

First Sunday of Advent A: November 27, 2022

"... let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

Looking back at my life at the age of almost 67, it seems that I spent an awfully long time in school, and much of it was nonsense. And perhaps, after long years of being both a priest/pastor and a life-long student, I have come to know that the most important object of my study must be one of both God and man. Everything else is rather like 'icing on the cake.' Life is really not as complicated as many seem to think. Bare bones. Either God and man are first in our studies, in our interests, in our hearts, minds and souls – or they shall, indeed, be last. Period.

It is not a mistake that the first commandment that the Lord, Our God, has given to us is: "I am the Lord, thy God: thou shalt not have strange gods before Me." Isn't it interesting that in the first commandment (and only in this commandment) that we see the name of God Itself, that is "I AM"? Our late Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul II often said that the reason God could write His commandments on tablets of stone to give to His people, was that He first inscribed them on the tablets of our hearts. We refer to this 'God first' and the knowledge that goes with it, as well as a deep-seated respect for the human person, as the natural law. No advance of any kind in any science can erase God's law or the natural law. And any attempt at any time in history to erase the natural law has proved, *every time*, to be a disastrous step backwards for mankind itself.

The last line of our first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah is: "*O, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*" (Isaiah 2. 5) We are, once again, beginning the season of Advent. The word 'Advent' means 'a coming or arrival.' In other words, at this season of Advent, Holy Mother Church invites Her children, you and I, to enter into a journey – once again as we do each year! – beginning now this Sunday, which will move to the Feast of Christmas, and culminate in the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, January 12, 2020. (Many of you, especially you poor mothers, are thinking: "Oh dear heavens, it was bad enough just getting to Christmas! Now we have to go all the way to January 12th?) Well... no, not really. Actually, we have to go a little farther. Let me explain.

Many years ago, visiting Fr. Mike Phillips who was then the pastor of St. Wenceslaus Parish, Iowa City I was stunned to see, in front of the main altar, a cradle with the Baby Jesus, and, at the head of the cradle, a crucifix. Amazing!

You see, our arrival which begins this Sunday with the first Sunday of Advent, is a beckoning first to Christmas, where we contemplate the Baby Jesus born in poverty, who "*for us and for our salvation descended from Heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary and became Man.*" But why? Why did He come from Heaven and take flesh for us, why was He born in poverty of the Blessed Virgin for us? The Creed answers that question for us: "*For our sake, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered, died and was buried.*" An old Spanish carol sings: "And in His hands, a tiny Cross grows..."

As I said before, God is either first in our lives – and, remember, we are preparing for His arrival to this world as Man – or God is last, which is to say, He is not at all. Period. There you are. And, in spite of what political and historical revisionists tell us, once God is gone mankind doesn't have a chance. In which case, worries about the end of the world are irrelevant because we shall in the end destroy ourselves.

We have forgotten, I'm sorry to say, that Jesus has come to our world as a Saviour – that is, to save us from our sins. Sin causes the death of our souls, or to put it another way, when we sin gravely, we turn away from God to choose something else in such a way that the relationship between God and our souls simply dies. In listening to a tape of a priest giving a mission in one of our churches a few weeks ago I thought this image was rather good. Fr. Richards mentioned the idea of mortal sin – one mortal sin killing a soul (which seems so extreme to so many people today) is like a well-trained athlete who, with all of his well-trained muscles runs up all the way to the top of the Empire State Building. At the top, with great bravado, like Rocky Balboa, he

shouts and sings, and, in his excitement, he walks to the edge of the building, still shouting and singing. Unfortunately, in all of his shouting, singing and excitement, he loses his balance and falls off of the buildings. Ooooooovooo – Splaaat!! He’s dead! Just with one fall! Mortal sin is just like that. It’s not that God moved... the sinner moved.... And please, my children, don’t forget that I include myself with each and every sinner. (1)

You might be interested to know what inspired this more-than-usual rambling article. I will tell you. Every year about this time (actually this stupidity starts earlier and earlier each year, watching TV, I am increasingly amazed by all of the ads for Christmas gifts, and how loud, lavish and exceedingly vulgar they are. And there seems to be no escape from them. Just when I think they can’t get any worse... of course, they do. On the screen comes an ad in which a person says that their spouse liked football – up jumped football sweaters for an exorbitant price. Then the person says that their spouse “... *really* likes football!” And the next ad is for a television or some such machine that cost almost \$800.00! and what about this: *Why not buy your family – a new car??!! Can one imagine the Holy Family fleeing Herod in an SUV replete with DVD players in the back seat?* Hmmm, something is messed up here, and I smell a whiff of sulphur.

What in Heaven’s name are we becoming in this country? We buy, *or are expected to buy*, more and more things, at greater and greater expense, to fill the gaping hole in our hearts, and to still the little voice which says: God is not first in our lives? How long will it take us to learn to put the Lord Jesus, Christ, back into Christmas?

This year as we begin our celebrations *and, indeed, we are called by God, Himself, to celebrate!*, we must celebrate with dignity: “*O come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*” (Isaiah 2. 5) When I say we must celebrate with dignity quoting the sacred text of the Prophet Isaiah, “*let us walk in the light of the Lord,*” I mean just that: let us walk! That means, when we celebrate, if we eat or drink so much that we lose our senses and stagger, we have sinned – and sinned gravely, losing that which makes us men, our rationality, our very rational souls! – and thus, we cannot “*walk in the light of the Lord!*” And that is why we are cautioned by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans: “... *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the desires of the flesh.*” (Romans 13. 14).

As I think about what is happening today in our world today in its frenzied rush to gather more and more material gain, and compare the message of Christ that I learned as a child through both my early childhood prayers, some of my wonderful teachers, and now, through some magnificent Popes, it becomes increasingly obvious that Jesus wants one thing: “*O... come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*” (Isaiah 2. 5) To do that I must take seriously, to the very depths of my heart the first commandment of God which uses His very Name in that commandment: “I AM the Lord thy God: thou shalt not have strange gods before Me!”

In short, maybe during *this Advent*, it’s time for each and every one of us to ask ourselves a burning question: Is God first, or not? Because, I can assure you, if He is not first, He is, I’m sorry to say, last.

1. Fr. Larry Richards: from his talk *Confession*, www.TheReasonForOurHope.org