

*Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter Sion...
behold your king will come to you.*

December 2, 2009



Dear Friends,

Amid trial and tribulation Mother Church celebrates the Advent of the Lord who comes to his own.

This coming is clearly no ordinary coming, and it is not like any other. The Lord who comes has already been in our world and he has spoken our language, endured our trials and bore the vicissitudes that flesh it heir to; and he lived at a time and in a culture very unlike our own. He left his mark, however, and having once spoken words of comfort and consolation in person, he is still with us in Word and Sacrament just as he promised he would be.

And yet, he is also the “Coming One”. He was among us once and wore our vesture, but he comes in his holy Advent which can only be celebrated properly by those who are already in him – *abide in me as I abide in you*, he once said encouragingly. And so, Christians may rightly say, “Come, Lord Jesus”. He comes, then, to his beloved bride who is already filled with his Spirit and with a holy longing.

In a very real sense, only the bride can long for his “Coming” because she is the Church who is his body on earth. It is fairly clear, therefore, although not always easy for everyone to see and to understand, and this is especially so in times of trial and tribulation as we now have them, that only the Church can properly place before her children *a genuine and effective* Advent celebration. She does so in proclaiming the Word and in celebrating the Eucharist. As Francis said, the Word of the Lord *is spirit and life*, and Eucharist is his very special presence among us as well as the earnest, or token, of eternal life. Our culture will, very naturally, given its stresses, strains and disappointments, find it very difficult to accept all this.

In ancient times God promised his coming to *his people*. It says in the Bible, *Jerusalem, right soon shall come your salvations, why consume yourself in grief. And again, weep not, City of Jerusalem...behold the Lord comes in power and his arm will have dominion.* And so, as you can tell, he has always been coming to *his people*.

Moreover, individuals have represented *his people* and the same individuals have also represented him. The ancient prophets were examples of this: Abraham, Moses, and Elijah and the like. *This people* finds its final representation in Mary, the Virgin, when God sent his Son *born of a woman*. She bore the Messiah in love and pure joy, and in this, she represents the new Israel who hears his Word and celebrates his presence.

For their sake he comes. He cannot forsake his own. He leads them to glory and to the fulfillment promised by his first coming at Bethlehem of which the choir of angels sang: *Glory to God in the highest and peace to men of good will.* The saints will rejoice at his final coming. But for those who did not recognize his first coming at Bethlehem and who did not *profess his name before men*, his coming will be a judgement. For the bride, however, glory awaits, for *his bride is prepared to welcome him*.

A Blessed Christmas to all!

Father Michael Conaghan, OFM