

Advent 2

I take as my text today from the 21st Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel:

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight O' Lord my Strength and my Redeemer.”

As we celebrate the Second Sunday in Advent, we begin to realize this is a season of both joyful and solemn expectation.

We joyfully wait for Christmas Day to celebrate the arrival of our Lord and Saviour, born into the world, taking upon Himself our flesh.

What a joyful expectation and centuries have not dulled the beauty of that night in Bethlehem. Even the angels could not be contained as they heralded the birth of God's Son. Such an event, filled with love, joy, and hope for all of mankind, for all of creation.

Yet, as we wait with joyful expectation, we are reminded of the words of Jesus when He said He would come again. Yes, He would come again to complete the redemption that began with His first coming.

See, we are living through an incomplete process, the end result of that process being our final judgment and the determination of how we will spend eternity.

Much has been written about the Second Coming, what it will be like, when will it be. There has been so much speculation about the Second Coming, even dates have been given, some with precise times.

In truth, it is not ours to know the time. Our conception of what it will be like, drawn from various interpretations of Scripture, can hardly approach the reality that awaits. If we could say anything, it would be that history is not circular and, as Christians, we know that it has a direction, a goal, and that goal is Jesus Christ Who will establish His Kingdom at the last.

Today's Gospel reading from St. Luke gives us an image of the final times though when our Lord was speaking, the destruction He was predicting was the fall of Jerusalem. Still, the imagery is quite appropriate to what is often referred to as the "End Times" but more properly the Second Coming.

Similar imagery may be found in the prophets predicting the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred twice before. As in the words of the prophet Joel:

And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth,
blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.
The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into
blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD
come.

And then compare the words of our Lord as recorded by Luke:

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and
in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with
perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts
failing them for fear, and for looking after those things
which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven
shall be shaken.

Very powerful words from our Lord. He sets a very frightful state that the people would be in, using language understandable in that day

The frightful sights in heavens or sky above and the terrible storms and tempests, all leading to a state of confusion and perplexity. In the Syriac text, we see a wringing of hands as done by someone in agony and great distress.

The roaring of the waves can be taken as a metaphor for the waves of Roman soldiers crossing the land as they approach the city of Jerusalem.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud
with power and great glory.

Here, we have, in His words, a description of His Coming again. Though most often associated with His Second Coming, it applies to the destruction of Jerusalem as well. Indeed, at the destruction of Jerusalem, the evidence of His Coming was in the fulfillment of these predictions while the evidence of His Second Coming will be the glory of His Person as the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Final Judge.

Focusing first on the fall of Jerusalem, we are presented with its inevitability. The People of Promise, prepared over centuries for that moment in history when the Messiah would enter the world, had rejected Him. They had turned their backs to God and set in motion their own destruction. Christ's religion could not prevail unless there was a radical change.

That change came when the temple was destroyed and the Levitical priesthood was abolished. The destruction of the earthly Jerusalem to make way for the heavenly Jerusalem.

Yet, the words of our Lord go beyond just the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 and reflect on His Second Coming as well.

Difficult as it may be for us to comprehend the full meaning of the passage from Luke's Gospel, there is a clear warning of what is to come when history comes to its end, reaches its goal. Our Lord will return in glory and majesty to render judgment and to receive into His Kingdom those who have endured in the faith and given themselves to His service.

Jesus further warns the Apostles concerning the reading of the signs. Certainly, it is easy enough to read the signs of the seasons. These are earthly signs. But heavenly signs are different and not so easily discerned. Thus, we should watch so as not to be easily led astray by false prophets especially during times of war and conflagrations.

Now, in this time, as we wait in joyful expectation for the annual celebration of Christ's First Coming into the world, how can we also look forward with any sense of joy at the Second Coming having heard the dreadful warnings from our Lord Himself?

That is part of the miracle of Christ's Birth and the wonder of God's Love.

Jesus Christ, as one of us, defeated Satan and laid waste to Satan's empire of sin. Though He died on the Cross for our salvation, He rose up again bodily from the grave that we may also rise up clothed in a spiritual body to be with Him in His Heavenly Kingdom.

Regardless of the calamities that may come or the terrors that may await the world, Christians who have accepted God's Love and Grace, and lived accordingly, have nothing to fear. Those Christians have filled their hearts and minds with love, kindness, patience, and understanding, ever mindful of the two great commandments: to love God with heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbor as our self.

For them, the beauty and awe of Christ's First Coming will be exceeded only by the Glory and Majesty of His Second Coming.

As we approach the joyful celebration of the Nativity of our Lord on Christmas Day, let us not forget that the same preparation in our hearts, in our souls, in our minds, is the same preparation for the glory of His Coming again.

At that time all will be fulfilled in Christ. His Kingdom will truly come. Our salvation will be fully realized and we will be united in love with Him forever.