

An Advent Meditation
Sunday Next Before Advent
(From *the Epistle: Jeremiah xxiii.5 ff.*)

5 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 "Therefore, behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' 8 but, 'As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land."

We are approaching the Advent season, when we celebrate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to earth. Most of the festivities this time of year are directed toward His birth in Bethlehem, His First Coming. Even then, though He arrived a mere helpless Infant, and under very trying circumstances, those who were close to the heart of God knew that this Child was indeed destined to be a King. Mary and Joseph knew, as did the shepherds to whom the angels proclaimed the good news on the night of Christ's birth. So did the wise men from the East, and those who came to see Him when His parents presented Him later at the Temple.

Even during His three years of adult ministry, His kingship remained hidden. Although He presented all the necessary evidence to the nation of Israel and the world in general that He was the divine Son of God, through His great miracles and His teaching, He was shamefully rejected. And finally, during His crucifixion, over His head on the cross Pilate nailed a sign that proclaimed "This is the King of the Jews". How could a King arrive at such a place of suffering and humiliation?

This was the First Coming, when Jesus proved His kingship through His humility, and in taking upon His own Person the great and awful weight of all human sin.

But Advent season also brings with it the promise of Christ's return, which will be under completely different circumstances. And it is of this event that today's Epistle speaks. When He comes back, He will govern the earth as a great King might be expected to do. I want to focus on one wonderful sentence of this passage from Jeremiah: *A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.* And I want us to consider especially these two aspects of His executive rule: *judgment* and *righteousness*. These are two of the principal marks of His dominion, and it is important that we examine them closely.

First of all, note that these two states of human affairs, *judgment* and *righteousness*, are very scarce ingredients among the affairs of men upon this earth. Judgment is often arbitrary at best, because it reflects human laws, which vary according to the beliefs and purposes of those who legislate them. Judges and juries, after all, are composed of fallible men, subject to the pressure of opinion, and to their own temperaments and preferences. Where will pure objectivity be

found? And especially, during times when wicked men assume power, overthrowing the law of the land and replacing it with laws that suit their own ends, how can there be recourse to standards that uphold what is right and good, which should be the basis of everything that orders human life? Societies can only try desperately to approach as closely as possible a state of affairs which consistently reflects judgment and justice. Our successes are cherished, but our failures create enduring havoc and disorder.

But Christ the King, at His return, will *execute judgment* throughout the whole earth. Because He is Who He is --perfect, without sin, above reproach, empty of ulterior motives, empowered only by love-- His authority over the affairs of men will institute complete order and rectitude. His administration will require no checks and balances. There will be no courts, because the King's power and authority are absolute, as is the commitment of His subjects to Him, so there will be no legal cases to decide. Gone will be the awful uncertainty associated with any human legislation. Gone will be the fear of the arbitrary abrogation of the law by the forces of evil. All that characterizes even the best endeavors of men in terms relative to that which is pure and perfect will no longer cast the shadow of doubt over all of life: *A king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters all evil with his eyes* (Pv. 20:8).

Along with *judgment*, Christ will bring *righteousness*. This word is surely among the most beautiful in the English language, but perhaps also among the most misunderstood. It is often associated with *self-righteousness*, which is something very different. This is a state of snobbery, often religious, in which an attitude of superiority is assumed by those who are convinced that their exercise of religion makes them better than others. Jesus interacted very sharply with the self-righteous hypocrites of His day.

But the righteousness of the Kingdom of God is as different from self-righteousness as night is from day. Imagine a world in which there is no injustice...where no one on any level can succeed in taking advantage of another...where there is no dark place for evil men to hide, nor any curtain behind which powerful and wicked people of influence can manipulate and control the affairs of others. Psalm 85 contains a description which is surely a foretaste of this new order:

10 Mercy and truth are met together ; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. 11 Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. 12 Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. 13 Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.

All will indeed be *right*. And what could possibly be a higher hope or a more wonderful prospect?

The prophet names this great King *the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*, and notice how this title is stated in capital letters. In His very own person He embodies the entirety of what men have ever hoped for and desired both individually and as the destiny of all human life. Lastly, He

will lead the children of Israel back from *from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them. And they shall dwell in their own land.* This miraculous regathering will mark the end of thousands of years of human division, the striving of nations, and all other forces of disruption and destruction that without exception have characterized history.

As we enter Advent season and begin to approach Christmas time, let's pause to reflect on this amazing plan of God. It began among peaceful, unknown, but deeply devout people, who believed in the Scriptures, and welcomed the Christ Child into their midst, based merely upon their faith. They saw no crown on His head nor ruler's staff in His hand. Instead of the bright vision of His kingly reign, they saw only the selfish cruelty and envy of sinful men. Only very afar off did they perceive in their hearts the culmination of His first coming, His visible and victorious rule upon earth. They held onto that hope with unbelievable desperation, considering the awful realities of Christ's life which they would soon witness.

But on some yet unknown day the King will return once again to vindicate the entire plan of God the Father: *A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

O Lord, Come!

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