

What is Christian hope but that one day I might see my Lord face to face in the Heavenly Jerusalem, there to wonder for eternity at His great love for me? It is this hope that should orient my life, awakening in me a desire to draw near to the Kingdom of God even as I live my life in this valley of tears. For what hope may we have in mankind or in this world that encompasses us with daily images of violence and hatred, if that hope is not that the Eternal Word became Incarnate here, not to speak of love in an abstract sense but to perform love's duty of total self-giving, of sacrifice that returns love to its source?

My hope, then, is the salvation of my soul, which is God's gift of love to me. And when I say that I love God, I only ever draw from that love which He has first given me, desiring ever more completely to return it to Him through the offering of my life, as He offered His for mine in Jesus Christ. And when I say I love myself, I mean that I open myself to receive the love of God and to desire my own salvation, working it out with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12) as I seek consolation and grace in prayer and the Sacraments. And when I say that I love my neighbour as myself, I mean that I desire the salvation of their souls and would walk the path of Christ to the Cross for them if only they would be saved.

All things are ordered to the salvation of souls because this is our one and only hope in Jesus Christ. We are not here to create some utopian 'kingdom of god' on earth so that when Christ comes again in glory He sees no need to return with us to His Father in heaven. We are here to "look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18), for "our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we also look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).

It is in this context that I desire to set the Gospel proclamation for this first Sunday in the season of Advent, to remind myself and to urge you all to awaken the virtue of hope which is a gift of God's grace and which answers our burning desire for happiness. May this hope of the full vision of God's glory for all eternity refocus our perspective on our lives here on earth. May we see our present joys as reflections of that joy perfected to which we are called to participate for eternity. May we see our present sufferings as our meagre share in the sufferings of Christ; transient sufferings which should only fortify our hope because by them, joined with the Cross, we work for the salvation of our souls and of our neighbours'. And may this lived and living hope be found awake in us when He comes again, for this is the message of Advent, that "this Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11b).

Let us hope, then, not for vain and petty things, not for comfort or success, but rather in the promise of Christ.

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on in corruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on in corruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).✝

Be Disciples of Hope

NEWBEC

3rd December 2017
1st Sunday of Advent

The Awakening of HOPE



How do I desire the Lord to find me when he comes? Certainly, awakened in hope of the day of salvation. But what must I do today to make myself ready for the day of the Lord? The spirit of Advent is one of preparation. All too often this preparation is undertaken to make ourselves ready for the Christmas festivities. Writing cards, buying presents, putting up decorations ... December is a busy month. But for far too many of us, bar the Christmas Carols piped through supermarket loudspeaker systems, the true meaning of the season is easily eclipsed by premature celebrations, some of which begin even before the first purple candle is lit on the Advent Wreath.

At the risk of turning Grinch-green, I call on you to consider the season's penitential heart, its call to conversion echoing the voice of the Baptist in the wilderness that calls out, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight!" (Mark 1:3) Make ready your heart to receive the Lord. Recall your own baptism, when you rejected Satan and all his works, when you turned from sin and death and clothed yourself in the white robe of salvation. Advent is the time to take that robe out again, and to ensure that it is as white as the first day that you wore it. Making the paths straight for the Lord means removing the obstacles in your life that prevent you from going out to meet him. Fear of the day when you will see him face to face can only ever be replaced by hope when we are freed from the burden of our sins and become free to embrace the one who frees us. It is for this reason that we begin the journey of the liturgical year surrounded by the penitential colour violet, which evokes the image of Christ crowned with thorns, mocked, scourged, and rejected by his own people with cries of "Crucify him!". It is a potent reminder of why the Eternal Word Incarnate humbled himself even unto death on a cross, and it humbles us too, before so great a love that we have too often rejected.

At the very beginning of the Church's year, we are reminded of why the Word became Flesh, so that we might embrace that conversion of life to which each of us is called. It is a conversion that sees us (in the words of today's Responsorial Psalm) turn back to the Lord to see his mercy and receive his saving help; for justice did indeed march before him as the Father received full satisfaction for all man's sins in the death of his Son, and peace did indeed follow his steps: that peace between heaven and earth which the angels announced at his birth singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, to people of good will."

