his Creator, man is destined to live on forever! If he has died in the friendship of God he is now assured of eternal happiness with God's saints. This happiness no one can take from him. It is everlasting and enduring. He is now forever in the company of all those who have fought the good fight, and remained faithful to God through all life's trials and sufferings.

It is an honorable and religious deed to pay our respects to our beloved deceased. In the book of Wisdom, the Holy Spirit tells us: "The souls of the just are in the hands of God. Their passing away was thought an affliction . . . but they are in peace" (3:1-3). Life on earth may have been hard at times, discouragement may have dogged their steps, suffering may have been their lot, but again the Spirit consoles us: "Chastened

a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God has tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace he proved them" (Wis. 3:5-6).

Our beloved ones who have entered the abode of the just will undergo a marvellous transformation. Like Christ they will be given a new and glorified existence. No pain or sorrow, no agony of death can touch them now. In life they were incorporated into Christ at baptism. All during life they partook of the Bread of Life in the Eucharist and in the Scriptures. They have grown continually in Christ. Now the glorified and resplendent Christ will manifest himself in each of his faithful members, for they shall share his glory. They shall put on the splendor that belongs to Christ to impart. He told his disciples the night before he died: "I have given them, O Father, the glory you gave me, that they may be one, as we are one" (Jn. 17: 22). This is the glory of the communion of saints, who are all one in Christ's Spirit of love, sharing the riches that belong to Christ himself. They live in perfect fulfillment of all their aspirations in the eternal presence of the Father.

But it is also a holy and wholesome thought to pray for our dead. For even the just man falls often. That is why Judas Maccabees sent funds to Jerusalem to provide a sacrifice of expiation for the men in the army who had fallen in battle and had not lived up to their covenant promises. Thus, the Scripture says: "he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from sin" (2 Macc. 12: 43.46). The Christian People of God have an infinitely more valuable sacrifice to offer to the Father, the very Body and Blood of Christ. He is the offering for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). The Eucharist that we offer brings great consolation to our dear departed ones, and great glory to those who have been admitted to the mansions of the Father.

Our Response: It is a noble deed to honor our departed ones. But what they appreciate most from us is our prayers, our offerings for the poor, our participation in the Eucharist which brings them untold joy. In Christ we are united even now, and someday, having followed him to the end, we shall be re-united in the glory of heaven.

CHRIST: HIGH PRIEST AND VICTIM

November 7, 1976: Thirty-Second Year in Ordinary Time

The Human Situation: In all our Churches and chapels, the candle continues to symbolize Jesus who gave himself up for our sake. Like the virginal beeswax Christ is virginal. He is on fire with love from the heavenly Spirit, as the candle is lit from above. As the candle gives

light and warmth by burning itself out more and more, so Christ by burning himself out in self-immolation gives life and warmth of love to all who come to the Light. The candle shows the way and saves from dangers of darkness, so Christ himself is the Way and the Savior from all the powers of evil.

The Good News: For several Sundays in the second reading, the author of the letter to the Hebrews has sketched in a particularly appealing manner the image of Christ our High Priest. Priest means mediator, and as such Jesus is truly a man, one of ourselves; he offers no other sacrifice but himself for his fellowmen; and his sacrificial oblation is everlasting.

In order to become our High Priest, Jesus took on our flesh and blood from the Virgin Mother, for only as man could he be mediator between God and man. He chose to be like his brothers in every way, living the life they lived, putting up with all the demands of this daily existence for several decades, so that he would understand the needs and problems of his brothers. In that way he could plead for them with the Father and be "a merciful and faithful High Priest before God in their behalf, to expiate their sins" (2:17). For years he underwent the inconveniences and sufferings common to man, "being tempted in every way that we are yet he never sinned . . . Thus he is able to sympathize with our weakness and to help those who are tempted" (4:15; 2:18). It is this loving condescension that makes him so approachable and appealing to the human heart. He is our Brother. He understands. He has our very flesh and blood. He knows.

But Jesus is at the same time the Victim for our sins. It took every ounce of strength to take upon himself the shame of the scourging, the ignominy of the crucifixion, the agony of hanging long hours exposed to the gaze of all on the cross. "With loud cries and tears he offered supplication to God" (5:7) bending his will again and again to that of the Father, who wishes his Son not only to take upon himself the sins of all mankind, but to manifest the extremes of God's love for man. "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (5:8).

