

2 Advent C

December 9, 2018

St. Patrick

Of all the prayers the church gives us for Mass, it's the one which most gets my attention. It's like a thump on the side of the head.

Now, this "prayer over the offerings" takes place after the priest washes his hands. It's one of those times my mind might wander somewhere else, without my wanting it. You might not hear it, either. The prayer goes like this for this Second Sunday of Advent:

"Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings, and, since we have no merits to plead our cause, come, we pray, to our rescue with the protection of your mercy. Through Christ our Lord."

It's that one line which troubles me, agitates me: **"...since we have no merits to plead our cause."** And during the four weeks of every Advent, the church uses this same prayer *six* times. It must want to get our attention.

"...since we have no merits to plead our cause." That puts it bluntly: now, and on the Day of Judgment, when I go before God—*and you, too!*—well, I—*we*—have nothing to bring before God. Nothing to bargain with. Nothing to leverage against that record of sins which keep adding up on our life's spread sheet.

"...since we have no merits to plead our cause."

Then, why try? Why put our efforts on deepening our virtues, and living uprightly?

This Second Sunday of Advent speaks about John the Baptist **"proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."** But, St. Patrick's, this morning we shall celebrate Benjamin's baptism. His, and ours—whenever we celebrated our baptism—is much more than the Baptist's! Ours is a consecration. It celebrates the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit in our lives—not just this morning, for Benjamin, as he's baptized, but throughout our lives. We don't have to try to pile up **"merits to plead our cause,"** because God is so reckless in love! Our baptism celebrates that—

- We're redeemed in the blood of Christ. It's a gift.
- We've become an adopted child of God. It's a gift.

- And, most extravagantly, we're promised a share in the inheritance—eternal life!

God takes a big risk in allowing his Son to become one with us. God takes a bigger risk in ripping up any “checklist” of our merits. It's a gift—salvation.

“...since we have no merits to plead our cause.” We don't have to earn “brownie points” to make our case at judgment time. In fact, we have “no merits.” Instead, everything we *are*, everything we *do*—it's not to plead our record before God. No, it's done out of gratitude, thanksgiving, for the prodigal, excessive love of our God, given us in Jesus our Savior.

Friends: Everything we *are*, and *do*, is Eucharist, meaning “giving thanks.” It's begun here at the sacred table, and it's lived out there, in our lives.

On the day of his baptism, don't you want Benjamin Valentine to live up to his family name?—Not “Donati,” but being a “child of God.” For all of us, we want to show the dignity we've been given as a gift. As we heard Jesus at the start of our Advent last Sunday, we want to “**stand straight, our heads raised**”—why? Because we *know* that we're consecrated. We're loved recklessly. So we hear the words of Advent, “**Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths.**” These Advent days, we're to clear away any rubbish, any stuff that keeps us weighed down and not rejoicing in the redemption we've been given, and promised.

St. Patrick's: When, at Christmas, we sing “*Christ our Savior is born,*” we want grace to have cleared away our angers, our grasping for more stuff, our pettiness, and resentments. Having cleared all these “rough edges” within and about us, we want to “**stand straight**” and give thanks for our consecration.

We don't need to add up merits. No, we're only to live our dignity given us with true gratitude!

General Intercessions

2nd Sunday of Advent

December 9, 2018

Deacon/Lector: Before reading the petitions, say--- “After each petition, please give this response, ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’ ”

For us, the church, that we might heed the Baptist’s call and prepare for Christ’s coming in mystery during these coming days; we pray to you, O Lord—

For the renewal of the church in West Tennessee with healing, and with deeds of mercy, justice and peace; we pray to you, O Lord--

For a true reverence for all human life, standing up for the unborn, for those on death row, and for all victims of violence and war; we pray to you, O Lord—

As we celebrate this week the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe: for the Latino community, and for the welcome of all who are new to our nation; we pray to you, O Lord--

For the sick—those ill in mind or body; for our homebound, and for those who will celebrate the coming holidays alone; we pray to you, O Lord—

For the eternal rest of all who have died, especially Damian Lashaun Williams and Shaun Hamblen; we pray to you, O Lord—

(for the 11:00 a.m. Mass only—)

For Benjamin Valentine, on the day of his baptism: for joy and love in his faith; we pray to you, O Lord—

