

Homily for the Second Sunday in Advent
6th December 2020

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

I would like to begin by returning to the Collect for today:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning : grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, now and for ever. Amen

One of my favourite Saints is St Augustine of Hippo, an African Saint, Doctor of the Church and the leader in Christian thought for many centuries. Augustine was fierce in his defence of the Church, and of Holy Scripture. In his time there were many heresies to combat, most claiming a ‘special revelation’ about the Person of Jesus Christ. Here is a quote from St Augustine of Hippo that underscores our Collect of the day:

*“If you believe what you like in the Gospels,
and reject what you don’t like,
it is not the Gospel that you believe,
but yourself.”*

As Traditional Anglicans, we are people of the Holy Scriptures, of the Creeds and of the Book of Common Prayer. These give us our base and keep us on the right path as we pursue a holy life of faith. Psalm 119: 105 says *“Thy word is a lantern to my feet, and a light unto my paths.”* As we hold fast to the faith of our fathers and ensure that our lives conform to the teachings of Holy Scriptures, we will find ourselves ‘rooted and grounded’ in love, as St Paul wrote to the Ephesians. A good and solid orthodox Christian life takes time, study and patience and discipline....for we are slow to learn and even more slow to obey! But our Collect tells us that are to immerse ourselves in the Word of God in order that *“we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life”* This sentence implies a serious application to the study of the Word of God, not an infrequent dipping into the Divine Word, but a systematic, informed and dedicated study of the Scriptures, in order to rightly discern the Will of God for our lives and prepare ourselves for our eternal destination. The Collect encourages us to ‘eat up’ the Word, to *“inwardly digest”* it, so that it can permeate every fiber of our being and influence all our doings.

Our Epistle today was well-chosen, and has some powerful sentences for a believer:

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.....

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound (overflow) in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Advent is the Season of Hope as we prepare our hearts for the Christ Child, but also as we look with fixed gaze towards the coming of Christ as King and Lord in the Last Day...and where will we find that which we are looking for but in Holy Scripture? Jesus has much to say about the end times, about heaven and hell, and about our place among the saints on light, specially prepared for His children, but one has to be familiar with what He has said and taught or deceivers could turn our eyes and minds to fantasies and false teachings; (think of Jonestown in Guatemala in the 1980’s as an example of this).

The Word of God is written to encourage and guide us carefully towards our heavenly destination and to make a success of our journey. Once again we hear from St Augustine. He encourages us by saying that *“The Holy Scriptures are our letters from home”*

(Enarr. in Ps. xc, sermon 2) 4 What a lovely image that is! Inspired by our Father, re-enforced by the Holy Ghost, the Scriptures are like treasured love-letters to a front-line soldier, turned over and well-read (even memorized) and kept safe from harm.

My dearest brothers and sisters. Our heavenly Father has given us all we need in this Season of Hope. His Word to be upon our lips and in our hearts; His Holy Ghost to comfort and inspire us, and His blessed Son to be our Saviour, Shepherd and Guide. Last week, St Paul warned us that *“it is high time to awake out of sleep : for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed...”* (Rom 13:11) The disciplines we have personally decided to embrace in this season of fasting and prayer should already be beginning to bear fruit – if not we have wasted precious time on procrastination. Discipline must lead to action, and action will lead to growth...we, as Christians in a lost world, are God’s agents of Hope, and our action is the proclamation of the Message of Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

‘Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound (overflow) in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.’

Let us pray.

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 days, when He shall come gain 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