

The Shepherd's Staff Newsletter

The Right Reverend D. M. Ashman

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Thoughts about Thanksgiving and Advent

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Thanksgiving weekend brings two great themes into focus: Thanksgiving and Advent. The Gospel for Thanksgiving Day lays out the essence of our Thanksgiving Day gratitude. Jesus had compassion for the multitude that had followed him into the wilderness because he knew that they would not make it home for lack of food. So he took five barley loaves and two little fish and fed five thousand people. It was a prefiguring of the Eucharist he instituted at the Last Supper, the first Mass that feeds our bodies and souls with his Body and Blood; a gift he promised that would give eternal life. I certainly don't deserve such a gift; none of us do; no human does. But God loves us so much that he gives that inestimable gift of love. Does that not call for us to respond with gratitude?



For the secular world, the Thanksgiving weekend introduces the great "holiday;" a time when the cult of mammon asks, "What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" But for us the words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you," ought to add a special dimension of gratitude to our lives. Yes, many parishes use these words at this time of year to kick off pledge drives. Yet in the realities of my commuter parish, the vestry and I have found that we seem to get fewer pledge cards every year - no matter what we do or say. So we decided to put out the cards and to just tell everyone what our needs are; and why we must keep the flag of "Fort Defiance" flying. And the miracle is that through this parish family God supplies. I no longer try to figure it out but I know the principle goes far beyond a pledge card! It means that we are grateful to God; it means that we never give up on our brothers and sisters; it means we support the Church that feeds us.

Thanksgiving Weekend also brings us to Advent, the coming of Our Blessed Lord, who comes to save us from ourselves. So on Advent Sunday we bring out the violet, begin a new Church Year and prepare to greet Jesus on his birthday. And as we light the candles on the Advent Wreath, we meditate on why he came to earth: not just death, judgment, heaven or hell but also hope, peace, joy and love. Who among us is not grateful in heart and soul when they leave church refreshed by the Body and Blood of Christ? Jeremiah the prophet foretold that feeling in the lesson for the Epistle on the Sunday next before Advent, when he said that God would raise up a righteous branch, a king shall reign and prosper, Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall live in safety. Trinitytide has ended. We now await the birth of Our Saviour! Blessed Advent!

All Saints' Day Pictures

Taken at All Saints' Anglican Church, Tulsa OK



All Saints' Church (with a church complex, cemetery and columbarium) was built in 1985 by the Most Reverend Frederick Morrison, Archbishop Emeritus of the APCK – and upon his arrival in the United States from the United Kingdom. The Church of consecrated by Archbishop Morse on November 21st, 1999. The current Vicar, Father Torres, celebrates the Eucharist five days a week and shepherds a diverse group of parishioners including a number of young children.

Church of Our Saviour

Santa Barbara



On the Sunday next before Advent. Look carefully behind the altar and notice the Olive Trees which (for me) are a reminder of Advent Sunday: *And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.* (Matthew xxi. 8, 9)

And that is all folks....

Keep a blessed Advent

Consider the Advent Wreath

Advent is not only the beginning of the Church Year; it is a special time filled with symbolism pointing us towards that stable in Bethlehem. Consider the Advent Wreath. Consider first the four candles surrounding a center candle. Each candle represents one week leading up the Christmas. There many, many interpretations. One I like is the first candle represents the Patriarchs, the second candle represents the Prophets, the third John the Baptist, the fourth Mary the great mother of God and a center candle (often inserted just before Christmas Eve) for the Baby Lord Jesus. I like this symbolism because it emphasizes God touching the human experience down through time. God spoke through the prophets and patriarchs and most especially through John the Baptist to tell the people that repentance was necessary if they were to be God's children. And blessed Mary is the icon not only of motherhood but of obedience to God's will.

Consider the color of the candles. Some churches use Advent blue with white for the Christ Candle, but I have always preferred the three violet, one rose and white Christ candles. Violet is the color of penitence and self-reflection and reminds us that unless we work constantly to cooperate with God and his graces, we will not see the Christ Child at Christmas. The Rose candle is a Sunday of this penitence but mixed with the joy that the Christ Child is almost here. And of course the Christ candle is white for the purity of the Saviour who comes to save humans from their selfish selves. I should add as well that many churchmen prefer to say purple instead of violet and see purple as the color of the approaching king. This too is apt symbolism and neither interpretation is superior, but both give us that tangible glimpse into things beyond the physical, temporal and material.

Consider the symbolism in the Advent ring and greens. These are both often missed by the casual observer, but both convey much symbolism. The ring reminds us that God is eternal and the creator of all things. As a circle has no beginning and no end, so neither does God, who created time and will still exist long after time has ended. Evergreens are an ancient and non-Christian symbol of immortality, life and growth. Christians use this color to symbolize that God is the source of immortality, life and growth. In other words, the evergreens show clearly the love of God which caused Him to make us in his image and give us free will and the help we need to channel that free will towards love and not death.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, consider the light on the candles. In the ancient world every civilization conveniently believed through the grace of the Holy Ghost that light meant warmth and life and that night meant cold and death. In theology these ideas transfer to sin and righteousness. So Advent Candles are symbolic of the light of God coming into the world not just to bring warmth and new crops, but who brings true righteousness in his message of true and limitless love which will destroy darkness and death. As each week goes by, a new candle is lit and the closer we come to the light made manifest among us. Be sure to keep a blessed Advent.

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and [the] dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.*