

12.01.19

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew by Paschasius Radbertus [1](#)

Watch, for you do not know the day or the hour. Like many other scriptural texts, the admonition is addressed to all of us, though it is formulated in such a way that it would seem to concern only Christ's immediate audience. We can all apply it to ourselves because the Last Day and the end of the world will come for each of us on the day we depart this present life. This means we must make sure we die in the state in which we wish to appear on the Day of Judgment, Bearing this in mind each of us should guard against being led astray and failing to keep watch, otherwise the day of the Lord's return may take us unawares. If the last day of our life finds us unprepared, then we shall be unprepared on that day also.

I do not for a moment believe the apostles expected the Lord to return in judgment during their own lifetime. All the same there can be no doubt that they took every care not to be drawn from the right path. They kept watch, observing the universal precepts their master had given to his disciples so as to be ready when he came again.

Consequently we must always be on the lookout for Christ's twofold coming, the one when we shall have to give an account of everything we have done, and the other when he comes day after day to stir our consciences. He comes to us now in order that his future coming may find us prepared. If my conscience is burdened with sin what good will it do me to know when the Day of Judgment will be? Unless the Lord comes to my soul beforehand and makes his home with me, unless Christ lives in me and speaks his word in my heart, it is useless for me to know if and when his coming will take place. Only if Christ is already living in me and I in him will it go well with me when he comes in judgment. If I have already died to the world and am able to say, *The world is crucified to me, and I to the world*, then, in a sense, his final coming is already present to me.

Consider also our Lord's warning: *Many will come in my name*. It is only the Antichrist and his members who, albeit falsely, claim the name of Christ, though they lack his works and his true doctrine and wisdom. You will never find the Lord in Scripture actually declaring, "I am the Christ." His teaching and miracles revealed it clearly enough, for the Father was at work in him. Louder than a thousand acclamations his teaching and mighty workd

proclaimed: “I am the Christ.” And so whether or not you find him describing himself in so many words, the works of the Father and his own message of love declared what he was, whereas the false christs who possessed neither godly deeds nor holy doctrine loudly claimed to be what they were not.

[1](#)Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – New York – 1992 – pg 16

A Reading from the Fourth Sermon for Advent, by Blessed Gueric of Igny.¹

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.

¹Gueric of Igny, Liturgical Sermons, Cistercian Fathers Series: no.8. Cistercian Publ. Spencer MA 1970. pp23-25. (Sermon 4 for Advent).

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12.03.19

St. Francis Xavier – from Butler's Lives of the Saints 2

Francis Xavier was born in Spanish Navarre at the castle of Xavier, near Pamplona, in 1506, the youngest of a large family. He entered the college of St, Barbara and in 1528 gained the degree of licentiate. It was here that he met Ignatius Loyola, and later joined with him in the first band of seven who vowed themselves to the service of God at Montmartre in 1534. With them he received the priesthood at Venice three years later and in 1540 Ignatius appointed him to join Fr. Simon Rodriguez on the first missionary expedition the Society sent out to the East Indies.

They arrived at Lisbon about the end of June and together lodged in a hospital in order to attend and instruct the sick. They made this place their ordinary dwelling, but catechized and instructed in the town. Sundays and holidays were taken up in hearing confessions at the court, for the king, John III, had a high regard for these religious; so much so that Rodriguez was eventually retained by him at Lisbon. Before he at last sailed, on his thirty-fifth birthday in 1541, the king delivered briefs from the Pope in which Francis Xavier was constituted Apostolic Nuncio in the East.

They arrived at Goa, India on May 6, 1542, after a voyage of thirteen months. Francis opened the mission with the Christians of Goa, instructing them in the principles of religion and forming the young to the practice of virtue. He walked through the streets ringing a bell to summon the children and slaves to catechism. He offered Mass with lepers each Sunday. For the instruction of the very ignorant or simple he versified the truths of religion to fit popular tunes, and this was so successful that the practice spread till these songs were being sung everywhere, in the streets and fields and workshops.

After five months Francis was told that on the Pearl Fishery coast, there were people called Paravas who had been baptized by the Portugese, but for want of instruction still retained their superstitions and vices. Xavier went to help these people. Then he preached to those Paravas to whom the name of Christ was still unknown and had great success in this. The Paravas were a low caste people and Francis had a much more difficult time among the Brahmans.

