

Happy new year! With the preparations for the birth of Christ, this season of Advent, the new year begins. The King is coming! Are you prepared? While this season of Advent involves preparation for family and friends, it also involves the preparations of the King. We often hear how we are to be prepared for the coming Savior. How can we be prepared, particularly in a time of abundant activity? The relationships with friends and family are important. They are a part of Advent preparations. Yet Advent is primarily about preparing for the coming King who took on flesh to bear it to the cross. He took on flesh never to leave it behind, but by His flesh to bear our iniquity. We prepare in Advent for Christ. Yet, once again, how do we prepare for Him?

That preparation is made today, the first day of the Church's Year, through meditation on His ride into Jerusalem to die. It has not been arranged sequentially, chronologically, but theologically. God used the prophet Isaiah to prepare for the coming Christ in the comforting words, "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it..." (Isaiah 2:2) Again "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your salvation comes; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense is before him.'" (Isaiah 62:11) Isaiah prepares the people to see their King in the Triumphal Entry. He prepares them to see their King with the reward in His hand. His reward is life, His recompense, or making of amends, is the making of amends between us and God. God uses Isaiah to prepare the people for a King who would come to bring peace. God prepares His people to receive Christ who comes with a reward, peace with the Father.

God also used Zechariah to prepare for Christ in these words, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9) Zechariah prepared the people for a King who would come with righteousness in his hand. A King who was humble, not revealed by a red carpet, but rather mounted upon a donkey and riding upon a bed of garments.

In the same way, we prepare for our coming King during Advent. Hence this text, the Triumphal Entry, is the chosen text for the first Sunday of Advent. It prepares us to receive our King. It demonstrates to us how preparations for this King are made, as well as the type of preparations made for this King.

The activities of the coming season will soon surround us. Preparations of all shapes and sizes will tempt us to turn from the preparations of the coming King. And while danger can come from placing our preparations for family before preparation for Christ, there is a greater error. This is the error of thinking that preparing for Christ is a work of our own.

We deceive ourselves if we think we can make ourselves prepared for the coming Christ. We do not make ourselves more prepared by coming to church frequently during the Advent season. We aren't more prepared because we feel more guilty about our sins during this penitential season. Sorrow and repentance are certainly good things, but they are only the work of God.

When the liturgy leads us and says, "The Lord be with you," and we respond, "And with your Spirit," or "and also with you," or the singing of the Sanctus, God uses these words to prepare us to receive Him. In the Salutation, the liturgy points us to the coming presence of Christ and we respond with words that affirm God's serving us here. In the Sanctus, we sing the same words sung as Christ prepared for His life to be taken on the cross. These words now prepare us for His sacramental presence. "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matthew 21:9) And then the song goes on: "Blessed is He." That does not mean that he is good at something desirable, like playing the piano or singing. So that we would say, "Oh, he is blessed. The Lord has gifted Him." Nor does it mean that He is wealthy and fortunate. He is not. To be blessed is to have good things said about you. Our word "eulogy" comes directly from the Greek word for "blessed." It means good words, good speaking. To be truly blessed is to have God say good things about you. The One who comes in the Name of the Lord comes with the Father's blessing, that is, with the Father's approval, at the Father's pleasure, to fulfill the Father's will, with the Father saying good things of Him.

Behold your King! He does not look like the kings of the earth. He does not act like them. He comes lowly, riding on a donkey, not as victor but as Victim. He will be born outside the inn. He will die outside Jerusalem. But there, in that lowliness, in that brutal, unfair execution, in that silent suffering Lamb to the slaughter, behold His glory, behold your sins are atoned for, forgiven! He has intervened for you, come into your hall of doom, breathed your poisoned air, allowed the Law to do to Him all it should have done to you. Thus, He restores you unto the Father by purer love than mere men can know or obtain, but which He holds in His great mercy, with fiery passion and zeal that nearly destroys creation, for you."

What a wonderful and glorious Divine gift. We're preparing to see our King who comes to us, humble laying in a manger. Our King comes to us, humble and riding on a donkey. Our King comes to us, humble with bread and wine. What a wondrous mystery. And while He asks of us preparation, the preparation He requires, He gives. This preparation is of more value and worth than any college education. This preparation is worthy more than the any financial advisor's advice on retirement plans. This preparation prepares us for not only the Advent season, but also for eternal life. For Christ also promises to prepare for us an eternal place in heaven, a room in His Father's mansion.

And our joyous response to this preparation and gift: thankful giving and preparation for others. This season is a season of preparation for both Christ and for our neighbor. Friends and family will come and spend time with us. We prepare and we give ourselves selflessly during this season, only because the giving of God in Christ. Only by His dwelling within us by Body and Blood do we then give ourselves for our neighbor.

Christ has now prepared you. He has not only prepared you, but prepared for you a place in His Father's House. This ultimately points us back to the realization that Christ does all the preparation; Christ does all the work. And so, when He says that He goes to prepare a place for you, you can be assured of your place in the house of the Father, a place at the banquet feast of the coming King.

"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." (Romans 13:11) Salvation is here, the king has come, he forgives you, and declares you his own.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.