

SandalPrints

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ADVENT PREPARATION AND RENEWAL

By Richard Brakefield, J.D., S.F.O.

We are entering the liturgical season of Advent signaled by the use of violet vestments at Mass. Violet, the color of Advent, is also the color of penance. Just as we begin Mass with a penitential rite, we begin the new liturgical year with a time of penance, reflection, renewal and conversion. That is not to suggest that Advent is a time that is morose or painful. It is a time of spiritual preparation for the birth of the Great King. Our individual preparation for such an event would be wanting if it did not involve serious reflection on the question of how well we, each one of us, is living the life to which we have been called.

For a Franciscan, one way of preparing is to

reflect on the elements of the Franciscan life. Why are we called to live the Franciscan way? Surely not only as an aid in living as Christ has commanded we should but also so we may be used as the Lord may require in bringing the good news to others. Francis has left us very good directions on how to allow ourselves to be so used. We are to live the life of a Franciscan and others will be affected by the way we live, in a positive way, if we do it with sincerity, purity and without fanfare. The example must be generated from authentic good living; anything else is plain hypocrisy. We need not be preachers haranguing others about our faith like an overanxious missionary, but we can "Use words if necessary" as Francis advised.

In our age, words are perhaps less effective than in prior times or at least they are so abundant today that, to many, they are less effective. It seems that so much of our daily life is bombarded with words telling us what we should want and buy, what we should strive for and what values are worth embracing. If there is something material to be gained by an action or omission then it is good, we are told, if nothing of material value is to be gained then an act is a waste of time. With such attitude prevalent, words alone will seldom exhort people to a Christ centered spiritual awareness. Only example can most often awake the sleeping soul. Example too will sometimes be rejected, mocked, and criticized by the faithless and proud. But good people, people of faith, people who still possess an active sense of wonder will more likely accept the seed of Christian example

and allow it to nurture. So, Advent is a time to renew a commitment to living the Franciscan life and allowing God to do the rest.

Poverty is another essential element of living as a Franciscan. But as we cannot gain God's favor by merely talking the talk, we cannot attain friendship with God merely by impoverishing ourselves. Poverty in our attitude toward material things is the essential. It is vitally important because wealth can be so distracting from spiritual matters that it can drive out of us the attraction of growing in spirit and substitute the dull but comfortable satisfaction of possessing money and objects – the seductive attraction of materialism.

We don't have to be wealthy by today's standards to become materialistic. We can be poor and allow our life focus to be on gaining wealth or we can be wealthy indeed and focus our whole being on maintaining that wealth. In both cases materialism controls. It is our attitude toward wealth that makes the difference. That is what Christ is telling us in the parables. Certainly, salvation is worth more than all the wealth of the world yet no amount of wealth can buy it.

Some people, like St. Francis of Assisi have been called to totally abandon everything material but they never saw that calling as one to pay the price of salvation. That price only Christ could pay. Few have actually attempted to live a life of voluntary, abject poverty and fewer still have persevered. St. Francis of Assisi was called to such a sacrifice and he did persevere but St. Francis' life was given to us as an example. While some are called to live under a vow of poverty, most of us live in the world, raising children, caring for elderly parents, with responsibilities to other family members and loved ones. If we can, we try to avoid poverty so that we can meet those responsibilities. The point is to enjoy life without the burden of being possessed by possessions and to accent the value of following Christ.

Whatever the life to which the Lord has called

us, Advent offers us a wonderful opportunity for reflection and renewal. Such renewal is incomplete, however, without an attitude of penance and reformation. The liturgy of this season is designed to facilitate all of this so that our preparation for the celebration of His birth may be truly enjoyed for joy is the trademark of the Christian living the life to which he or she is called.

Lest we focus only on penance, the Church celebrates a Sunday of joy during the season . . . *Gaudete* Sunday.

He and his earliest followers lived a life of poverty but his was a time when that was more possible than today. There are, of course, many people around this world who today live in such poverty but their life is not from choice but from circumstance. Nor do the poorest of the poor relish their life seeking not to change their circumstances. I have never met a poor person unwilling to better his/her state in life if given the chance. There are some who cannot change their circumstances because of illness and there are certainly a few who simply choose to live without responsibility and find abject poverty a refuge but their interest is usually focused on themselves. Their choice of life has no spiritual ground nor is it based on the love of Christ. I have met a very few who seek to live as St. Francis did but most religious live a life of personal poverty in houses well kept and appointed with more than adequate food and accommodations and many religious communities have become quite wealthy.

**Christ is the Morning
Star, who, when the
night of this world is
past, gives to his saints
the promise of the light
of life, and opens**

A CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

Christmas calls a community back to its origins, by remembering Jesus' own beginnings as a human child, a prophet of God's reign, a judgement on the world and its projects. What the parish celebrates during this season is not primarily a birthday, but the beginning of a decisive new phase in the tempestuous history of God's hunger for human companions. The social concerns of the season are thus rooted in Jesus' proclamation of God's reign: the renunciation of patterns that oppress others (holding, climbing, commanding) and the formation of a new human community that voluntarily embraces those renunciations. It is an *adult* Christ that the community encounters during the Advent and Christmas cycles of Sundays and feasts: a Risen Lord who invites sinful people to become church. Christmas does not ask us to pretend we were back in Bethlehem, kneeling before a crib; it asks us to recognize that the wood of the crib became the wood of the cross.

Brother Nathan

advent

**like the long awaited flowers
of springtime
like the mountain snow
melting to the sea
we await the coming of the lord
in glory
we await his son
who is to be**

**the rivers run the endless
race of ages
the sun has warmed the earth
from all time
the lord has made a promise
with his people
his words are written
on the hearts of all**

**we offer all the gifts
we've been preparing**

**the paths on which the lord
will walk someday
we await the coming of the lord
in glory
we are ready for his son
to lead the way**

**like the burning candle
placed in the window
and the desert sands
crying for the rain
with the songs of prophets
dancing in our memories
we apply his words
like balm to our pain**

**we offer all the gifts
we've been preparing
the paths on which the lord
will walk someday
we await the coming of the lord
in glory
we are ready for his son
to lead the way
we are waiting for his son
to come today**

Fr. Edd Anthony

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Let us pray for the intentions of those who asked us to pray for them.

Two monks on a pilgrimage came to
the ford of a river. There they saw a
girl

dressed in all her finery, obviously
not knowing what to do since the river
was high and she did not want to spoil
her cloths. Without more ado, one of the
monks took her on his back, carried
her across and put her down on dry
ground on the other side.

Then the monks continued on their
way. But the other monk after an hour
started complaining, "Surely it is not
right to touch a woman; it is against
the rules to have contact with women.
How could you go against the rules of
monks?"

The monk who had carried the girl
walked along silently, but finally he
remarked, "I set her down by the river
an hour ago, why are you still
carrying her?"

God is light;
in him there is no darkness.
If we walk in light,
as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses
us from all sin.

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*A BLESSED
CHRISTMAS
TO ALL !!!*

