

ADVENT - II

Isaiah 35, John 1:5, John 1:14

The dogma, the doctrine, of the Christian faith is high drama. "The Book" tells a tall tale. It even has a star. It is from first to last an Advent, an adventure story and an adventure story is one of action and excitement. The Gospel, God's spel, God's story in the New Testament, is one of high adventure, filled with action and excitement. The dogma is all about God's dramatic venture into the turbulent stream of human history, and what happened to Him here; how God struggled here with the odds all stacked against Him, how he went down under the current of events, but rose again to reign in the lives of men and women. One may find this dogma unbelievable, but not dull, not boring, and not easily dismissed. After all, this tale of God's derring-do, under the assumed name, under the name He assumed, Jesus of Nazareth, aroused such a commotion in world culture, it changed the calendar (did it not?), decidedly changed the course of history, changed the character of more people than any other tale ever told, and after two millennia, the old story, still going strong, has lost little of its punch, it's impact in the re-telling. Obviously, this was more than the life and death story of a Galilean peasant, for men and women are still trying either to live their lives by it, which isn't easy, but they still try; or, to discredit and forget it altogether, which is the hardest yet.

For even those who would discredit it seem strangely unable to forget it. The people who talk most about God, are those who call themselves atheists. Very peculiar, this. They may call the advent-ure story, of all time irrational; they may even call it illegal; but, they do keep talking about it, actively and excitedly, talking about it all the way from mother Russia to the local school board, talking as though it were still a living word (not just an antique symbol) with some mysterious power in it, creating for every generation an issue that must again and again, eternally, be dealt with. And that is true: "The light is still shining in darkness, for the darkness has never put it out" (John 1:5, Goodspeed). When "the Word became flesh, you see, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14a) He came to stay (the God who came to dinner), never to go away; and do you know why? Because it was discovered that "In Him (in Jesus of Nazareth) was life; and this life could be the light of men." (John 1:4)

So we, here today, still celebrate this great drama--and even we would behold "His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14b). We too would like for Him to come again and visit us, make us fully alive. Why, it would be like light in our dark worlds. We have played our roles blind long enough. It is time, high time, some light was shed on what our little games here are all about: the business game, the professional game, the living game, the parent game. We grow weary of all the tricks of our gamesmanship, all the arts of "getting ahead", in whatever our role is, or just "getting on" with it, by hook or hell, and would like to see some over-all purpose, some lasting purpose in our bit parts, what the intent of the whole play really is.

What a dramatic adventure it would be for us to get the true perspective. After all, if Jesus "came" once upon a time, God's Star, the very God ("Call His name 'Jesus', or 'God Saved'), why shouldn't He 'come again'", down again in our time, to save us, the "quick and the dead" as the dogma says, we who are not always very "quick", seldom, indeed fully alive, and are often half dead. Goodness knows, we need someone to come and clear up our century's confusion as to what is dark and what is light, what is evil and what is good, what is wrong and what is right. In short, what is death and what is life. To know that, really to know it, such perspective would be quite exciting. What saving action it would promote, in family, state, and world; altogether, a first rate adventure. His coming again would indeed once more turn the world upside down.

So the true mood of Advent is one of expectancy. There is every reason to expect that when God's life finally comes to light, finally dawns on us, as we say, it will clear up confusion. It will clarify. For example, we will quit treasuring junk and junking treasure. We will be more loving and giving and honest and humble. We will value the valuable. We keep talking of putting others in their place. We will put ourselves in our place and our things in their place. We will know how to balance our accounts and our possessions with persons and their deep need. We will temper justice with mercy and mercy with justice. We will love and not be afraid, of ourselves or each other. In short, when the light of God finally dawns upon our life, we will have the peace and joy of righteousness.

(Read Isaiah 35: RSV)

A prophet's dream? Of course it is. But it's a choice. Join with the prophetic hope--the belief in the open door and the light ahead--or--join the dark theatre (go ahead--join the dark if you want to!) of the absurd, the literature of despair, the cult of bewilderment.

As a very young person asked me once, "Is it all just a cruelty joke?" Well, is it? Is life, after all, just one big cruelty joke? A cruel comedy? One idiot error after another? No reason, much less rhyme to it? "The terrible laughter of life?"

Well, it is, if this is the way you look at it. It's a matter of perspective. Some, at the very height of their life, turn bitter, scorn their own success, sour others' happiness, while others, even out of the depths of pain and disappointment, have about them a light, an insight, a faith and hope that gives them love and peace. Without faith and hope, you cannot love life or have any peace. It's a matter of perspective.

Well, the Advent dogma offers the dramatic challenge, the adventure of a right perspective. It will; however, take penitence and preparation.

But more of this on the following weeks.