

November 27, 2016

1st Sunday of Advent '16

Stay awake! For you do not now on which day your Lord will come.

The harder thing breaks our hearts open to be more like the expansive heart of God

Advent - becoming like the expansive heart of God

Traditionally, Advent has been associated with waiting for Christmas. And this is appropriate. Christmas is an important step in God's manifesting God's Self in creation. But this is about more than reminiscing God birthing God's Self into Jesus 2000 years ago, it's about God birthing God's Self into us and all creation - today. God is continually seeking a room to be born in the inn of our hearts.

John of the Cross believed: *"If the soul is seeking God, much more is God seeking her."* But he sensed a danger here - not that we shall trust in the wrong thing, but that we shall stop trusting at all, that we shall cease to believe that we are a factor in God's life.

God and us

Advent reminds us that we are a factor in God's life; Advent is about God's and our hunger for each other. Listen to how St. Bernadette of Lourdes' deep hunger for God expressed itself in the many hardships she faced in her life:

- † For the poverty in which my mother and father lived, for the fact that everything failed for us, for the collapse of the mill, for the fact that I had to look after the children whom I was feeding too much and for the dirty noses of the children, for the fact that I had to guard the sheep, for the constant tiredness, thank you, my God!
- † Thank you, my God, for the prosecutor and the police commissioner, for the policemen, and for the harsh words of Father Peyramale!
- † For the slaps in the face, for the ridicule, the insults, for those who thought I was crazy, those who suspect me of lying, those who suspected me of wanting to gain something from it, thank you, my Lady.
- † For my spelling, which I never learned, for the memory that I never had, for my ignorance and for my stupidity, thank you. Thank you, because if there had been a more ignorant, stupid child on earth, you would have chosen her.
- † For the fact that my mother died so far away, for the pain I felt when my father, instead of

- hugging his little Bernadette, called me, “Sister Marie-Bernard”, I thank you, Jesus.
- † For the fact that Mother Josephine proclaimed that I was good for nothing, thank you. For the sarcasm of the Mother Superior: her harsh voice, her injustices, her irony and for the bread of humiliation, thank you.
- † Thank you that I was the privileged one when it came to be reprimanded, so that my sisters said, ‘How lucky it is not to be Bernadette.’
- † Thank you that I was the Bernadette threatened with imprisonment because she had seen you, Holy Virgin.
- † Thank you that I was that Bernadette who was so frail and worthless that when people saw her, they said to themselves, ‘That must be her,’ the Bernadette that people looked at as if she were an unusual animal.
- † For this miserable body that you gave me, for this illness that burns like fire and smoke, for my decaying bones, for my perspiration and fever, for my dull and acute pain, thank you, my God.
- † And for this soul which you have given me, for the desert of inner dryness, for your nights and your flashes of lightening, for your silence and your thunders, for everything. For you—when you were present and when you were not—thank you, Jesus.”

Bernadette knew that by feeling stripped during her life, her heart was being stretched to become more and more like the expansive heart of God, and she couldn’t thank God enough for that.

Penance during Advent

The practice of penance during Advent is not to placate a God who has gotten impatient with our miscalculations and mistakes. Penitential practice serves to stretch “*our*” hearts to become more like the expansive heart of God.

The Coming is here

Well, if this is what the Coming of the Son of Man look like, we will find ourselves wanting to stay awake and be prepared - not just for something that’s going to happen sometime in the future, but for something that is happening right now.

No wonder we find ourselves saying:

HAPPY ADVENT, EVERYONE!