

FIVE MINUTE SERMON BY THE REV. F. P. HICKEY, O. S. B. FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE REDEEMER

"Your redemption is at hand." (Luke xxi, 28.)

Solemn and sublime thoughts should lift up our hearts at the beginning of this holy time of Advent. The anniversary of the coming of our Redeemer is at hand and gratitude for that blessed coming bids us raise up the eyes of our soul, and reverently peer into the mystery of God's goodness in decreeing that a Saviour should be born to save His people from their sins. From all eternity the Almighty had determined to create mankind. From all eternity He knew of the fall, of man's infulness and rebellion against Him, so that it would come to pass, as the Scripture says, "It repented Him that He had made man" (Gen. vi. 6.) His justice was outraged; His mercy despaired. And poor fallen man, what could become of him? He could not retrieve the past. He could not atone for his own misdeeds. Was there no salvation for the human race?

A God was needed to make reparation and atonement for the outrages against a God! for the outrages of unbelief, of blasphemy, of hatred, of the impurities, and of all the evils that spring up from the depraved hearts of sinners. Then was the mystery of love declared that surrounded heaven; that caused countless angels to rebel; for poor fallen man was to be more honored than themselves. The second Person of the Blessed Trinity willingly offered Himself to come to the rescue of mankind. As God, He could not suffer, but a body and a soul united to the divine Person, and behold Emmanuel—God with us, our Redeemer! "Behold! I come." He said. A Man to suffer; a God to offer! The justice of the Almighty to be placated; His mercy to be thanked; His love to be requited! And the gates of heaven to be opened to repentant man. This is the tidings of great joy that Advent brings to the faithful.

But how little did the world understand of the divine mercy that was to come! True, God's chosen people knew that a Messiah, a Saviour, had been promised. The prophets had spoken of Him. Devout men had longed for His coming and prayed that they might live to see it. But as time went on these holy aspirations faded, and in a very different and earthly way the children of Israel looked for their deliverer. A leader, a ruler to establish an earthly kingdom, a prince of peace was their expectation. Vague was their knowledge, and their yearnings were for something infinitely lower than what was to come. Not an earthly kingdom but a heavenly one was their Saviour to establish, not transient glory that would shortly perish, but immortality amidst indescribable splendor and happiness. He was to come not to rule merely, but to love mankind. He was to come, not to be inaccessible and seldom to be seen, but to be with them, one of them, whose delight was to be with the children of men.

Oh! how blessed are we, who know so well this Saviour, "this most high God and our Redeemer" (Ps. lxxvii. 35.) He that had been promised, came not only for the people of Israel, but for all mankind. He came to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. i. 21.) Let us realize it more intimately. He came not simply to proclaim a universal pardon for all the multitude of the children of men. He came for me! To pardon me, to win my love, my loyalty; to recognize me as His child for whom He had opened the gates of heaven. And is this all? What could hope expect more than this? If He had brought us redemption once, would not this have been an infinitely bountiful mercy?

Let us bow down in humble confusion as we think of this! Forgiveness once restored to our heavenly Father's favor once! An eternity of thankfulness would not suffice to pay for such a mercy. But what is the reality? Oh! the times and times that He has poured out upon our souls His "copious redemption." Our very sins bring out His mercy more and more. We are the children of the merciful goodness of God! Let us recall with grateful hearts the times without number that our redemption—our forgiveness—has been renewed. It is always at hand indeed. An act of sorrow; a humble owning of our sins; and He that came to redeem His people from their sins ratifies the words of absolution, and our sins are forgiven us once again. And our release, what do they mean? Do we not believe in our forgiveness? Do we despise it? Are we not trespassing on the Almighty's patience, tempting Him to repent that He made us?

Let us resolve that this rejection of God's pardon shall never occur again. But as this blessed anniversary of the coming of our Saviour approaches, let us prepare our hearts to receive Him and bid Him welcome. No wonder good people rejoice at holy Christmas-time! It is not a mere memory of the redemption that came, but it is an actual redemption that comes again to the souls of men. How many anniversaries of His coming have we celebrated, and yet we are no better than we are! To so

many in the world the message of Advent finds no admittance to their hearts. But to us it must not be so. We must prepare a home for Him, lest the first coming should be repeated: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John i. 11.)

ADVENT

The first Sunday of Advent is the beginning of the ecclesiastical year. The word Advent means 'coming.' Three comings are symbolized by this word, the coming of the incarnate Word into the world on the first Christmas, the coming of Our Lord into our souls in Holy Communion, and the coming of the same Lord as the Judge of the living and the dead. During this season we are accordingly admonished to prepare ourselves worthily for the commemoration of the anniversary of Christmas, by making our souls fitting abodes for Our Lord's coming in Holy Communion, in order to make ready for His final coming at the end of the world.

