

The Second Sunday of Advent

The Liturgical Year

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The Office of this Sunday is filled, from beginning to end, with the sentiments of hope and joy, with which the soul should be animated at the glad tidings of the speedy coming of Him who is her Saviour and Spouse. The interior coming, that which is effected in the soul, is the almost exclusive object of the Church's prayers for this day: let us therefore open our hearts, let us prepare our lamps, and await in gladness that cry, which will be heard in the midnight: 'Glory be to God! Peace unto men!'

The Roman Church makes the Station today in the basilica of Holy-Cross-in-Jerusalem. It was in this venerable church that Constantine deposited a large piece of the true cross, together with the title which was fastened to it by Pilate's order, and which proclaimed the kingly character of the Saviour of the world.

These precious relics are still kept there; and, thus enriched with such a treasure, the basilica of Holy-Cross-in-Jerusalem is looked upon, in the Roman liturgy, as Jerusalem itself, as is evident from the allusions made in the several Masses of the Stations held in that basilica. In the language of the sacred Scriptures and of the Church, Jerusalem is the image of the faithful soul; and the Office and Mass of this Sunday have been drawn up on this idea, as the one of the day. We regret not to be able here to develop the sublime beauty of this figure; and must proceed at once to the passage, which the Church has selected from the prophet Isaias. There she tells her children how well founded are her hopes in the merciful and peaceful reign of the Messias. But first let us adore this divine Messias:

Come, let us adore the King, our Lord, who is to come.

From the Prophet Isaias.

Chapter 9

And there shall come forth a branch out of the rod of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the Spirit of knowledge and of godliness: and he shall be filled with the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears: but he shall judge the poor with justice, and shall reprove with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

And justice shall be the girdle of his loins, and faith the girdle of his reins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and the lion and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall lead them. The calf and the bear shall feed: their young ones shall rest together: and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. And the sucking child

shall play on the hole of the asp: and the weaned child shall thrust his hand into the den of the basilisk. They shall not hurt, nor shall they kill in all my holy mountain: for the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the covering waters of the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who stands for an ensign of people, him the Gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulchre shall be glorious.

How much is contained in these magnificent words of the prophet! The branch; the flower that is to come from it; the Spirit which rests on this flower; the seven gifts of this Spirit; peace and confidence established on the earth; and, throughout the world, one brotherhood in the kingdom of the Messias! St. Jerome, whose words are read by the Church in the lessons of the second nocturn of this Sunday, says that the branch which cometh forth from the root of Jesse, is the blessed Virgin Mary, who had contact with no shrub or plant; and that the flower is the Lord Jesus, who says in the Canticle of canticles:

'I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valley.' In every age of the Christian Church, this wonderful branch and its divine flower have been objects of enthusiastic veneration. In the middle ages the tree of Jesse, with its prophetic branches, was carved on the cathedral porches, was painted on the windows, was embroidered on the hangings of the sanctuary, and the melodious voice of the priests sang its praises in the beautiful responsory composed by Fulbert of Chartres, and put to music by the devout king Robert.

R. The root of Jesse gave out a branch, and the branch a flower; and on the flower rests the holy Spirit.

V. The Virgin Mother of God is the branch, her Son the flower. And on the flower rests the holy Spirit.

The devout St. Bernard, commenting upon this responsory in his second Advent homily, says: 'The Virgin's Son is the flower, a flower white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands; a flower on whom the angels love to look; a flower whose fragrance restores the dead; a flower, as Himself assures us, of the field, not of a garden: for the flowers of the field bloom without man's care, no man has sown their seed, no man has cultivated them.'

Just so the Virgin's womb, a meadow verdant in an endless spring, has brought forth a flower, whose beauty will never droop, whose freshness will never fade. Oh Virgin, branch sublime, to what a height art thou grown! Even up to Him that sits on the throne, even to the Lord of majesty. It was sure to be so, for thou casts deep down the roots of humility. Oh plant of heaven indeed, precious above all, holier than all. Oh tree of life indeed, alone worthy to bear the fruit of salvation.'

And of the holy Spirit and His gifts, what shall we say? They rest and are poured out on the Messias only to the end that they may flow from Him upon us; He needs them not; but we alone need wisdom and understanding, counsel and fortitude, knowledge and godliness, and fear of the Lord. Let us ask with insistence for this divine Spirit, by whose operation Jesus was conceived and born in Mary's womb, and let us beg of Him to form Jesus within our hearts.

But let us not forget to rejoice at those other glorious things which are told us by the prophet, of the happiness, and peace, and delights, which are to be on the holy mountain.

The world has been looking for so many ages for peace; it is now coming. Sin has caused enmity and division everywhere; grace will bring unity. A little Child will be the pledge of an alliance between all nations. The prophets have foretold it, the Sibyl has announced it, and in Rome itself, buried as it is in paganism, the prince of Latin poets has sung the celebrated poem, which, after all, is but the voice of the old tradition: ‘The last age foretold by the Cumean Sibyl, is at hand; a new race is being sent down to earth from high heaven. The flock shall no more fear the fierce lions. The serpent shall be no more: the treacherous plant, which yielded poison, shall grow no more.