In the spring of 1545 Francis set out for Malacca, on the Malay peninsula, where he spent four months. He was received with great reverence and cordiality, and his efforts at reform met with some success. From there he departed for India again. But before he left he heard about Japan for the first time from Portuguese merchants. The next fifteen months were spent in endless traveling between Goa, Ceylon and Cape Comorin, consolidating his work and preparing for an attempt on that Japan into which no European had yet penetrated. In April 1549 Francis set out, accompanied by a Jesuit priest and lay-brother and three Japanese converts. On the feast of the Assumption they landed in Japan, at Kagoshima on Kyushu. (over)

Francis set himself to learn Japanese. A translation was made of a simple account of Christian teaching, and recited to all who would listen. The fruit of twelve months labor was a hundred converts, but then the authorities began to get suspicious and forbade further preaching. So, leaving one of the Japanese converts in charge of the neophytes, Francis pressed further with his companions and went by sea to Hirado, north of Nagasaki. Before leaving Kagoshima he visited the fortress of Ichiku, where the baron's wife, her steward and others accepted Christianity. Xavier left the rest in the care of the steward, and twelve years later the Jesuit lay-brother, Luis de Almeida, found these isolated converts still retaining their first fervor and faithfulness.

At Hirado the missionaries were well received by the ruler and they had more success in a few weeks than they had had at Kagoshima in a year. Xavier's objective was Miyako (Kyoto), then the chief city of Japan. In due time he was able to be received by the authorities, who gave him permission to preach and provided an empty Buddhist monastery for a residence. He preached with such fruit that he baptized many in that city.

Francis decided to revisit his charge in India, from whence he hoped to extend his mission to China. After dealing with matters in India, Xavier set sail for China. In August 1552 the convoy reached the desolate island of Shang-chwan, half-a-dozen miles off the coast and a hundred miles south-west of Hong Kong. Here Xavier fell sick with a fever and died on December 3. He was buried on the island, but his body which was found to be incorrupt, was later moved to Goa. He was canonized in 1622 at the same time as Ignatius of Loyola.

Advent: Hope or Delusion? A reading from *Seasons of Celebration* by Thomas Merton.³

The Advent mystery is a mystery of emptiness, of poverty, of limitation. It must be so. Otherwise it could not be a mystery of hope. The advent mystery is a mystery of beginning: but it is also the mystery of an end. The fullness of time is the end of all that was not yet fullness. It is the completion of all that was still incomplete, all that was still partial. It is the fulfillment in oneness of all that was fragmentary.

The advent mystery in our own lives is the beginning of the end of all, in us, that is not yet Christ. It is the beginning of the end of unreality. And that is surely a cause of joy! But unfortunately we cling to our unreality, we prefer the part to the whole, we continue to be fragments, we do not want to be "one in Christ."

Theologically, since human nature was assumed by the Word of God in Christ, all humanity is at least potentially "the humanity of Christ" in the sense that every existing human nature belongs by right, and indeed in fact, to Christ. Hence the terrible truth that a humanity which belongs to Christ without perhaps knowing it, or without being able to really evaluate the meaning of so astonishing a mystery, is spiritually alienated from Him and is tearing itself to pieces.

The Body of Adam ("humanity"), which should be the Body of God's Love, is torn with hate. The Body of Adam which should be transfigured with light, is a Body of obscurity and untruth. That which should be One in love is divided into millions of frenzied and murderous hostilities. Yet the fact remains: Christ the King of Peace has come into the world and saved it. He has saved humanity, He has established His Kingdom, and His Kingdom is the Kingdom of Peace. Furthermore, **we** are His Kingdom. Yet we have devised a power capable of destroying not cities, not nations, but humanity. "Are you He who is to come, or look we for another?"

Christ, in answering John's disciples, gave them signs which, according to the preaching of the Old Testament prophets, were clear indication that the Messianic Kingdom had come. They were also indications that the "fullness of time" had come and that the old world had ended. These were the "last days," the days of fulfillment, the days of "the end" because they were days of the "beginning."

Advent for us means acceptance of this totally new beginning. It means a readiness to have eternity and time meet not only in Christ but in **us**, in humanity, in our life, in our world, in our time. If we are to enter into the beginning of the new, we must accept the death of the old. The beginning, therefore, is the end. We must accept the end before we can begin.