In Advent the Church has beautifully arranged her liturgy to prepare our souls for this three-fold coming. In her official prayer, the Breviary, she calls upon her priests to adore "the Lord, the King that is to come," "the Lord already near," "Him whose glory will be seen on the morrow," she prescribes readings from the prophet Isaiah, who scathingly rebuked the chosen people for their ingratitude in forsaking and forgetting God their Father, and who accurately described the Man of Sorrows in His coming, His passion and death, and in His final glory.

In the hymns of the Advent season the Church combines praise for the coming of Christ, the Creator and Redeemer of the world, with hope that the coming Judge of the world will protect us from the enemy. In the last seven days before the vigil of Christmas, the same ideas are expressed in the eloquent antiphons for the Magnificat. She calls on the Divine Wisdom to teach us the way of prudence, on the Key of David to free us from bondage, on the Rising Sun to illumine us sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, on the Leader of the house of Israel to redeem us from eternal flame, on the Root or Jesse to liberate us without delay, on the King of Nations to come and save men whom He created, and on Emmanuel, God with us, King and Lawgiver, the Expected of Nations and their Saviour, to come for the salvation and healing of all mankind.

The keynote of the Advent preparation is given in the Epistles and Gospels of the successive Sundays, in the epistles she exhorts the faithful that since the Redeemer is nearer, they should cast aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, walk honestly as in the day and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. She shows that all nations are called to praise the name of the Lord and asks them to rejoice in the nearness of the Lord, so that the peace of the Lord which surpasseth all understanding may keep their minds in Christ Jesus, and she admonishes them not to pass judgment, for the Lord when He comes will manifest the secrets hidden in hearts.

In the Gospels the Church speaks of the Lord coming in glory, of Him in whom all prophecies are being fulfilled, of the Eternal walking in the midst of men. She leads John the Baptist from the desert and makes him the official preacher of her Advent message. The message which John preaches is a message of penance. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." To the love of pleasure in the world, to the search after material things, to the pagan denial of the Divinity and Sovereignty of Christ, the holy season of Advent comes as a timely and effective antidote. For the establishment of enduring peace among nations, it is the best preparation.

During this season as Cardinal Wiseman says: "We are not dryly exhorted to profit by that blessed event, Christmas, but we are daily made to sigh with the Fathers of old—send down the dew, ye Heavens from above, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened, and bud forth the Redeemer." A well spent Advent with penance and prayer, is the best preparation for the threefold coming of Christ, which this holy season typifies.—The Pilot.

PASSION PLAY

FOSTERS THEATRE MOVEMENT

By Rev. Dr. Wilhelm Baron von Capitaine The Passion Play at Oberammergau has been presented for the last time until ten years shall have elapsed, and the little village has settled down to its accustomed quiet. Offers of fabulous sums from American motion picture concerns for the privilege of filming the Passion Play have been turned down because of the piety of the villagers which makes them regard proposals to commercialize their play as highly improper.

It is not generally realized, however, that plays similar to the one presented every ten years at Oberammergau are not at all uncommon in Germany. Several villages in Bavaria present similar plays and in the Rhineland passion plays have been presented at Stiel-

dorf-on-the-Siege in the Cologne archdiocese every ten years for several decades. In the past few years the "Freilichttheater" movement has made great progress in Germany. Plays are presented by amateurs in the open air and without a stage.

At Cronenbourg, a little village of 400 people, the play "William Tell" has been presented almost every Sunday for the past two years by the peasants. This presentation has attracted widespread attention and it is estimated that 50,000 visitors have witnessed it. The Catholic priest, Father Saier, at Oettingheim, has directed the presentation of the Biblical play "Joseph of Egypt," written by Sebastian Wieser. More than 800 peasant actors and a choir of 350 men take part in this production.

The objects back of all this renewed interest in amateur dramatic art are the stimulation of patriotism and the promotion of Christian morality. The Catholics of Germany have become, to a large extent, disgusted with the morality of the professional stage and are striving to create Christian theatrical standards.

Prayer lends heaven to earth; the supplications which the latter sends up to the former fall back in a soft dew to refresh hearts parched by the burning breath of affliction.

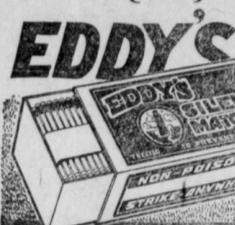
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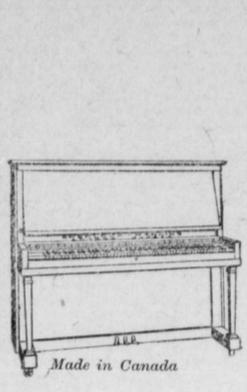


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