Come then, Oh Messias, and restore to the world its primitive peace; but remember, we beseech Thee, that it is in the heart of man that harmony has been broken more than elsewhere in Thy creation: cure this heart, enter into possession of this Jerusalem, which Thou loves, though so unworthy: she has been too long captive in Babylon; lead her out of this strange land. Build up her temple again, and make the glory of this second temple to be greater than that of the first, by having Thee to dwell in it, not in figure, but in the reality of Thy adorable Person. The angel said to Mary: ‘The Lord God shall give unto thy Son the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.’ What can we do, Oh Jesus, but say with Thy beloved disciple, at the close of his prophecy: ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus !’

Mass

The holy sacrifice commences with a song of triumph, addressed to Jerusalem. This song expresses the joy which will fill the heart of man, when he shall hear the voice of his God. It extols the goodness of that divine Shepherd, who looks on each of our souls as a sheep most dear to Him, so dear, indeed, that He will feed it with His own flesh.

Introit

People of Sion, behold the Lord will come to save the Gentiles: and the Lord will make the glory of his voice heard to the joy of your hearts.

Ps. Give ear, Oh thou that rules Israel: thou that leads Joseph like a sheep.

V. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. Amen

In the Collect, the priest lays stress on the great preparation we must make for the coming of our Saviour; we must have purity of heart.

Collect

Stir up, Oh Lord, our hearts to prepare the ways of thy only-begotten Son: that by His coming we may be enabled to serve thee with pure minds. Who lives and reigns One God world without end. Amen.

The other Collects of the blessed Virgin, against the persecutors of the Church, and for the Pope, are the same as on· the first Sunday in Advent.

Epistle

Lesson of the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans. (Romans 15:4-13)

Brethren, what things soever were written, were written for our learning: that through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures, we might have hope. Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of one mind one towards another, according to Jesus Christ: that with one mind and with one mouth you may glorify God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive one another as Christ also has received you unto the honour of God. For I say that Christ Jesus was minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. But that the Gentiles are to glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: Therefore will I confess to Thee, Oh Lord, among the Gentiles, and will sing to thy name. And again ho says: Rejoice ye Gentiles with his people. And again: Praise the Lord all ye Gentiles, and magnify him all ye people. And again Isaías says: There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise up to rule the Gentiles, in him the Gentiles shall hope. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing: that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Ghost.

Here, Christians, is your instruction; be patient, be firm in hope, and you shall delight in the God of peace who is coming to you. But take heed, you must have cordial charity one for the other; it is the mark of the children of God. The prophet tells us that the Messias will make even wolf and lamb dwell together; and now we have the apostle showing us how this same Christ brings Jews and Gentiles into the one same family. Glory to this sovereign King, the powerful offspring of the root of Jesse, who now bids us hope in Him! Listen to the Church, she again tells us that He is about to show Himself in Jerusalem.

Gradual

He shall come in his comeliness and beauty from Sion: God will come visibly.

V. Gather to him his saints, who have set his covenant by sacrifice.

Alleluia, alleluia.

V. I rejoiced at what was told me: we are to go up to the house of the Lord. Alleluia.

Gospel

Sequel of the holy Gospel according to Matthew. (Matthew 11:2-10)

At that time: When John had heard in prison the works of Christ, sending two of his disciples, he said to him: Art an thou he that art to come, or look we for another? And Jesus making answer, said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them: and blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me.

And when they went their way, Jesus began to say to multitude, concerning John: What went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings. But what went you out to see? A prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send my angel before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.

Thou art He that was to come, Oh Jesus! We look for no other. We were blind, Thou hast enlightened us; we were lame, Thou hast made us walk; the leprosy of sin disfigured us, Thou hast cleansed us; we were deaf to Thy words, Thou hast given us hearing; we were dead in sin, Thou hast given us life again; we were poor and had none to care for us, Thou hast come to us with every aid and consolation. These have been, and will again be, the blessings of Thy visit to our souls. Oh Jesus! A visit, silent but wonderful in its work; which flesh and blood cannot understand, but which faithful hearts feel is granted them. Come, my Saviour, come to me, Thy condescension, and familiarity with such poverty as mine, shall not scandalize me; Thy workings in the souls of men are proof enough that Thou art God. He alone, that created souls, can heal them.

After the symbol of faith has been chanted, when you see the priest is about to make the offering of the bread and wine, unite with the Church in asking to be filled with life by the divine Guest, who is so soon to be with her.

Offertory

Thou will turn, Oh God, to us, and bring us to life, and Thy people shall rejoice in Thee: show us, Oh Lord, Thy mercy, and grant us thy salvation.

Secret

Be appeased, Oh Lord, we beseech Thee, by our humble prayers and sacrifices: and although we allege no deserts on our part, grant us thy protection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who lives and reigns with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen

During the Communion, the voice of the Church is again heard, proclaiming the happiness which is to be granted to Jerusalem. Her God is coming to her, and He wishes to make her His bride. Let her prepare herself for this divine visit, and detach herself from everything which is not God, her God who is her Spouse.

Communion

Arise, Oh Jerusalem, and stand on high; and behold the joy that will come to thee from thy God.

In the following prayer the Church explains in what consists that high standing to which she has just invited Jerusalem: love of the things of heaven whence comes her Saviour, and contempt of earthly things which, when loved, separate man from God.

Postcommunion

Being filled, Oh Lord, with this spiritual food, we humbly beseech thee to teach us, by partaking of this mystery, to despise earthly things, and to love such as are heavenly. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who lives and reigns with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen