

NT-MK20

12.03.18

A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark by St. Augustine ¹

Our God will come openly; our God will come and will not keep silent. The first coming of Christ the Lord, God's Son and our God, was in obscurity; the second will be in the sight of the whole world. When he came in obscurity no one recognized him but his own servants; when he comes openly he will be known by both good people and bad. When he came in obscurity, it was to be judged; when he comes openly it will be to judge. He was silent at his trial, as the prophet foretold: *He was loike a sheep led to the slaughter, like a lamb before his shearers. He did not open his mouth.* But, *Our God will come openly; our God will come and will not keep silence.* Silent when accused, he will not be silent as judge. And he is not silent now. By no means; when people today recognize his voice and despise him, Scripture assures us that he will not be silent, he will not hold his hand.

Nowadays when the divine commands are spoken of, some people begin to jeer. They are not at present shown what God promises, they do not see what he threatens – so they laugh at his commands. After all, good people and bad enjoy this world's so-called happiness; good people and bad suffer from what are deemed this world's misfortunes. Those whose lives are geared to the present rather than the future are impressed by the fact that this world's blessings and sufferings fall to the lot of good and bad without distinction. If wealth is their ambition, they see it being enjoyed not only by decent folk, but also by people of the worst kind. If they are in dread of poverty and all the other miseries of this world, they also see that the good and the bad both suffer from them. Therefore they say to themselves, “God does not care about human affairs, he exercises no control over them. On the contrary, he has sent us into the abyss of this world, and simply abandoned us to its sufferings. He shows no sign of providence.” Consequently, seeing no evidence of anyone being called to account, such people hold God's commands in derision.

Nevertheless, each person would do well to take thought even now, because when he wills to do so, God looks, and he judges; he will not tolerate an hour's delay. When he wills to do so, he waits. Why does He do this? Surely if he never passed judgment in this present life, some people would think that he does not exist. But if he always gave sentence here and now, there would be nothing reserved for the Day of Judgment. That is why much is kept for that day; but in order to put the fear of God into those whose cases are deferred, and so convert them, some judgments are made here and now.

For it is clear that God takes no pleasure in condemning. His desire is to save, and bears patiently with evil people in order to make them good. Yet we have the Apostle's warning: *The wrath of God will be revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and God will reward each one according to his deeds.* The Apostle takes scoffers to task by asking them: *Do you think lightly of God's abundant goodness and his forbearance? Do you despise him*

and think his judgment a matter of no account because he is good to you, because he is long-suffering and bears with you patiently, because he delays the day of reckoning and does not destroy you out of hand? *Do you not know that the patience of God is meant to lead you to repentance? By the hardness of your heart you are storing up wrath against yourself on the Day of Retribution*, when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed and he will give every one the reward his or her deeds deserve.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year B – New City Press – NY – pg. 10

TM-ADV04

12.04.2018

**A Reading about Advent from "The Mystery of Christian Worship",
by Dom Odo Casel.¹**

With every first Sunday of Advent we begin another church year. The cycle begins anew, and starts from the beginning. Is its only meaning didactic? Repetition, they say, is the mother of all learning. We have, perhaps, not drawn the value out of the old year sufficiently; does not the church therefore give us occasion to live through the whole once more? Of course this motive is present; the church knows how to teach. We are to go on celebrating the same events, so long as life lasts, exhausting the whole content of the church year and making it our own. What was neglected last year can be made up in this, the gaps filled in. And when we have lived all to its full we can still deepen what we have won and come to know. Like a path which goes round and up a mountain, slowly making the ascent to the height, we are to climb the same road at a higher level, and go on until we reach the end, Christ himself.

But didactic reasons alone cannot exhaust the meaning of return and cycle in the church's year. For we who are imperfect are not properly its bearers: rather in it we join a higher sphere of action. The real actor in the church year is the mystical Christ, the glorified Lord Jesus, together with his bride the church, who in her inmost being is with him in heaven already.

Circle and sphere are the sensible images of eternal perfection. The sacred course of the liturgy is to speak of eternity not of nature, which comes, blooms, puts forth its fruit, then fades and dies. There is no dying in the church year, only life, even in the way through death. Nature has a shadowy eternity in her capacity to come back to life after fading and sinking away; but death always comes again; how short the bloom is, how long the dying and the death. There is no winter in the church's year; if in spite of that, it starts up again, circle forming on circle, this constant return is meant to suggest the divine quality of the mystery. St Ambrose in his morning hymn calls Christ, *the true day which shines on day, the true Sun which casts everlasting splendour*. Christ is therefore the day which is splendid with the light that knows no evening, as the Greek liturgy says.

