

The Third Sunday of Advent

The Liturgical Year

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Today, again, the Church is full of joy, and the joy is greater than it was. It is true that her Lord has not come; but she feels that He is nearer than before, and therefore she thinks it just to lessen somewhat the austerity of this penitential season by the innocent cheerfulness of her sacred rites. And first, this Sunday has had the name of '*Gaudete*' given to it, from the first word of the Introit; it also is honoured with those impressive exceptions which belong to the fourth Sunday of Lent, called '*Laetare*'. The organ is played at the Mass; the vestments are rose-colour; the deacon resumes the dalmatic, and the subdeacon the tunic; and in cathedral churches the bishop assists with the precious mitre. How touching are all these usages, and how admirable this condescension of the Church, wherewith she so beautifully blends together the unalterable strictness of the dogmas of faith and the graceful poetry of the formulae of her liturgy! Let us enter into her spirit, and be glad on this third Sunday of her Advent, because our Lord is now so near unto us. Tomorrow we will resume our attitude of servants mourning for the absence of their Lord and waiting for Him; for every delay, however short, is painful and makes love sad.

The Station is kept in the basilica of St. Peter, at the Vatican. This august temple, which contains the tomb of the prince of the apostles, is the home and refuge of all the faithful of the world; it is but natural that it should be chosen to witness both the joy and the sadness of the Church.

The night Office commences with a new Invitatory. The voice of the Church no longer invites the faithful to come and adore in fear and trembling the King, our Lord, who is to come. Her language assumes another character; her tone is one of gladness; and now, every day, until the vigil of Christmas, she begins her nocturns with these grand words:

The Lord is now nigh; come, let us adore.

Now let us take the book of the Prophet, and read with the Church:

From the Prophet Isaias - Chapter 26

In that day shall this canticle be sung in the land of Juda. Sion the city of our strength: a Saviour, a wall, and a bulwark shall be set therein. Open ye the gates and let the just nation, that keeps the truth, enter in. The old error is passed away, thou wilt keep peace: peace, because we have hoped in thee. You have hoped in the Lord for evermore: in the Lord God mighty for ever. For he shall bring down them that dwell on high, the high city he shall lay low. He shall bring it down even to the ground, he shall pull it down even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down; the feet of the poor, the steps of the needy. The way of the just is right, the path

of the just is right to walk in. And in the way of thy judgements, Oh Lord, we have patiently waited for thee: thy name and thy remembrance are the desire of the soul. My soul has desired thee in the night: yea, and with my spirit within me in the morning early I will watch to thee.

Oh holy Roman Church, *city of our strength!* Behold us thy children assembled within thy walls, around the tomb of the fisherman, the prince of the apostles, whose sacred relics protect thee from their earthly shrine, and whose unchanging teaching enlightens thee from heaven. Yet, *Oh city of strength:* it is by the Saviour, who is coming, that thou art strong. He is thy wall, for it is He that encircles, with His tender mercy, all thy children; He is thy *bulwark*, for it is by Him that thou art invincible, and that all the powers of hell are powerless to prevail against thee.

Open wide thy gates, that all nations may enter thee; for thou art mistress of holiness and the guardian of truth. May the *old error*, which sets itself against the faith, soon disappear, and peace reign over the whole fold! Oh holy Roman Church, thou has for ever put thy trust in the Lord; and He, faithful to His promise, has humbled before thee the haughty ones that defied thee, and the proud cities that were against thee. Where now are the Caesars, who boasted that they had drowned thee in thine own blood? Where the emperors, who would ravish the inviolate virginity of thy faith? Where the heretics, who, during the past centuries of thine existence, have assailed every article of thy teaching, and denied what they listed? Where the ungrateful princes, who would fain make a slave of thee, who has made them what they were? Where that empire of Mahomet, which has so many times raged against thee, for that thou, the defenceless State, didst arrest the pride of its conquests? Where the reformers, who were bent on giving the world a Christianity, in which thou was to have no part? Where the more modern sophists, in whose philosophy thou was set down as a system that had been tried, and was a failure, and is now a ruin? And those kings who are acting the tyrant over thee, and those people that will have liberty independently and at the risk of truth, where will they be in another hundred years?

Gone and forgotten as the noisy anger of a torrent; whilst thou, Oh holy Church of Rome, built on the immovable rock, wilt be as calm, as young, as unwrinkled as ever. Thy path through all the ages of this world's duration, will be right as that of the just man; thou wilt ever be the same unchanging Church, as thou hast been during the eighteen hundred years past, whilst everything else under the sun has been but change. Whence this thy stability, but from Him who is very truth and justice? Glory be to Him in thee! Each year, He visits thee; each year, He brings thee new gifts, wherewith thou may go happily through thy pilgrimage; and to the end of time, He will visit thee, and renew thee, not only with the power of that look wherewith Peter was renewed, but by filling thee with Himself, as He did the ever glorious Virgin, who is the object of thy most tender love, after that which thou bears to Jesus Himself. We pray with thee, Oh Church, our mother, and here is our prayer: 'Come, Lord Jesus! Thy name and Thy remembrance are the desire of our souls: they have desired Thee in the night, yea, and early in the morning have they watched for Thee.'

