

Sunday Next Before Advent

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Date: 26 November 2023

Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Today, Stirrup Sunday as it is often called, because of the opening words of this morning's collect, today marks the last Sunday of the church year.

And the church marks time very differently than the way the world marks time. Our new year is not January 1st. Our new church year actually begins four Sundays prior to Christmas, called Advent.

And Advent has a two-fold outlook. We remember first the coming of our Lord as he came, being born in a feeding trough for animals in Bethlehem.

The city of Bethlehem literally means house of bread. But the first coming of our Lord really is not the main focus for Advent. The primary or main purpose of Advent is to prepare for the second coming of our Lord.

Or as we say in the Creed, our Lord will come again to judge both the quick and the dead. Advent, therefore, is a penitential season of fasting, almsgiving, and growing in our faith.

[1 : 2 6] Growing in our faith as we prepare to meet our Savior and our Judge, our dear Lord Jesus Christ. But before we enter into this new year of Advent, we close the season of Trinity with a very familiar reading.

It is the reading from John chapter 6, and the feeding of the vast multitudes of the people. One reason we encounter John chapter 6 right before Advent is because we celebrate the feast of the Apostle Andrew on the last day of November.

This year we will have Mass on the vigil of St. Andrew's feast, which will be this Wednesday at noon. However, there is another important reason why we encounter this text of John chapter 6 right before Advent, right before the beginning of a new church year.

For this account of the feeding of the vast multitudes is a reminder that Jesus, Jesus Christ is our source of life and sustenance as we walk together through this rather difficult journey of life.

For our Lord walked this road that we all must travel. Therefore, our Lord and Judge knows the temptations and tribulations that we face in this life.

[2 : 5 4] Jesus actually identifies with our suffering and he feeds and nourishes us in this journey we call life. For here in our gospel text this morning, Jesus sees a great multitude coming towards him.

And the question is, how will the disciples feed such a great, great number of people? Jesus then takes five loaves of bread and he does an amazing miracle of multiplying the bread and the fish for all to eat.

He feeds thousands upon thousands, signifying that he, he is the one who provides food for his people because he is the God who rained down manna upon the Israelites as they made their own journey through the wilderness.

Jesus Christ is greater than Moses because he is the source and giver of all life. And I believe that what we have in our gospel texts this morning is the reminder that our Lord is our life and the one who sustains us on our own journey through life.

The bread of heaven came to Bethlehem, that is, house of bread, in order that he might feed the world and impart his own life to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

[4 : 27] And though this life poses many challenges and great difficulties for us all, Jesus Christ continues to feed us with his own body and his own blood.

For he who is eternal came to all of us, creatures of the temporal, so that we might share eternity with him.

But, we are not to be mere consumers of this bread that comes down from heaven. In other words, we are not merely takers.

We are called to be givers as well. We are called to share this bread that has come from heaven with a world that is starving.

We are called to share Christ, the very source of life, to others. As we prayed in this morning's collect, stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people, that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[5 : 43] We are called to become what we eat, bringing forth the fruit of good works by seeking to imitate the love of our Savior, being givers and not just takers.

That is why we give, we fast, we pray, we learn, and we share the love of God with others. We are called to offer the bread of heaven to others so that the spiritual starvation found in our community might be satisfied by the only one who can give eternal life, Jesus Christ, our eternal Lord.

Therefore, friends, as we prepare for the coming of the church's new year in Advent, may we seek to receive often the life of our God in the Holy Eucharist, feasting on the true bread of heaven, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

May we be watching and longing for the coming of our great God and King, Jesus Christ, and may we use our mouths, our hands, and our feet to point others to Christ as the source of all life and as the hope of a hurting world.

And may all who are weary and heavy laden find their hope and rest in Him and He who is the bread who has come down from heaven, He who gives His life for the world.

[7 : 23] In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.