Finally, Jesus is the Perfect Man. All holiness abides in him. He always did that which pleased the Father. Never for a moment was any thought or word or act of his displeasing to God. Innocent and undefiled Lamb that he is, he offered himself for his fellowmen (7:20). Countless animals offered in sacrifice could not blot out a single sin, but the Precious Blood of Christ, offering himself unblemished to God, completely takes away all sin, and enables man with purified conscience to worship the Father in a manner worthy of him (9:14). Once he had consummated his sacrifice, he became the source of holiness for all who approach him with confidence (5:9). Christ now lives forever to make intercession for his brothers (7:25). It was this loving and willing sacri-

fice of his Son that pleased the Father. On entering into the world he said: "I have come to do your will, O God . . . By this act of complete immolation of his will made once and for, all, we have been sanctified" (10:9-10). Ever before the Father's throne, Jesus' sacrifice is present, a constant plea for those who approach him with faith and confidence (9:24). **Our Response:** "Since we have a great high priest, who is over the house of God, let us draw near in utter sincerity and absolute confidence, our hearts sprinkled clean from the evil which lay on our conscience . . . let us hold unswervingly to our profession which gives us hope, for he who made the promise deserves our trust. We must consider how to rouse each other to love and good deeds" (10:21-24)

THE LORD IS COMING

November 14, 1976: Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Times

The Human Situation: When Palestinian guerillas hijacked a French plane and interned over one hundred Israeli in Entebbe, Uganda, a special group of trained Israeli executed a marvellous surprise attack on the Uganda airport where they were interned. The rescue was completely unexpected. It happened with blitz suddenness, and it was carried out with perfect precision. The plans for rescue were known only to the highest authorities, and the moment of rescue was top secret. The Parousia's final break-through is also top secret, known only to the Father, and it will come totally unexpected.

The Good News: The Lord is coming! That was the watchword of the early Christians. Full of expectation, they eagerly awaited the grand event which would be the crowning victory of the Savior. At times there were false prophets among them stirring up the faithful to fear and dread of impending disaster (like some self-styled prophets even today), but the genuine Christian sentiment was geared to a different dimension. They were not filled with foreboding at the thought of Christ's coming, but with joy and longing. Had they not put on Christ in baptism, and carried his cross in their daily lives? They had endeavored to follow him and live his gospel message. Was there any room for fear then at the thought of his coming in glory? On the contrary, Jesus himself had told them: "When these things begin to happen, lift up your heads for your deliverance is at hand" (Lk. 21:28). The final stage of Christ's salvific work would bring total redemption. St. Paul instilled courage into his Thessalonians when he wrote them these words: "then we shall be with the Lord unceasingly. Console one another with this message" (E Th. 4:17-18).

God did not reveal the time of Christ's glorious triumph. No matter how often the self-made prophets determine a definite year for the so-called end of the world, an all-wise God deemed it far better for man-

kind to be left in the dark about the time of the Parousia. Meantime, each succeeding generation could prepare itself by vigilance. One thing both the Lord and the Apostles made clear: it shall come suddenly and unexpectedly. Jesus said: "Be on your guard therefore. The Son of Man will come when you least expect him" (Lk. 12: 40). And again: "Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake! You do not know when the appointed time will come" (Mk. 13: 35). It will be like a flash of lightning, seen in the East and West at the same time (Mt. 24:27). It will be like a trap that springs closed suddenly (Lk. 21:34). It will be like the coming of a thief in the night or birthpangs that come upon a woman suddenly (1 Thess. 5:2). On this point the Lord must have impressed the disciples definitely.

When the sacred writers describe the end-times, they often use a peculiar style of writing called apocalyptic, which makes use of cosmic phenomena to express its message. The sun is said to be darkened, and the stars to fall from heaven. These expressions were never intended to be taken literally but symbolically. The prophets often use such expressions to drive home major events on earth, such as distress among nations because of wars, calamities, earthquakes, pestilence. These are divine judgments on mankind and when they are intensified, the heavens are said to take part. Nor does the Scripture say that the world is going to "end". Rather, it is to reach its stage of consummation, to undergo through divine power a transformation. It would indeed be remarkable if the good God had created the immense universe with all the mighty stars and galaxies, only in the end to annihilate them all. To what purpose? St. Paul has a different idea: He tells us in the letter to the Romans that "the whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God... the world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God" (8:19f). Creation is tending toward an end-point under God's impetus. This end-point in the plan of God is a glorious issue, a long-developed resultant which all creation is aiming at since the very outset, and man himself is hastening by his sincere efforts. But God alone can bring it about.

Today the liturgy has re-inserted the thought of the Coming of Christ several times in the Eucharistic sacrifice, especially after the elevation, when the faithful proclaim: "Christ will come again", and the priest repeats this after the Our Father. We are thus strongly reminded of the grand event to come, in order to prepare properly by holiness of life. We can and ought to make the prayer of the early Christians our own: Maranatha, the Lord is Coming! or that of the book of Revelation: Come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:20)!

Our Response: We ought not be too gullible in believing all manner of supposed private revelations especially those with dire forebodings. Jesus told us to be vigilant, and St. Paul urges us to prepare by becoming more

holy each day. The Scripture warns the sinner that if he continues in his sinful ways, the Day of the Lord will overtake him unprepared when he least expects it. But it does not frighten the faithful followers of Christ with horrors and threats. Vigilance and prayer are the watchwords. The Day of the Lord will come for each one individually in God's own time.

JESUS, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

November 21, 1976: Solemnity of Christ the King

The Human Situation: In 1927 revolution broke out in Mexico. Cruel despots took it out on the Church and faithful Catholics. Priests were hunted down and shot to death. Outstanding among them was the Jesuit Fr. Pro. Men and women were thrown into prison, their property confiscated. Youth rallied to the Catholic cause and gave up their lives rather than betray their faith. Thousands died gloriously, shouting "Long live Christ the King" as they faced the firing squads. The revolution has passed. Mexico is more Catholic today than ever. Catholic Mexico bore witness to the truth.

The Good News: Jesus stood before Pilate, Procurator of Judea, representative of the Roman Empire, the greatest empire the world had as yet seen: Pilate, self-confident at first, arrogant, and anxious to finish this unpleasant business in quick order. And Jesus? He stood there bound by cords, covered with blood and dirt and spittle, hair dishevelled, accused of the crime of lese majesty, handed over to be judged by Pilate as guilty of death. And he really claims to be a king?

Have no fear, Pilate. Jesus is not king of some other earthly empire that hopes to rival Rome. Not at all! He is no pretender to the temporal throne of David which had ruled the land for centuries and now lay in ruin. Far from it! He is not one of those zealot leaders who planned to put an end to foreign domination as others had tried in the past. No! Jesus has no designs of violence, he has no lust for temporal power. He does not aim at Caesar's throne nor any other earthly one. His is an empire more vast than all the empires of the world put together, yet it is not of this world. His is a kingdom that far exceeds the bounds of earth. He is King of the universe, universal ruler having power over all creatures "high above every name that can be given in this age or the age to come" (Eph. 1:21).

But how does he reign? In what does his spiritual kingdom consist? his reign extends over the hearts of men. He has come into the world to bear witness to the truth of God's love for his children, a love that did not spare even his only Son. Untiringly he taught the children of men

that God desires not the death of the sinner but that he repent and live. How often he pointed out that the reign of God was at hand, only there was need of a change of heart from selfishness and greed, from sin and the works of darkness, to selfless love of one's fellowmen after his own example. Those who accept him and are bent on following him are the children of the Kingdom. They are not out to rival any earthly power, they are not craving for first places; they are marked for service of all who need help. This is the reign of God that he came to establish.

Then why is he here standing like a man condemned before Pilate? Because his own did not receive him. On the contrary, his message of love was too much to bear, his words of gentle forgiveness of our fellowmen and service of one another did not find an echo in men's hearts. His call for metanoia and a change of heart did not find the required response. Because men loved the darkness more than the light. Therefore they plotted to put out the Light. They would crucify him and kill him but they would never be able to put out the Light. For he is Light Eternal. He is destined to rule from one end of the heavens to the other in unsurpassed glory. Once his mission of bearing witness even unto death is accomplished, he shall rise to be enthroned forever on high. And from there he shall draw all to himself.

As vast as the universe is the domain of Christ's reign. He is the center of the cosmos, for all things in the heavens and on earth will be brought under his headship (Eph. 1:10). "He is the first-born from the dead, so that primacy may be his in everything" (Col. 1:18). Now he stands before the representative of the Roman Empire to be judged and condemned. A day will come when the very Emperor will fall at his feet and adore him, and all his subjects will bow the knee to him. The Roman Empire crumbled and passed away. Christ's reign will never pass away. "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14).

Perhaps we are on the threshold of a new era, when spaceman will succeed in penetrating further out into the universe, and contacting other civilizations of living intellectual beings. Did Christ have these in mind when he told his apostles to "go into the whole world (kosmos) and proclaim the good news to all creation" (Mk. 16:15)? We do not know. But if there should be other intellectual beings on other stellar bodies, one thing is certain: Christ is supreme King of the universe over all.

