

The First Sunday in Advent – 2019

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 21:1-11

At the appointed hour, three days will meld into each other. You will not know whether you are in heaven, in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, or in this Divine Service. When the times will have reached their fulfillment, God will bring time to a close and open up eternity and three days will meld into one another. You will be there. You will see time end and history made present.

This day will shine on that Last Day; this day and every day like it will be enveloped into the Last Day. Today we worship the risen King. Today, here and throughout the world, the church gathers in divinely inspired faith to welcome our crucified and risen Lord. Today the Master approaches bedraggled sinners with His grace and we greet Him with our “hosannas.” Today we rehearse what is our future. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! The historic day of Palm Sunday blends into Today. Today we welcome the coming King just as surely as those ancient pilgrims who lined the streets of Jerusalem.

He is here. Christ the King is present, with us. The Lord comes to us just as powerfully, just as humbly, just as gracefully as when he made His triumphant entry to Jerusalem. This day and that vibrant day of old when Jesus entered the city of His destiny blend into one. Hosanna to the Son of David! For two thousand years, our Lord has been making His triumphant entry into the hearts of men, His triumphant entry into the worshipping assembly, and the song of praise is laid down like a cloak in the street. Hosanna in the highest! He is going to come in power on that final day... it certainly approaches. We do not know when it will be, but when it comes you will know. We do not know when the last trumpet will sound, when the Son of Man will ride the clouds of heaven with great glory and bring this age to a close. We do know that that day is closer now than when we first believed.

For now, we wait. How good are you at waiting? We wait for the One who is Light of Light to roll back the heavens and pierce the gloom of this sad, confused, and conflicted world. For now, we wait. Some of us are not good at waiting. Impatience is not a vice that we automatically grow out of as we get older. Christians are to know that waiting is part of our faith. What are we to do while we wait?

When I joined the Navy thirty-three years ago, one of the first things they trained us to do was to march. I loved it. The rhythmic sound of the cadence, the uniform movement of the company, and the precision with which we performed each command was all a joy to my obsessive-compulsive personality. When my company was first constituted, we were clumsy, marching hacks, and an embarrassment to our company commander. Three times a day the whole base would march to the mess hall. The last company to arrive would always be the most senior company – the Alpha Company – those who were in their last week and ready to graduate. All eyes would be on them. Strength and confidence and discipline were hallmarks of the Alpha Company, and it inspired the recent arrivals who were still hacks.

It took hours of training to progress. Now, if some company simply marked time, if some company commander simply had the recruits march in place then when they became the Alpha Company they would be nothing but underachievers, ne'er-do-wells, and public buffoons. In our Christian faith, we are marching – following after the One who called us to pick up our cross and walk in His shadow. The King who rode into Jerusalem, humble and mounted on a donkey, is our Company Commander who teaches us how to march in faith as we wait for His return. Jesus said: “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:13-17).

What are the marks of the Alpha Company? What are the marks of those who are ready for His return, who wait with the desire to grow in grace, grow in His virtue, knowing full well that our lives have melded into His? In our Christian faith we wait. In our waiting we are not simply marking time; we are advancing. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. That is the parade ground on which we march. We wait expectantly for our Lord to return. We recognize Him as *already* being among us. We follow Him in love as we lay down our lives for others and we grow because His Word builds strength, builds confidence, builds virtue. Do you not know that others are watching? I, for one, don’t want to remain a hack. I don’t want to be the fruitless fig tree that our Lord curses because it is barren; you don’t either

To that very point, St. Paul writes this: “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). What does the Alpha Company do? It intentionally seeks the good of others. What does it mean to discipline the body and keep it under control? It means to crucify our sinful appetites.

Honestly, what muscle needs more discipline than the tongue? James says that the tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:8). We all know that the tongue is supremely capable of harming others. With your tongue, you have cursed those you have been called to love. With your tongue you have spewed excuses for the inexcusable, spewed lies to bury the truth, and spewed hyper-critical bile to demean those who you view as clumsy hacks. My brothers, these things out not to be so. This is not the Alpha Company way.

All of us need to repent; all of us. Repentance is the rhythmic cadence that guides our steps as we follow Christ the Lord, as we prepare for the return of the King. Repentance leads to love. Freely we have received. Freely we will give (Matthew 10:8). When Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, He said this: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). As we march through this life, our steps follow His. “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:11-12). As we wait for His second advent His new commandment directs our steps.

As we wait for His second advent, we know that Christ enters here. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem led to the premier expression of love. The King laid down His life for His servants. All eyes were on Him. He bled and died to forgive you and forgiven you are! Hosanna to the King. The King of kings has called you into His court, adorned you with the robe of His righteousness, and leads you to love others as He has first loved you (1 John 4:19). With that Divine, Self-giving Love, Christ enters here... to feed you, sustain you, and give you a foretaste of the feast to come. This is a mighty day. This is the day of resurrection, the day of Easter and worship and Eucharist, the day of the King. When time is fulfilled, this day will meld and be enveloped into the Last Day. On that great and glorious Day, we will join the thunderous multitude and rejoice and say: "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."