

First Sunday in Advent
November 27, 2011
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What really scares you?

In our text from Isaiah 64 for today it is God's absence which scares them the most.

Isaiah 64 is a most impassionate and earnest prayer for God to appear once again. God came down from heaven on Mount Sinai and the earth shook with God's presence and that is what this prayer asks for once again.

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence ... to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

When God turned His face from those who were sinning, the whole people sank into worse sin. And those most devoted to God sense the darkness that society falls into when God withdraws His presence, when society follows sinful ways rather than God's ways, God cannot watch.

In verse seven we hear that NO ONE even makes the slightest effort to be faithful to God, and so the whole of the people are delivered into their sinfulness.

The climax of this confession of sinfulness is the declaration of the people's bondage to their own sins which they have chosen for themselves.

As the end of verse seven says:
You have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

This slavery to sin is what St. Paul wrote about in Romans 6:16:

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience which leads to righteousness?

Of this slavery to sin St. Augustine writes:

Bound as I was not with another man's irons, but with my own iron will. But the enemy held my will, and thence had made a chain for me, and bound me. For of a forward will was a lust made; and a lust served became a custom; and a custom not resisted became a necessity. By which links, as it were, joined together (whence I called it a chain) a hard bondage held me enthralled.

People are conquered not by some outside foe, but by their own chosen desires.

This prayer of Isaiah 64 is primarily a petition for God's rescue of people from themselves.

Christina Rossetti writes of this insight from St. Augustine in her poem: Who Shall Deliver Me?

Myself, arch-traitor to myself;
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go.

In Isaiah 64, verse 8, we hear the beginning of a final plea to God the Father and Maker of us all:

Yet, O LORD, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are the work of thy hand. Be not exceedingly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, consider, we are all thy people.

And we add our own plea here as well: Lord, let the bottomless depth of your mercy swallow up the bottomless depth of our sins.

In this Prayer for God's Mercy, the Lord's penitent people pray to Him as their Father, asking Him to reclaim them.

And we know that through Jesus' death and resurrection, our heavenly Father acted on our behalf, not counting our sin against us.

So we confess to our heavenly Father that we have sinned against Him and that we have highly honored our own will rather than faithfully followed God's ways of life. And so we pray: Father, for Jesus' sake, forgive me, and forgive us, keep each one of us as your Holy People!

The Gospel lesson for today, Mark 13: 24-37, is titled The Parousia or The Coming of the Son of Man, in which we read:

The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man COMING in clouds with great power and glory.

In this vivid imagery is pictured the Messianic Hope.

Jesus will return in such glory that no one will be able to miss it.

Are we still those who wait for the COMING of our Lord Jesus Christ in this way or have we out-grown it or have we out-thought our way to something Newer, something More Exciting, something More to Our Liking?

Have we traded this vivid imagery of the COMING of our Lord Jesus Christ for something more secularly acceptable?

Have we traded a Saving Faith in God, the Father, for a faith in ourselves, for a faith in our ability to think things new?

Have we traded a Saving Faith in God, the Father, for a faith in going GREEN?

Have we traded a Saving Faith in God for a faith in Energy Saving Appliances, in Gas Saving Electric Cars, in Coal Saving Wind Generated Energy?

Have we traded the COMING of Christ Jesus for the Coming of Black-Friday or Cyber-Monday?

The fact that we can even mention such possibilities indicates our need to HOLD FAST to the New Testament's expectancy of the COMING of Christ Jesus as the JUDGE of the whole world and all of its people.

And even though time has passed away since Jesus' death and resurrection, His WORDS have not passed away. Jesus' WORDS have not become obsolete, they are still profound and timeless, they are still as meaningful for our lives today as they were for those who heard them personally.

The ending of Chapter 13 of Mark is a plea for watchfulness, it is a plea for LIVING ALERT, it is a plea for KEEPING OUR EYES, OUR MINDS, and OUR HEARTS on The One Who Gives Life!!!

Be on guard, keep awake, stay awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will COME...

We have entered the Season of Advent.

Advent means COMING as in the COMING OF CHRIST JESUS.

It is a Season of Preparation not only for the COMING of the Birth of Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem, but also preparation for the COMING of Jesus as JUDGE of the whole world and all of its people on the Last Day.

Therefore, let us turn from slavery-to-ourselves, let us confess and repent of our self-centered sins, let us highly honor God, the Father, above all things, and let us keep our eyes, our mind, and our heart on the COMING of THE ONE WHO GIVES REAL LIFE!!!

Amen.