Our Response: The annual celebration of the Feast of Christ the King in a special parish in a given diocese is a splendid opportunity for all participants to renew loyalty to him who has shown such love for them, and who reigns now with such admirable goodness and mercy. Let young and old but above all the youth demonstrate that they have not only enthroned a statue of Christ the King on a pedestal for the procession, but above all that they have enthroned him in their hearts to let him

reign there. This will only be done if they live his gospel message of reconciliation and love. To decorate externally is praiseworthy. To decorate the heart with purity, love, mercy and faithfulness brings down God's abundant blessings.

ADVENT PREPARATION

November 28, 1976: First Sunday in Advent

The Human Situation: What elaborate preparations are made for a wedding, especially if there is question of those who are well-to-do! Invitations are sent out, best man and bridesmaids selected, garments specially made or chosen for the occasion, "showers" for the young couple to provide them with the necessary things for their new life, a suitable abode picked out, and finally everything is in readiness. The book of Revelation (19:7) depicts God's climaxing reign over man under the image of the wedding of the Lamb with his Spouse, the Church. Long centuries went into the preparation of this divine wedding and the bride's wedding-garment is the virtuous deeds of God's saints (v.8).

The Good News: The keynote for Advent is "preparation", for "advent" means "coming", and it prepares us for a twofold coming, that of Christmas, the birthday of Jesus to be reborn in our hearts, and the final Coming of the triumphant Christ in glory. By means of our spiritual rebirth in the Christchild we are prepared more fittingly to be ready for his Coming in glory, be in at the end-time or for the individual at his departure from this life.

Many will ready themselves for Christmas by festive decorations, and by preparing gifts for relatives and friends. Radios play Christmas music throughout the seasons, Christmas lanterns and lights adorn windows and rooms, and soon the evenings are filled with carolling. Surrounded by these factors we cannot help getting into the spirit of Christmas. Meantime the liturgy strives to prepare the hearts of God's children so that the real event of Christmas be not lost sight of, namely, God's Son becoming our Brother, and that the spiritual rebirth intended by the celebration of Christmas be accomplished.

In Advent, the liturgy will recall the many prophetic utterances about the Coming One, the Messiah-King of Israel, whom we profess to be Jesus, Son of Mary. His person and his hole are brought out from various angles in the prophecies. On our lips are placed the longing and the pleadings of the patriarchs and prophets, so that we enter into their spirit of hope and expectation, this time to prepare for a renewal of the Christ-life within us. The infancy narratives make us ponder on the

ineffable mystery of the Incarnation, the deep faith and total commitment of Mary, the anxiety and selflessness of Joseph, Elizabeth's joy in receiving Mary into her home and Mary's song of thanksgiving (the Magnificat). Re-living these scenes, we put on the sentiments of God's chosen ones that thereby we may be more prepared to welcome the Christ-child on his birthday.

The liturgy likewise brings before our minds the stalwart figure of John the Baptist who prepared the People of God to receive Christ in his public appearance. Both the ascetical figure of the man and his clarion call to "prepare the way" is bound to have a salutary effect in making our own preparation worth while. Nine days before Christmas the Missa de gallo heightens our expectations and fills us with joy at the thought of the nearness of the feast. Our participation will be the final stage of our preparation for it.

This annual interior renewal brought about by the Advent preparation serves a further purpose which is emphasized by the liturgy again and again. It makes us more prepared for the final Coming of Christ in triumph and glory. Our preparation for that event consists in putting away all sinfulness and becoming more holy as Christ is holy. This is what St. Paul tells his Thessalonians: "May God strengthen your hearts, making them blameless and holy before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his holy ones" (1 Th. 3:13). And again: "May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness. May he preserve you whole and entire . . . irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (5:23). And to the Corinthians he writes: "God will strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8). It is evident that the liturgy is endeavoring to make us interiorly prepared, not only for the feast of Christmas, but also for the grand event of Christ's coming, whenever that becomes a reality for us individually.

Our Response: It would be regrettable if the Christian People of God would stop only at the external and material preparation for Christmas. It is the internal preparation that has a lasting effect long after all the lanterns and the decorations are taken down, and even the gifts are forgotten. If the mind and heart have become more like Christ in this time of preparation, the Advent period of preparation has borne much fruit, fruit lasting even till time is no more and eternity has dawned. This is the fruit which the Christian ought to store up most.