

NOTE: It was suggested by a parishioner who heard Deacon Jopp's homily last Sunday that we should include it in the parish bulletin for everyone to read. It offers a powerful message to contemplate during this season of Advent.

1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT ~ YEAR A ~ 11/27/2022

HOMILY BY DEACON HAL JOPP

IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THE CHURCH BEGINS HER LITURGICAL YEAR IN ADVENT WITH A STARK WARNING FROM ST. PAUL: "IT IS NOW THE HOUR FOR YOU TO AWAKE FROM SLEEP." THEN, TO UNDERSCORE THE POINT, JESUS MINCES NO WORDS IN THE GOSPEL READING FROM ST. MATTHEW: "STAY AWAKE! FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW ON WHICH DAY YOUR LORD WILL COME." WHILE WE ARE BUSY ABOUT GETTING OURSELVES AND OUR HOMES READY FOR THE APPROACHING CHRISTMAS SEASON, WE ARE REMINDED BY THE CHURCH TO FOCUS NOT SO MUCH ON THE THINGS WE HAVE TO DO AS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST IN THE EYES OF GOD – OUR SALVATION.

WHY SHOULD THIS BE SO? ST. PAUL GIVES US THE REASON: "OUR SALVATION IS NEARER NOW THAN WHEN WE FIRST BELIEVED." NO MATTER OUR AGE, WE DRAW DAILY NEARER AND NEARER TO THE DAY OF OUR DEATH AND THE FINAL ACCOUNTING OF OUR LIFE TO GOD. THAT THOUGHT SHOULDN'T DEPRESS US BUT RATHER IMPRESS US WITH THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING GOD'S GIFT OF LIFE FULLY AND SPIRITUALLY. THE THEOLOGIAN YVES CONGAR MAKES THIS POINT IN THESE WORDS: "IN THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THINGS...THERE ARE ULTIMATELY TWO IMPORTANT AND ABSOLUTELY SUPREME MOMENTS: THE PRESENT MOMENT AND THE MOMENT OF OUR DEATH."

IT IS NOT A COINCIDENCE THAT IN OUR PRAYER TO MARY – THE HAIL MARY -- AS THE TRAPPIST MONK CHARLES CUMMINGS OBSERVED: "WE ASK MARY TO PRAY FOR US AT THESE TWO CRITICAL MOMENTS, WHICH SOMEDAY WILL CONVERGE AND BE IDENTICAL." NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH.

THE SEASON OF ADVENT IS A SEASON OF SOLEMNITY. OUR VESTMENTS ARE PURPLE, NOT OUT OF SORROW BUT OUT OF A SENSE OF ANTICIPATION. PERHAPS IT'S THE CHURCH'S WAY OF REMINDING US THAT WE SHOULD NEVER TAKE THE BIRTH OF JESUS FOR GRANTED. WE SHOULD PREPARE OURSELVES TO TRULY CELEBRATE HOW MOMENTOUS HIS BIRTH WAS AND IS FOR EACH OF US.

IF WE HAVE ALLOWED OURSELVES TO BECOME A LITTLE INATTENTIVE SPIRITUALLY, IF WE HAVE LET SLIDE SOME OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE OUR FAITH MORE FULLY, IF WE HAVE MAYBE HELD ONTO ANGER WHEN WE SHOULD HAVE LET IT GO – THEN ADVENT IS A GREAT TIME TO RECALIBRATE OUR LIFE. WE DON'T

KNOW HOW LONG WE MAY HAVE TO SET THINGS RIGHT, BUT WE DO KNOW THAT IT IS SOMEWHERE BETWEEN NOW AND THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH.

PROCRASTINATION IS INSIDIOUS. IT TRIES TO CONVINCE US THAT WE CAN GET TO SOMETHING LATTER. AS WE STRUGGLE TO FIND OUR PLACE IN LIFE, WE CAN LOSE SIGHT OF FINDING OUR REAL PLACE IN HEAVEN. THERE IS A JEWISH SAYING: “MAN SHOULD GO INTO GOD, SO THAT GOD MAY SURROUND HIM AND BECOME HIS PLACE.” ADVENT REMINDS US THAT WE HAVE NOT YET REACHED THAT PLACE OR ACHIEVED OUR DESTINY – TO LET GOD SURROUND US AND BECOME OUR PLACE.”

IN THE THIRD CHAPTER OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS, GOD SPEAKS TO ADAM AND EVE AFTER THEIR FALL: “WHERE ARE YOU?” THAT’S AN INCREDIBLY PROFOUND QUESTION AND ONE THAT IS ADDRESSED TO ALL OF US: “WHERE ARE WE?” THE ADVENT SEASON PRESENTS US WITH A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO PONDER OUR ANSWER. FIRST, HOWEVER, WE MAY NEED TO ANSWER ANOTHER QUESTION: “WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN SO FAR?” THAT’S NOT AN EASY ONE TO ANSWER EITHER. THE COMBAT BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL GOES ON IN THE WORLD AND IN OUR SOULS. JESUS WARNS US TO BE WATCHFUL FOR EVEN HE WAS TEMPTED BY SATAN. IT IS GOOD TO TAKE STOCK OF THE GOOD WITHIN US AND TO SHORE UP OUR WEAKNESSES. THAT CAN BE A PAINFUL SELF-ASSESSMENT, BUT A NECESSARY ONE.

AS WE APPROACH THE SHORTEST DAY OF THE YEAR, WE ARE REMINDED OF THE SHORTNESS OF OUR LIFE. THE CHANGES WE MAY DISCOVER THAT WE NEED TO MAKE MUST HAPPEN NOW WHILE WE LIVE IN TIME. SOON WE WILL LIVE IN ETERNITY, BEYOND THE REACH OF TIME. THE ORTHODOX THEOLOGIAN PAUL EVDOKIMOV OFFERS US THIS PROFOUND AND PREVOCATIVE INSIGHT INTO LIFE AND DEATH: “IT IS NOT LIFE THAT IS A PHENOMENON OF DEATH, BUT IT IS DEATH THAT IS AN EPISODIC AND PASSING PHENOMENON OF LIFE.”

SO, EARTHLY TIME IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT GIVES GOD A CHANCE TO SEE WHERE WE ARE AND FOR OURSELVES TO DISCOVER WHERE WE ARE WITH GOD. ST. PAUL URGES US TO GET ABOUT THIS IMPORTANT TASK: “THE NIGHT IS ADVANCED, THE DAY IS AT HAND.” NO PROCRASTINATION! WHEN HE TELLS US TO “PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST,” HE IS ASKING US TO LET GOD BECOME OUR PLACE. THAT’S WHY GOD CREATED US.

THE DAYS MAY BE GROWING SHORTER WITH LESS DAYLIGHT, BUT WE, IN THE WORDS OF ISAIAH, “WALK IN THE LIGHT OF THE LORD.” ONCE WE KNOW WHERE WE HAVE BEEN AND WHERE WE ARE NOW, WE WILL BEGIN TO SEE EVER MORE CLEARLY THE WAY WE HAVE YET TO GO BETWEEN NOW AND THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH.