

ADVENT II 2007
SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
LUKE 21.25



“LET EACH HEART PREPARE A HOME WHERE SUCH A MIGHTY GUEST MAY COME” The second Sunday of this Advent season offers perhaps the richest tapestry of topics in the Church Year! Catholic Christians commence the New Church Year with consideration of needed changes...changes to make things better. Advent propels us to make changes...prepare...get things cleaned up for Christmas.

Preparation inevitably produces frenzy... guests will be arriving...we want to make a good impression...we don't want them to show up and find a mess! I am reminded of childhood admonitions to get my room cleaned up before my German-born great grandmother arrived for a visit. Not that she was going to inspect or evaluate but out of respect, good manners and sound judgment you put things in order

The second verse of one of my favorite Advent hymns, delivers the same message with musical elegance...“Let each heart prepare a home where such a mighty guest may come”...this guest is not about great grandmothers...it is about Jesus...ultimately there will be an inspection and an evaluation!

Evaluation is one of the four themes we consider during Advent...the season of cleaning up and getting ready...it's a word that makes us more than a little nervous...JUDGMENT.

Incidentally, it's NOT about being judgmental...of which some Christians are often accused...sometimes with good reason.

Judgment is something we don't like to think about very much and much of our present culture has tried to eradicate the concept...sort of a visit from fraudulent Dr. Feelgood with a message of “don't worry ...it's all OK as long as no one finds out.”

Why concentrate on this...what's the point of being so rigorous...what has this to do with getting ready for Christmas? Remember the four major Advent themes... death, judgment, heaven and hell.

The answer is clearly told in today's Gospel...St Luke's graphic description of what will happen at the end of time...the portion of that Gospel which follows immediately (not included in today's reading) is compelling...

“Be on watch and pray also that you will have the strength to go safely through all those things that will happen and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21.36)

The matter of judgment is now anything but subtle! The day will come when everything gets inspected. A report card will be issued.

All too often I hear “Christianity is just depressing...you people just think about what's wrong...you're just concentrated on Catholic guilt”...or Baptist guilt...or Jewish guilt...they manage to assign some level of group identity to escape inclusion!

The response is of course that we are concentrated on what's RIGHT...what we are FOR...not what we are against. Christianity is about recognizing God's love and being ready to apply it to ourselves and to others...about knowing that we have a way out when things get messy. We are not encumbered with guilt, despair and hopelessness as were the Jews of 20 centuries ago.

That is very Good News...that is the message of Emmanuel...God with Us ...Jesus...the annual festival of whose birth we now prepare.

As we began the new church year, we talked about why the Jews were so desperate for help...too many things had gone wrong...centuries of failed leadership, one disappointment after another, everything was in a mess. They needed help...so do we!

Think about the Kyrie...asking God to have mercy. It's the underlying theme of the great Advent hymn *O Come O Come Emmanuel*...God be with us...help us. Advent is when we concentrate on that repetitive request...look at our lives...ask God to help get things straightened out.

Through that process sincerely applied and with the Love of God great joy and consolation will come to you in this life... and in the next.