May we then strive to live in that same peace which we have been given in Christ, and prepare our lives for the glory of God to be revealed. Christ's peace is the end of enmity between man and God. His incarnation, death, resurrection from the dead, and ascension to the right hand of the Father proclaims that our warfare is accomplished, that our iniquity is pardoned. And as, in this season of Advent, we await in hope for his return in glory, let us heed the words of the St. Peter, that while we are waiting, we do our best to live lives without spot or stain so that he will find us at peace (2 Peter 3:14).

"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3) †

Be Disciples of Hope

NEWBEC

10th December 2017
2nd Sunday of Advent



Made Ready in Hope

Just before the break of dawn, the horizon turns rose in colour, and although the sun is yet to appear, we make take comfort that the night will end and another day will soon begin. This hopeful colour of rose illuminates the deep violet of the season with the promise of the dawn of salvation. And so, as we gather for Holy Mass and the priest approaches the altar vested in rose-coloured vestments, the Church proclaims, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! Indeed, the Lord is near."

Today we are reminded of the purpose of our advent penance; we are comforted with the promise that suffering gives way to joy, just as sure as the sun rises each day in the east. For sure, we must look inward to examine our conscience and repent of our sins, which separate us from the path of holiness that leads to the Lord. But we must also look outward, to the breaking dawn, ever hopeful of the Lord's coming, ever joyful that the light he brings casts out all the shadows of sin and lifts the darkness of human suffering.

In the rose light of this Gaudete Sunday let us consider the nature of Christian joy. When was the last time you felt truly happy? What was the source of your joy? And how long did it last? All things of this world will fade and disappear. This is the very nature of the natural world. It stands to reason then, that all joy found in the things of this world will also fade and disappear. The smell of a new car fades quite quickly, as does the joy of driving it disappear into the frustration of our daily jammed journeys. The joy of a holiday evaporates into the burdens of work, even memories of it fade and are only temporarily reawakened as photographs appear on our Facebook timeline to remind us of joys already passed. For sure there is joy to be found in our daily lives and in the natural world, but these are mere reflections of the supernatural joy that is ours to be had in the Father's Kingdom. Only when all our joys in this world are rooted in the promise of eternal joy in heaven can we truly rejoice in the blessed hope that Christ brings.

It can be as simple as thanking God for the joy of friendship, or for the beauty of a clear blue sky. Dedicating the joyous moments of our lives to our God who gives us all that is good is the beginning of experiencing a joy that transcends this world and lifts us daily closer to heaven. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul exhorts us to "Be happy at all times," yes, even when there is nothing much to be happy about, and even when life is just not going our way. Be happy! Why? Saint Paul has the answer, "because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus". Because in Jesus Christ we have eternal joy, which transfigures even sadness and grief, and puts all things of this world firmly in context: joy or sorrow in the things of this life will pass, and in Jesus Christ become joy with him in his Kingdom for ever.

The English saying, "looking at life through rose-tinted glasses" is usually spoken with a degree of negativity, as if these glasses make a person naïve and ignorant of the ways of the world. But the pair of rose-tinted spectacles we are given today are glasses of joyful hope, which do not deny that there is both joy and sadness to be experienced in the world around us, but rather give us a heaven-sent perspective that looks upward and forward to the dawn of Christ's coming and enable us to stand with John the Baptist as witnesses to the light, looking forward to the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. †

Be Disciples of Hope

NEWBEC

17th December 2017
3rd Sunday of Advent



In Joyful Hope

**From above and the clouds bestow the gentle rain of righteousness:
let the earth reveal and bring forth the Saviour.**

The Entrance Antiphon for the Fourth Sunday of Advent takes us into the mystery of the Incarnation using images of heaven and earth in a perfect symmetry that reflects the Word made Flesh in Jesus Christ – Emmanuel, God with us. The heavens have opened up, not in anger or vengeance for the sins of men, but in such utter love that God Himself becomes the flesh that He created. And in reciprocation the earth opens up to receive Him, and having received Him brings Him forth, to give Him to the world as our Saviour, if only we shall open ourselves to receive Him.

Tomorrow, Christ is born in Bethlehem. It did not happen with august fanfare, nor with fear and trembling. In the days prior, there was no warning, no excitement, no expectation that the world would be forever changed. There were no crowds thronging the streets, no jubilee impatiently waiting to begin. God came among us with the softness of the dewfall in the night, barely perceptible as it falls, and yet clothing all in its shimmering mantle. Had we been forewarned of the date and the hour, we might have looked expectantly towards heaven only to see nothing. For this was not how God was to come.

For He came not on the clouds of Heaven, but forth from His own creation, changing us forever, though yet we perceived it not. The dust from which we were formed, imbued now with the dew of the heavens, its form unaltered but its essence forever transformed: not so that eyes in the darkness of night would see it, but that in Heaven's light we should see the glistening presence of the Emmanuel there, God with us in a manner we never dared even dream of. For it is in the Incarnation that we see the tenderness of God through the gentleness of His coming. Not destroying that which by its nature is corrupt but bestowing on it His own nature in a redemption, the only pain for which was to be His to bear.

For He loved that which at the dawn of time He brought into being, with a love that designed as our consummation a perfect union with Himself. And since we refused to become one with Him by returning the love we first received of His Spirit, He condescended to us, becoming one with us that we might be one with Him and with the Father who sent Him both to create and redeem, to originate and consummate the divine love for man.

So shall we be lifted high by this dew that fell upon the arid dust of our mortal flesh. For in the day of His return, His glorious light shall lift again the dew that fell in the twilight of man's days: the warmth of Christ the rising sun drawing love's dew back to its source, and with it, we who will receive Him as Saviour and King, as Love Incarnate, as God made man, on Christmas Day. †

Be Disciples of Hope

NEWBEC

24th December 2017
4th Sunday of Advent



Drop Down Dew,
YE HEAVENS

Apostle Paul has been helping us to understand better in what Christian hope consists. And we said that it was not optimism, it was something else. And the Apostle helps us to understand this. Today he does so by approaching it from two altogether important attitudes for our life and our faith experience: “*perseverance*” and “*consolation*” (vv. 4.5). They are mentioned twice in the passage of the Letter to the Romans. What is their most profound, truest meaning? And in what way do they throw light on the reality of hope? These two attitudes: perseverance and consolation.

We can describe *perseverance* in fact as *patience*: it is the capacity to endure, to carry on one’s shoulders, “support,” to remain faithful, even when the burden seems to be too great, unbearable, and we are tempted to judge negatively and to abandon everything and everyone. *Consolation*, instead, is the grace to be able to receive and show in every situation, even in those largely marked by disappointment and suffering, the compassionate presence and action of God. Now Saint Paul reminds us that particularly the Scriptures, namely, the Bible, transmit to us perseverance and consolation (v. 4). In fact, in the first place, the Word of God leads us to turn our gaze to Jesus, to know Him better and to be conformed to Him, to be ever more like Him. In the second place, the Word reveals to us that the Lord is truly “the God of perseverance and of consolation” (v. 5), who is always faithful to His love for us, namely, that He is perseverant in His love for us, He does not tire of loving us! He is perseverant: He always loves us! And He who takes care of us, covering our wounds with the caress of His goodness and His mercy, that is, He consoles us. He does not tire of consoling us, either.

Understood in this perspective also is the Apostle’s initial affirmation: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (v.1). This expression “we who are strong” might seem presumptuous, but, in the logic of the Gospel, we know that it is not so, rather, it is in fact the contrary, because our strength does not come from ourselves, but from the Lord. One who experiences in his life the faithful love of God and His consolation is able, more than that, has the duty to be close to weaker brothers and sisters and take on their frailty. If we are close to the Lord we will have that strength to be close to the weakest, to the neediest and to console them and give them strength. We can do this without being pleased with ourselves but feeling ourselves simply as a “channel” that transmits the Lord’s gifts; and thus become concretely a “sower” of hope. This is what the Lord asks us, with that strength and capacity to console and to be sowers of hope. And today it is necessary to sow hope, but it is not easy . . .

However, all this is possible if Christ and his Word are put at the center, because He is “strong. He is the one who gives us strength, who gives us patience, who gives us hope, who gives us consolation. He is the “strong brother,” who takes care of each one of us: all of us, in fact, are in need of being carried on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd and of feeling enveloped by His tender and solicitous gaze.

We can never thank God enough for the gift of His Word, which is rendered present in the Scriptures. It is there that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed as “God of perseverance and of consolation.” And it is there that we realize that our hope is not founded on our capacities and our strength, but on God’s support and on the faithfulness of His love, that is, on God’s strength and consolation. †

Be Disciples of Hope

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31st Dec 2017
The Holy Family

