

Birkenhead, Sunday 24th December 2023

4th Sunday of Advent / Vigil of Christmas

“This day you shall know that the Lord will come, and save us: and in the morning you shall see His glory.”¹

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“At length,” says St. Peter Damian, in his Sermon for this holy Eve, “at length we have got from the stormy sea into the tranquil port; hitherto it was the promise, now it is the prize; hitherto labour, now rest; hitherto despair, now hope; hitherto the way, now our home.”²

After a shorter than usual, but hopefully more intense Advent, here we are, facing the empty manger again, expecting tonight at midnight, to see the Infant being placed in it by His Holy Mother.

Wisely, the Church used the words of the book of Exodus to begin this mass with. “This day you shall know that the Lord will come, and save us: and in the morning you shall see His glory.”³ And the words of the collect give a new light to our last day of expectation:

“O God, You Who gladden us year after year with the expectation of our redemption, grant that we, who now welcome with joy Your only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, may also gaze upon Him without fear when He comes as our judge, our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴

Since we are on earth, we cannot forget the account we will have to give one day. Christmas Vigil is another opportunity that the Liturgy offers us to remember that one more time, and beg for God’s clemency at that time. We are also asking the same confident and loving attitude to approach our sovereign judge on that terrible day, than tonight, when we will bend over His manger, to adore and give honour to the Infant King, Saviour of mankind.

We may be worried that the Lord would find us not ready at this hour, but, again, the Liturgy gives us more confidence and reassures our weak Hope, with the Faith of St. Joseph:

“Do not be afraid, Joseph, son of David, to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.”⁵

The Holy Patriarch and Foster-Father of Jesus Himself is guiding us for our final preparation. Like him, we had questions and fears, but with him from now, we should gladly welcome the mother and the child, as they are bringing us our salvation. The Name of Jesus,

¹ Ex., XVI, 6-7. Vigil of Christmas, Introit.

² Dom Guéranger, *Liturgical Year*, Christmas Eve.

³ Ex., XVI, 6-7. Vigil of Christmas, Introit.

⁴ Vigil of Christmas, Collect.

⁵ Mt., I, 20-21. Vigil of Christmas, Gospel.

which we will honour with a special celebration in a few days, is told to St Joseph to calm down his worries and questions, to strengthen him, and confirm him in the holy mission the Lord entrusted him.

“The Lord rewarded Saint Joseph's profound humility. He considered himself unworthy to lend his services to Mary, the handmaid of the Lord. Instead, here he was to act as father to the only Son of God, even taking on the title, and exercising paternal authority over Him in the name of the heavenly Father. Even more, the first act of this authority will be to impose upon the Incarnate Word the adorable name of Jesus, by which the whole humanity will be able to obtain salvation. God thus exalts the humble; and while in heaven, on earth and in the depths, every creature trembles before the most holy Name of Jesus, Joseph, clothed with the authority of the One from whom all other paternity in heaven and on earth derives its name, assigns it to him, and, with the name, also imposes on the Saviour the whole evangelical programme of redemption.”⁶

Following the model of St Joseph, we could present ourselves in full confidence before our Creator and Redeemer, because we don't fear Him anymore. We are only scared to be separated from Him forever.

Let's receive the Infant King tonight from St. Joseph, who received Him in the darkness of the Faith, but firmly rooted in the Hope of Salvation. This King of peace came upon earth to destroy sins and evil and bring us happiness and grace. St Joseph gave Him the Most Holy Name, for us to imprint it in our souls. With the Name of Jesus, St Joseph believed, and was relieved of his worries. With the Name of Jesus, we will find happiness and peace, and will confidently reach the day of judgment, guided by the sure hand of the Foster-Father.

“Adeamus cum fiducia.” “Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid.”⁷

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁶ Blessed Cardinal Schuster, *Liber Sacramentorum*, Vigil of Christmas. Translated with www.deepl.org.

⁷ Hb., IV, 16.