

The Second Coming: Its Significance

(From the Gospel: *Luke xxi.25.*)

The Second Sunday in Advent

Luke 21: 25 *And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring ; 26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken . 27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 And when these things begin to come to pass , then look up , and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh . 29 And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; 30 When they now shoot forth , ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. 31 So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass , know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. 32 Verily I say unto you , This generation shall not pass away , till all be fulfilled . 33 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away .*

Today's Gospel, in describing the Second Coming of Christ, shows how differently that great event will affect believers and unbelievers. I find the contrasted reactions highly instructive, but also very encouraging. It is this topic that will preoccupy us today.

The encouragement I receive is because of the absolute switch in status that will occur among God's enemies and His allies at the moment of Christ's return. I think of some sobering words from Scripture that remind us of what our position as believers is in this world now:

-Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. (1 John 3:13)

-I have given them [the disciples] thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

-If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. (John 15:18-19)

-It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? (Matt. 10:25)

To believe in Jesus is to be hated. Even if such hatred is clothed in hypocritical politeness, and would not be openly expressed for fear of embarrassment, it is the bottom-line attitude of proud inhabitants of the 21st century who picture themselves as having shaken free from the bonds of religion. Its lie, they think, is proven in a thousand ways, whether by the much-publicized sins of the church, or by the triumph of science over Scripture as the only dependable means of explaining anything, or by their being simply too cool to be tied up by old-fashioned rules of right and wrong, or by the gospel of diversity and tolerance which forbid any claims of absolute truth. The impression is given that most people have, with serene confidence, just matured beyond religion. It's been left behind as unimportant and irrelevant.

But their dismissal of biblical religion is in actuality not just a mere wave of the hand, as if it were a thing hardly worth the dignity of their attention, but a willful, decisive act of rejection. At its core is the most unseemly and base of all human attitudes: hatred for God Himself:

Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us. (from Psalm 2)

For us as Christians, maintaining our faith makes us at the very least unpopular. It is no small wonder that today's weak church does everything it can to minimize the difference between the worldling and the believer. For many who profess to be Christians, the cost of living a life committed to Christ is just too great, and the difference from ones peers it entails is too stark. But for the true disciple there is no possibility of not sharing in the hatred that Christ Himself received, *because we are members of his body, of his flesh and bones* (Eph. 5:30).

But when Christ appears, the tables, as it were, will be turned. The last laugh --if it must be put that way,-- will belong to God's people. The place and position of the unbeliever will be frightful:

25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring ; 26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth...

The events leading up to the return of Christ will provide a preamble for what is to come. To a world which has been priding itself in its mastery of the elements, its superior knowledge over all preceding ages, its use of science to provide a ready rationale to dismiss every uncertainty, its easy going "Whatever!" and "It's all good!" mentality to meet every contingency, the occurrence one after another of inexplicable, horrifying phenomena will represent a change of immense magnitude.

The culmination of this period of preparation will be Christ's appearance: *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory* (27). It is impossible to conceive of the depth of fear at that moment that will be the lot of those who have set themselves against God:

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17)

But for God's own people, the increase of evidences pointing to the end of history, and the very second advent of our Lord Himself, will involve an entirely different set of emotions. Those who have been among the hated and despised are told to *look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh* (28). It is a time of vindication from the insults and slander of the world. It is also a time of ever-increasing clarity and certainty. Even the simplest and humblest believer will know that all of the mighty institutions that man has erected for himself as a fortification against God were nothing but a mere house of cards, and that the great body of

knowledge and learning that man has accumulated as a testimony to himself of his own greatness, and used as a weapon against God and His Church, was inconsequential.

As we ponder these great themes, and stop to consider how very different things will be at that time, we are also reminded that we can take no pride in our greatly privileged position as Christians, for we are merely sinners saved by grace. And laid upon us is the duty of love:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt. 5:43-45)

We cannot exult in the thought of the doom of the wicked. "Pay-back time" for them cannot be our attitude, at least in the sense that it destroys our concern for their souls and destiny.

But we can allow ourselves every sense of comfort from the information the Bible provides us that the status quo which currently makes us an oppressed minority, subject to misunderstanding and potentially even much worse, is not permanent. Though the clamor of arrogant rebellion against God increases all the time, along with the abandonment of virtue and values that has seized our beloved land, and we seem to hardly have arrived at the worst of it yet, we can look forward to Christ's appearance.

Far from provoking in us any fear or loathing, it will be for us the very best conceivable moment that has ever --that could ever-- occur in the life of any human being.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...(1 Thess. 4:16). Think of it, that shouting voice will be the very same one that once wept and cried upon Mary's breast so many, many years ago when she had just brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.