¹The Mystery of Christian Worship, Odo Casel OSB. London 1962. p63.

In heaven the glorified Lord is the very content of eternal life for all the saints; on earth his mystery is the spring of the church's life. They live seeing; we walk in faith. We do not see the Lord in glory but possess him already in faith and in the mysteries which he gave to the church on leaving her. The church year is therefore the mystery of Christ.

A Reading about the fruitfulness of the desert; from a sermon by Guerric of Igny.²

A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord. **@** Before anything else I think we should consider the grace of the desert, the blessedness of the desert, which right from the beginning of grace has deserved to be consecrated to the repose of the saints. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, John preaching and bestowing the baptism of repentance in the desert, certainly consecrated for us his dwelling-place in the wilderness. Yet even before him the solitude had always been dearly loved by the holiest of the prophets as a place where they could listen to the Holy Spirit. But a far greater and more divine grace came to the desert to sanctify it when Jesus took the place of John. Even before he began to preach to those doing penance he prepared a place for penitents. For forty days while he was living in the wilderness, purifying it and dedicating it as a new place for the new life, he conquered the tyrant who brooded there and all his malice and subtlety, not so much for himself as for those who would be its future inhabitants.

If then you have fled away to remain in the solitude continue to stay there; wait there for the One who will save you **A**from pusillanimity of spirit and the storm **@**(Ps 54:9). However much the storm of battles may assail you, however much you may feel the lack even of sustenance in the desert, do not because of pusillanimity of spirit return in mind to Egypt. The desert will feed you more abundantly with manna, that is, the bread of angels, than Egypt with its fleshpots. Jesus himself fasted indeed in the wilderness but the multitude that followed him into the desert he fed often and in a wonderful manner. And much more frequently and in an even more wonderful way will he satisfy the needs of all you who have followed him into the desert and whose service is all the more pleasing since your purpose is so much holier.

When you think that Jesus has forgotten you for rather too long, he himself, not unmindful of his goodness, will console you and say to you: **A**I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness. **@** Then will he make your wilderness like the garden of delight, and you yourself will confess that the glory of Lebanon has been given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. For just as in many places today we are seeing fulfilled to the letter the prophecy: **A**The beautiful places of the wilderness shall grow fertile, strangers shall eat in the deserts now become fruitful; **@** so places in

² Sermon 4 for Advent in *Liturgical Sermons* (C F 8), Cistercian Publications, Spencer, Mass., 1970, pp. 22-23.

Scripture which previously seemed fruitless and dry will quite suddenly be filled for you at the blessing of God with a wondrous and spiritual abundance, so that from the fullness of your heart you will sing a hymn of praise, saying: ***Let them praise the Lord for his mercy, for his wonderful works to the people, for he satisfied him who is thirsty and the hungry he filled with good things*** (Ps 106:8f).

A Reading from the Fourth Sermon for Advent, by Blessed Gueric of Igny.³

By the wonderful favor of God's loving care, in this solitude of ours we have the peace of solitude and yet we do not lack the consolation and comfort of holy companionship. It is possible for each of us to sit alone and be silent, because we have no one to disturb us with interruptions, and yet it cannot be said of us: "Woe to him who is alone, since he has nobody to console him or if he should fall has none to lift him up" (Ecc4:10). We are surrounded by companions, yet we are not in a crowd. We live as it were in a city, yet we have to contend with no tumult, so that the voice of one crying in the wilderness can be heard by us, provided only that we have interior silence to correspond to the exterior silence that surrounds us. "The words of the wise heard in quiet," Solomon says, "are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools." And now, if the depths of your soul were to keep a quiet silence, the all-powerful Word would flow secretly into you from the Father's throne. Happy then is the one who has so fled the world's tumult, who has so withdrawn into the solitude and secrecy of interior peace that he can hear not only the Voice of the Word but the Word himself: not John but Jesus.

Meanwhile let us hear what the Voice of the Word calls to us, so that one day we may progress from the Voice to the Word. "Prepare the way of the Lord," he says, "make straight his paths." He prepares the way who amends his life; he makes straight the path who directs his footsteps along the narrow way. An amended life is certainly the straight road by which the Lord, who in this very conversion is already there before us, may come to us. For indeed it is by the Lord that our steps are directed, and he wants the road to be such that coming along it joyfully toward us he may continually walk with us. For unless he who is the Life, the Truth, and the Way anticipates his own advent to us, our way cannot be corrected according to the model of truth, and so cannot be directed to the way of eternity. By what does a young man correct his way, if not by observing his words, if not by following in the footsteps of him who made himself the Way by which we might come to him? O that my ways may be directed to keeping your ways, O Lord, so that because of the words from your lips I may follow even difficult ways. And if they should seem hard to the flesh that is weak they will seem sweet and pleasant to the spirit if it is resolute. "His ways are pleasant ways and all his paths make for peace," says the inspired writer. The ways of Wisdom are not only at peace, they bring peace; for when our ways please the Lord he even makes his enemies aspire to peace..

And so, my brothers, whatever happens to you on the way of the Lord, run the way of God's commandments with a joyful and generous heart, because though the way seems narrow to the fainthearted, still it is straight, and though it seems difficult it is blameless.

³Gueric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, Cistercian Fathers Series: no.8, Cistercian Publ. Spencer MA 1970, pp23-25. (Sermon 4 for Advent).

**A Reading about our reception of the Word of God,
from a treatise of St Ambrose.**⁴

May the study of wisdom be ever in our heart and on our lips. Let our tongue speak of justice, and the law of your God be in your heart. Hence, Scripture says: "Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest."(Dt 6:7) Therefore, let us speak of the Lord Jesus, for he is wisdom, he is the word, and the Word of God.

Indeed, it is also written: "Open your mouth to the Word of god." Diffuse this word which resounds with his discourses and meditate on his words. Let us always speak of him. When we speak of wisdom, he is present; when we expound on the virtues, he is present; when we treat of justice, he is present; when we discuss peace, he is present; when we speak of truth, life, and redemption, he is present.

"Open your mouth to the Word of God," it has been written. (Pro 31:8Vulg.) You open, and he speaks. Hence, David said: "I will hear what God proclaims," (Ps 85:9) and the Son of God himself says: "Open wide your mouth, and I will fill it." (Ps 81:11) However, not everyone can understand the perfection of wisdom as Solomon did, and not everyone can understand it as Daniel did. Yet to everyone the spirit of wisdom is poured out in accord with the

⁴Explanations of the Psalms, 36, 65-66: CSEL 64, 123-125.

capability of each--but only to those who are faithful. If you believe, you will possess the spirit of wisdom.

Therefore, meditate always, speak of the things that are of God, "sitting at home."(Dt 6:7) By the word "home: we can understand the Church, and our innermost part, and so speak within ourselves. Speak thoughtfully in order to avoid sinning, lest you fall by speaking too much. When sitting, speak to yourself as if you were the one who judges. Speak on the street, so that you may never be unoccupied. You speak on the street if you speak about Christ, for the street is Christ. On the street, speak to yourself, speak to Christ.

Listen to how you can speak to him: "It is my wish," he has said, "that in every place the men shall offer prayers with blameless hands held aloft, and be free from anger and dissension."(1Tim 2:8) Speak, O believer, when you are sleeping. so that the sleep of death will not take you by surprise. Listen to how you could speak when sleeping: "I will give my eyes no sleep, my eyelids no rest, till I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."(Ps 132:4-5)

When you rise or awake, speak of him, in order to fulfill what is commanded you. Listen to how Christ awakens you. Your soul says: "I heard my brother knocking"; and Christ exclaims: "Open to me, my sister, my beloved."(Sng 5:2Vulg) Listen to how you can awaken Christ. The soul says: "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, arouse and stir up love."(Sng 3:5) Love is Christ.

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12/08/18

A Sermon by St. Anselm ¹

Blessed Lady, sky and stars, earth and rivers, day and night – everything that is subject to the power or use of mortals – rejoice that through you they are in some sense restored to their lost beauty and are endowed with inexpressible new grace. All creatures were dead, as it were, useless for humans or for the praise of God, who made them. The world, contrary to its true destiny, was corrupted and tainted by the acts of humans who served idols. Now all creation has been restored to life and rejoices that it is controlled and given splendor by humans who believe in God.

