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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Epistle Series

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Outlines on the Standard Epistle Series

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ROMANS 13:11-14

Although it marks the beginning of the church year, Advent is closely related to the close of the Trinity season in its concern also for the end of our time. A study of the history of Advent, as well as a look at the propers for the closing weeks of Trinity and those for Advent, will show the close tie between them in their common interest in the fulfillment of the Christian hope in the Parousia. Advent is in a sense not so much a preparation for Christmas as a preparation for that which Christmas initiates, the consummation of salvation in the *eschaton*.

This note is found in the Epistle for Advent 1. St. Paul asserts that the Romans know the hour and the time. In this case, the word for time is *kairos*, the time in which God's promises have been and are being fulfilled. It is the Messianic time, the time embraced by the life and death of Christ at one limit and by His return at the other. The man who lives in the awareness of the meaning of this time is by definition the man of faith. He has put on the robe of Christ's righteousness; he has cast off his own works, the works of one in the bonds of the power of darkness. Our "flesh" has its own desires and seeks to gratify itself in those things by which man declares his independence from God. Instead the Christian is to let the Spirit fill him with life and to do the works which men perform in the light of God's face. Luther rightly taught that this process occupies the whole of the Christian life. (Small Catechism, Baptism, 4th question)

This text then has much to say to us at the beginning of the season which celebrates the "time" of Jesus Christ. This "time" is now;

it is the age in which Christ completes His work also in us. The sermon serves as an introduction to the role of the church year as a constant making present of the new "time" and of the work that is done by Christ for and in us during that "time."

The Time Is Now

The struggle between the Spirit and our flesh is, as St. Paul declares, the inescapable truth about us. His admonition is: "Let God do His saving work in you. Do not let your flesh hinder Him so that the coming of Christ will find the new creation in you." The constant concern of the church in her church year is to let this divine activity exert its power in our lives.

I. *This divine activity, typified by God's deliverance of Israel, is reenacted in us by making us sharers and participants in the redemptive work of Christ by whom all promises of salvation are fulfilled.*

A. The collect recalls to us the fact that it is God who always saves His people by His power and saving might. Our need is always the same: God's mercy in the face of our sin.

B. In the Passover of Israel God redeemed His people with a mighty show of power. Israel, by God's assistance, passed over from death to life, from slavery to freedom, through the baptismal waters of the Red Sea. By God's servant Moses they were given a new life in a land of milk and honey. They became a new people serving a "new" Master.

C. Christ's death and resurrection were a fulfillment of that early Passover.

Christ, the supreme Paschal Lamb, passed through death to life, from the grave to the resurrection. Because He passed through the baptismal waters of His death, we have life,

freedom, salvation. The new Servant, Jesus, by His obedience to the will of the Father, leads His people into the promised land, which He has already entered. God, by the mystery of a Lord who dies for His people, fulfills the expectation of the prophets and brings into being the new "time."

D. The Christian by Baptism is also brought from death to life. When he is baptized with water and the Spirit, he becomes a participant in the blessings of Christ's death and resurrection. What is true of Christ becomes true of him. But his baptism is also a process which continues throughout his life. The Spirit continually causes his flesh to die in him and his new character to prosper. In Him God stirs up His might in him and comes to rescue him from the threatening perils of his sins. It is indeed a mighty deliverance. It is divine activity since only God is able to bring this death and resurrection to pass in him.

II. *This divine activity is the purpose of the work of God in the church through her observance of the church year.*

A. The church year is not simply a series of days which we observe in remembrance of past events; nor do we follow it simply for pedagogical reasons because it lends itself to systematic teaching; nor is it observed simply for psychological reasons. The church year brings the "time" of the Messiah into the life of the Christian. Through the round of Sun-

days, festivals, and seasons, the Holy Spirit makes present in our midst the fruits of the holy days of the Lord's Passover. Whether we are celebrating Advent or Pentecost, Christmas or Ash Wednesday, the same living, ever-present fact and power of the sacrifice of Christ is held before us.

B. This round of seasons is helpful in applying St. Paul's encouragement that we use the "time" wisely. To use this time wisely means living the life of Christ, of the Spirit. God is for us the all-sufficient redeemer, teacher, sustainer, and strengthener. The emphasis of Advent is our state of readiness for His return. Desiring His return does not come easily. Our flesh would just as soon that He delayed His coming. The Spirit leads us to cry: "Come, Lord Jesus." Advent serves as a school for the Christian to utter this prayer more sincerely and fervently.

C. To be ready we must continue to cast off the works of our flesh and put on the works of the Light. This includes opening the way for the Spirit to others—both our brethren and those still of the world—by the performance of such works of love as may appear to be "unrequired" of us, to have no reward, and to go unadvertised. By thus putting our flesh to death and letting the Spirit live we open the way for others to share in the Light in which we bask and in the "time" in which we await the fulfillment of all our expectations.

Valparaiso, Ind. HANS C. BOEHRINGER