MASS

The assembly of the faithful is attentive; the cantors intone the Gregorian melody, and the church echoes with these sweet words:

Introit

Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men: for the Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous: but in every prayer let your petitions be made known to God.

Ps. Oh Lord thou hast blessed thy land: thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob.

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

In the Collect, the Church asks for the grace of that divine visit, which dispels darkness and brings light. Darkness produces fear in the soul; whereas, light gives courage and joy to the heart.

Collect

Bend thine ear, Oh Lord, we beseech thee, to our prayers; and enlighten the darkness of our minds by the grace of thy visitation. Who lives and reigns, with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.

Epistle - St. Paul the Apostle to the Philippians (Philippians 4:4-7)

Brethren, rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men: the Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous: but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing is more just than that we rejoice in the Lord. Both the prophet and the apostle excite us to desire the Saviour, both of them promise us peace. Therefore, let us not be solicitous: the Lord is near; near to His Church, and near to each of our souls. Who can be near so burning a fire, and yet be cold? Do we not feel that He is coming to us, in spite of all obstacles? He will let nothing be a barrier between Himself and us, neither His own infinite high majesty, nor our exceeding lowliness, nor our many sins. Yet a little while, and He will be with us. Let us go out to meet Him by these prayers and supplications, and thanksgiving which the apostle recommends to us. Let our zeal to unite ourselves with our holy mother the Church become more than ever fervent: now every day her prayers will increase in intense earnestness, and her longings after Him, who is her light and her love, will grow more ardent. First let us say together with her:

Gradual

Oh Lord, who sits on the Cherubim, exert thy power and come.

V. Thou who rules Israel, hearken. Thou who leads Joseph as a sheep.

Alleluia, alleluia.

V. Exert, Oh Lord, thy power, and come to save us.

Alleluia.

Gospel - Sequel of the holy Gospel according to John. (John 1:19-28)

At that time: the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and levites to John, to ask him: Who art thou? And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed: I am not the Christ. And they asked him: What then? Art thou Elias? And he said: I am not. Art thou a prophet? And he answered: No. They said therefore unto him: Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What says thou of thyself? He said: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaias. And they that were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him and said to him: Why then dost thou baptise, if thou be not Christ, nor Elias, nor a prophet? John answered them saying: I baptise with water ; but there has stood one in the midst of you, whom you know not. The same is he that shall come after me, who is preferred before me: the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose. These things were done in Bethania, beyond the Jordan, where John was baptising.

There has stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not, says Saint John the Baptist to them that were sent by the Jews. So that our Lord may be near, He may even have come, and yet by some be not known! This Lamb of God is the holy Precursor's consolation: he considers it a singular privilege to be but the voice, which cries out to men to prepare the way of the Redeemer. In this, St. John is the type of the Church, and of all such as seek Jesus.

St. John is full of joy because the Saviour has come: but the men around him are as indifferent as though they neither expected nor wanted a Saviour. This is the third week of Advent; and are all hearts excited by the great tidings told them by the Church, that the Messiah is near at hand? They that love Him not as their Saviour, do they fear Him as their Judge? Are the crooked ways being made straight, and the hills being brought low? Are Christians seriously engaged in removing from their hearts the love of riches and the love of sensual pleasures?

There is no time to lose: the Lord is nigh! If these lines should come under the eye of any of those Christians who are in this state of sinful indifference, we would conjure them to shake off their lethargy, and render themselves worthy of the visit of the divine Infant: such a visit will bring them the greatest consolation here, and give them confidence hereafter, when our Lord will come to judge all mankind. Send Thy grace, Oh Jesus, still more plentifully into their hearts; 'compel them to go in,' and permit not that it be said of the children of the Church, as St. John said of the Synagogue: There stands in the midst of you One, whom you know not.

During the Offertory the faithful should unite in the prayer of the Church, and beg that the captivity in which our sins hold us may be brought to an end, and that the divine Deliverer may come.

Offertory

Lord, thou hast blessed thy land; thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob, thou has forgiven the iniquity of thy people.

Secret

May the sacrifice of our devotion, we beseech Thee, O Lord, be always offered unto Thee: that it may both fulfil the end for which Thou didst institute this sacred mystery, and wonderfully work in us Thy salvation. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, forever and ever.

During the Communion, the Church chants the words of the prophet Isaias, which bid the heart of the sinner take courage. Fear not, Christian people! He that, is coming is God; but He comes to save His creatures, and to give Himself to them.

Communion

Say: be comforted, Oh ye timid of heart, and fear not; behold our God will come, and save us.

The Church asks of God, in the following prayer, that the secret visit which she has just been receiving from her divine Spouse, may fit her for that solemn one which she is preparing to receive at the feast of Christmas.

Postcommunion

We implore, Oh Lord, thy mercy: that these divine helps, having cleansed us from sin, may prepare us for the ensuing solemnity. . Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who lives and reigns with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, forever and ever.