

Message for 1st Sun. in Advent, 2009

Intro. Have you ever felt like you're in the wrong place at the wrong time? I bet a lot of you may be feeling that way right now. It's Advent isn't it, the preparation time for Christmas, right? Shouldn't we be hearing about Joseph and pregnant Mary coming to Bethlehem on a donkey, but instead our Gospel reading is taking us into Jerusalem with Jesus on a donkey. Santa Claus appeared at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade last Thursday already. Christmas trees and lights and decorations are going up all over the place. I'm wanting to get into that Christmas mood which takes a few weeks of Advent. So what's with the palm branches and 'Ride on Ride on in Majesty'? Well, strangely enough the traditional Gospel for the 1st Sunday of Advent is Palm Sunday, Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It seems in a way, wrong, out of place. We should all be going to the movie theaters to see the most recent Santa Claus is coming to town movie, instead we're being shown the prequel to the bloody and gory movie, The Passion of Christ. But, that's actually what Advent and Christmas are all about, Christ's passion for you! And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit this 1st weekend of Advent.

I. Christmas, appears to me, to be a holiday about nothing for many people or at least mainly about the things of this world. Most people, I think, have completely lost their bearings when it comes to Christmas or most anything truly Christian about Christmas. In our society, we certainly celebrate Christmas big time, we even fight for the right to say 'Merry Christmas' at places like Wal Mart, but we rarely really talk about why Christmas is to be merry. The absence of Christ and the absence of mass = which means worship has left a huge gapping hole, an emptiness in our society and in many people's lives. And so we try to fill that emptiness with a secular hymn book; Elvis Presley's Blue Christmas, Bing Crosby's White Christmas, Nat King Coles' Christmas Song, Gene Autry's singing about the Advent of Santa Claus coming to town checking to see who's been naughty or nice. We try to fill our emptiness with not THE Christmas story, but with A Christmas story, Dicken's Christmas Carol, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, the Nutcracker, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, It's A Wonderful Life, A Miracle on 34th Street. Now don't get me wrong. I like a lot if not all of these songs and stories myself, BUT if that's all there is, Christmas with out Christ and without mass = worship. Then no wonder Christmas falls flat for most people. No wonder there's a spike in suicide attempts around the holidays. And even for us who have a Christ – mass, Christmas, the holiday can appear to fail us, also.

**'It came upon a midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
Peace on the earth, goodwill to men, from heaven's all gracious King
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing'**

A beautiful song and a beautiful message, but where's the 'peace on earth'? I don't know about you but I don't see much peace on earth or for that matter much 'goodwill among men'. The first Christmas took place around 2009 years ago and for those 2009 years we've had nothing but wars and rumors of wars. The Christmas angels announce, 'don't be afraid'. Yet we live in one of highest stress and highest anxiety times in world history. We have family and friends in duel wars in Iraq and Afganistan plus soldiers being shot on American soil at Fort Hood. We have proofs galore of rapid climate change or at least of extreme effect and frequency of natural disasters. We have national unemployment over 10%. The greed of Wall Street hasn't changed. What if Iran and North Korea do get nuclear weapons or God forbid actually use them? What if a terrorist group detonates a dirty bomb or poisons a major cities water supply? 'Peace on earth, goodwill to men'? I don't think so! And how about our own personal lives, where's the peace and goodwill? Christmas is great but the bills aren't so wonderful. Add on a few anxieties about work, your kid's struggle in school, ailing and aging parents, a chronic medical problem, the loss of a loved one, divorce to a marriage. Our lives and relationships are a mess and more often than not, we're part of the problem.

II. So where's the solution to this world's mess, to our life's mess? Where's the solution to this world's emptiness to our souls emptiness? It's in the Passion of Christ, a real Savior for a world with real problems! The solution to this world's mess of sin and our life's mess of sin is the One riding into Bethlehem on the donkey in the womb of the Virgin Mary to be born to ride on a donkey into Jerusalem to suffer and die on a cross and be buried in the womb of the earth to be our Substitute and Savior. And so at our Savior's birth is sung 'Peace on earth' because as Jesus entered Jerusalem to die was sung 'Blessed is the King ... peace in heaven'. You see, true peace, lasting peace on earth and in our lives happens because God in heaven is at peace with us. God's at peace with a world that is constantly at war with each other and with Him. God's at peace with the world that ignores Him and blasphemes Him. God's at peace with a world that has taken the celebration of His incarnational birth and turned it into a celebration of sinful greed and gluttony and fraud and fakery. If we are to truly recover Christmas = Christ worship, we must also recover Advent. Advent isn't simply the 3,4 weeks we have to prepare our homes and market places and feasts and decorations. Advent is a time of preparation of our hearts and souls and minds to focus on Christ – mass, Christ worship. Advent is our time to recognize why our Lord of heaven came in the first place, as the King who wore a crown of thorns for us. Think about your lives, your hopes, your dreams. What are you looking forward to? What are you planning? Are your hearts set merely on the things of this world? What do you really want out of life? What are your life's goals? The season of Advent is a season in your life to assess those questions. Advent is a time to remember that the

things of this world, all of it, are already in the process of passing away and very rapidly. Advent is a time to set our hearts on things above, upon the cross and upon the passion of Christ for us. We don't simply cry out against the evils of the world. But, most importantly we cry out, we confess the evils of our own sinful human heart which contributes to the evils of this world. And through faith we see riding the donkey into Bethlehem as a fetus – a little one in the womb of the Virgin Mary our Savior who went to Jerusalem riding a donkey to die in our place to bring heaven's peace to earth into our hearts and souls and lives. Romans 5: 1 'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'.

Conclusion For so many people, Christmas is a big game of pretend, trying to create an idyllic world that doesn't exist, seeking a peace that will never last. But, for us Christmas is life itself as Christ comes-Advents into our hearts and souls through God's Word and Sacraments. So we can decorate this dieing old world with every good work, with acts of charity and generosity, as we forgive as we have been forgiven, as we offer up our lives as a gift to the One who offered up His life as a gift for us to be our Savior. That's the Passion of Advent and Christmas as we wave our palm branches and sing:

Ride on, ride on in majesty! In lowly pomp ride on to die.

Oh Christ, your triumphs now begin o'er captive death and conquered sin! Amen