The universe rejoices with new and indefinable loveliness. Not only does it feel the unseen presence of God himself, its Creator, it sees him openly, working and making it holy. These great blessings spring from the blessed fruit of Mary's womb.

Through the fullness of grace that was given you, dead things rejoice in their freedom, and those in heaven are glad to be made new. Through the son who was the glorious fruit of your virgin womb, just souls who died before his life-giving death rejoice as they are freed from captivity, and the angels are glad at the restoration of their shattered domain.

Lady, full and overflowing with grace, all creation receives new life from your abundance. Virgin, blessed above all creatures. Through your blessing all creation is blessed, not only creation from its Creator, but the Creator himself has been blessed by creation.

To Mary God gave his only-begotten Son, whom he loved as himself. Through Mary God made himself a Son, not different but the same, by nature son of God and Son of Mary. The whole universe was created by God, and God was born of Mary. God created all things, and Mary gave birth to God. The God who made all things gave himself form through Mary, and thus he made his own creation. He who could create all things from nothing would not remake his ruined creation without Mary.

God, then, is the Father of the created world, and Mary the mother of the re-created world. God is the Father by whom all things were given life, and Mary the mother through whom all things were given new life. For God begot the son, through whom all things were made, and Mary gave birth to him as the Savior of the world. Without God's Son, nothing could exist; without Mary's Son, nothing could be redeemed. Truly the Lord is with you, to whom the Lord granted that all nature should owe as much to you as to himself.

¹The Liturgy of the Hours – vol. 1 – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York - 1975 – p 1228

Advent as a time of hope; a reading from the book *Seasons of Celebration* by Thomas Merton.⁵

St. Gregory the Great said that all Christians should continue the prophetic mission of John the Baptist and point out the presence of Christ in the world. This may mean many different things. John was able to point out Christ at the Jordan, in a moment of fulfillment, which gave meaning to his whole life. But John also had to witness to Christ in prison, in face of death, in failure, when even the meaning of his other glorious moment seemed to have been cancelled out.

So too, we may at times be able to show the world Christ in moments when all can clearly discern in history some confirmation of the Christian message. But the fact remains that our task is to seek and find Christ in the world as it is, and not as it **might be**. The fact that the world is other than it might be does not alter the truth that Christ is present in it and that His plan has been neither frustrated nor changed: indeed, all will be done according to His will. Our Advent is the celebration of this hope. What is uncertain is not the "coming" of Christ but our own reception of Him, our own response to Him, our own readiness and capacity to "go forth to meet Him." We must be willing to see Him and acclaim Him, as John did, even at the very moment when our whole life's work and all its meaning seem to collapse. Indeed, more formidable still, the Church herself may perhaps be called upon some day to point out the Victorious Redeemer and King of Ages amid the collapse of all that has been laboriously built up by the devotion of centuries and cultures that sincerely intended to be Christian.

The Advent of Christ in history is not essentially bound up with the development and progress of a Christian **civilization**. "Christendom" is, and has been a great thing, but it has never been an absolute and unqualified good or an end in itself. **Christendom** is not **Christianity**. It is not "the Kingdom" and it is not the Mystical Christ.

The reality of Christian culture certainly flows from the presence of Christ in the world, but it is not identical with that presence. Our Advent is, then, not a celebration of mere traditional cultural values, however great, however worthy of perpetuation. Advent is not a mere return, a recurrence, and a renewal of the old. It cannot be a return to childhood, whether personal or social. The coming of the Lord, which is the same as His "presence", is the coming of the new, not the renewal of the old, and Sacred History is like the Heraklitean river in which no one steps twice.

Yet, since the Kingdom is the "fullness of time" it does in some sense make the past present in its fulfillment. But the past fulfilled is not the past, it is not merely renewed, it is completely transformed into the present. Baptism is the fulfillment of the Exodus, not its commemoration. The Eucharist is the Sacrifice of the Lord made present in its eternal reality, not reenacted in a ritual drama which revives the past.

We believe that He who has come and will come is present here and now: that we are in His Kingdom. Not only that, but we **are** His Kingdom. And I think that explains why we are not always too happy about asking John's question, since it implies a

⁵ New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965, p. 90.

questioning of ourselves, of our life, of our part in history, of the very meaning of Christ in His Church. The fullness of time is the time of Christ's emptiness in us. The fullness of time is the time of our emptiness, which draws Christ down into our lives so that in us and through us He may bring the fullness of His truth to the world.