The secret of the Advent mystery is then the awareness that I begin where I end because Christ begins where I end. In more familiar terms: I live to Christ when I die to myself. I begin to live to Christ when I come to the "end" or to the "limit" of what divides me from my neighbor: when I am willing to step beyond this end, cross this frontier,

³ *Seasons of Celebration*, New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965, p. 89.

become a stranger, enter into the wilderness which is not "myself", where I do not breathe the air or hear the familiar, comforting racket of my own city, where I am alone and defenseless in the desert of God.

12.05.19

Continuation of the Reading on Advent from a book by Thomas Merton.⁴

The mystery of Advent centers in the fact that God is now present in Humanity, and men and women will be judged according to their acceptance of this crucial truth, in all its consequences. What we do to another, we do to Christ, the God-man. Hence the tragedy of contemporary disorders and injustice. It is not only that they prevent people from becoming one in Christ, but rather that they rend humanity in pieces when, in the Advent Mystery, Humanity already **is** at least inchoatively, one in Christ!

In the light of current events, this is a sobering if not a frightening doctrine. Who of us does not fail in this faith? But there is hope in St. Paul's famous text: Whether well or badly, we all build on one foundation, Christ Jesus. No other foundation stone can be laid down. We can build on this foundation with gold, or stone, or wood, or straw. In the Day of the Lord (the day, that is, of His "Advent"), each one's work will be tried by fire. "If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire." (I Cor. 3:14-15).

This is the "tragic" aspect of the Advent mystery for sincere and faithful Christians. We do, indeed, love Christ. We are among those who, in St. Paul's phrase, "love His coming (Advent)" (2 Tim 4:8). We work for Him, and for His Kingdom. But we are also blind, confused, weak, fallible. We have resisted, perhaps sometimes even extinguished His Spirit, and done so perhaps when we thought we were most zealous for His truth. There have been great mistakes. Heroic efforts have been sometimes made and wasted. When times of crisis come to shake us out of our complacency, this all becomes sadly evident. What then shall we say? Advent, in these sombre times of "wars and rumors of wars" reminds us that though our work may be judged, and found wanting, even totally consumed by fire, it is in the very fire that destroys our imperfect works that we ourselves can be saved.

⁴ Seasons of Celebration. Thomas Merton. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. New York. 1965. p. 99.

Jesus as fulfillment of God's promise to David, from a sermon by St. Odilo of Cluny.

The testimony of the ancient prophets to Christ's eternal being and his boundless divine presence is indeed trustworthy and true, and is confirmed by the resounding call of that inspired heavenly trumpet: Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, the same for ever. Our Savior himself tells the Jews in the gospel: ***Before Abraham ever existed, I am.*** With God the Father from all eternity, before Abraham existed (more accurately, before anything existed,) he had his eternal being; and yet he chose to be born in time from the stock of Abraham — Abraham who was told by God the Father: ***In your posterity all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.***

The blessed patriarch David was also granted the sublime privilege of a similar promise. Revealing to him the hidden secrets of his wisdom, God the Father told him: ***The fruits of your body I will set upon your throne.***

These two received the promise of the Savior's coming more plainly than any of our other forebears, and so they deserved to be given the first and most important place in the records of our Lord's ancestry according to the evangelist, Matthew, the opening words of whose gospel are: ***The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*** With these sacred words of the evangelist both the prophetic oracles and the apostolic preaching are in accord. It is evident that when the prophet Isaiah said in the person of God the Father: ***And so, Israel my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend in whom I took possession of you,*** his message was that the mediator between God and humankind would be born according to the flesh from the stock of Abraham.

The man in the Gospel who was freed from the darkness of ignorance and enlightened by faith addressed God's Son as ***Son of David.*** Not only did he receive spiritual insight, but he also deserved to have his bodily sight restored. Christ the Lord desires to be called by this name, knowing that there is no other name by which the world can be saved. And if we ourselves wish to be saved by him who is the one and only Savior, each of us must also say to him: ***Lord, son of David, have mercy on me.***

A Reading about our reception of the Word of God, from a treatise of St Ambrose.⁵

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 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

⁵Explanations of the Psalms, 36, 65-66: CSEL 64, 123-125.

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.