

**An Advent Coin** (Isaiah 64:1-9; 1Co 1:3-9; Mar 11:1-10)

\* This Sunday can be imagined as a gate of the Advent Season – the four weeks period of preparation for Christ’s coming. Hey, the years in the past indicated that the intensity of our preparation gradually increases as much as the calendar year draws closer to Christmas - the busiest time for both who are shopping and who are selling. Meantime the door of our church is always open on Sundays, including Wednesday evenings until the joyful Christmas Eve will break with the spirit of Advent.

\* Dear friends, be attentive to the voice of our heavenly King and help your souls to find comfort and peace during this blessed season. With each time you come to St. Luke’s, the purple vestments around and the progression in the lighting of the candles will remind you of the return of Christ the King. With each of your coming here, the Word of God will shape you into the likeness of the saints who are enrolled in heaven. With each of your coming here, you will be reminded about a bright future God has prepared for those who have sought Him, ( Isa 65:11b). By the way, *the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah,* (Jer 33:14).

\* On hearing God’s solemn declaration, *I will fulfill the promise,* it might impress especially in view of the signs of the fulfillment, (Mat 24:32). It is clear, the Second coming of Christ will be signified with the accomplishments of what God has promised through the prophet. It is also clear that Christ will come in all his glory - the King of kings and the Lord of lords, (Rev 19:16). Now we wait for the King who will appear with clouds of angels and with heavenly power, (Mat 24:30) to fulfill His Father’s will. A manger with a baby in it, Mary and Joseph, a donkey and cow, shepherds from the field and Magi from the East are not expected any more; all these were the attributes of the first Christ’s Advent.

\* The difference between the accomplishments of the Two Advents is this. In his First Advent, Christ *gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works,* (Tit 2:14). But with respect to the Second Advent, our hope is in the appearing of Christ’s glory, (Tit 2:13) as a Conquer to make a final war against his adversaries: the sinful flesh, antichrist and the devil, (Rev 19:11-21). The Christ’s victory is perceptible; definitely, the adversaries will finish in the lake of fire and will not trouble God’s people anymore, (Rev 19:20, 21). From the other point, Christ will appear in his heavenly glory as our Redeemer; this coming we associate with the resurrection from the dead and life eternal.

\* Now, let’s address ourselves to the teaching of the first lesson from (Isaiah 64:1-9) that is a part of the dialog between the prophet and God. First, Isaiah recollected almighty deeds by which the Almighty became known to the pagan nations. Next, Isaiah mentioned that God forced these nations to tremble at

His presence. On the other hand, the people who pursued the divine likeness were sustained, (vv.1-4). Alas! After a certain time *you have hidden His face from (Israel)*, said Isaiah, (v.7b). And it is a real tragedy when God alienates Himself from his people especially who have sought Him. Where we read, *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?*, needs to understand as the experience of real alienation, (Psa 22:1).

\* In the course of his dialog, the prophet acknowledged the reason for being forsaken. His oration sounds as a testimony against himself and his brothers; that is just what it is. We are not fitted for fellowship with God and the community of saints because we have not repented. We cannot please God by our good deeds because these deeds have been done without love. Finally, we are dying in our sin that sweeps us away like the wind sweeps dry leaves because we have sold ourselves into slavery to sin, (v. 6). We neglect God as an exclusive object of worship and as our only a sacramental source of our spiritual strength because of wrong priorities, (v. 7a). After all, we sin again and again in God's presence without shame.

\* Following these circumstances, Isaiah has marveled – that if our forgiveness is still possible. He has posed the remarkable question before God: *Shall we be saved?* (v. 5b). If corresponding to the Second Advent of Christ the same question can be paraphrased in such a way, *“Will Christ come to us with peace or with a rod?”* The question is posed and it demands an answer. If judging from our personal observation, it seems that today God loves us and tolerates our sins. Nevertheless, God's wrath cannot be watered down, it is real and will be terrible for everybody who constantly refuse His will, (1Th 1:10).

\* Unlike the terrible image of God as a Judge, Paul, the apostle was perceived as a good-hearted one by the Christians in Corinth. We have the same feeling after reading the introductory segment of Paul's letter, (1Co 1:3-9) who is perceived here as a good shepherd. In the (v. 3) we see Paul's intention to come to the church with Christ's grace and peace. It became known among other churches that the Christians in Corinth had received the Holy Spirit due to some signs becoming the partakers of God's grace in Christ Jesus. Based on this fact the apostle wished them to be worthy of the gospel of Christ. That is to depart from adultery, sexual immorality, greediness, drunkenness and so forth, (1Co 5:11). In this letter the apostle taught Corinthians Christian ethics, specifically in the areas where they have not shown progress. As soon as all the pros and cons were set for life, Paul promised the Corinthians to come soon, if the Lord wills, (1Co 4:19). Then he asked them, *What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?* (4:21). There is no need to explain Paul's intention, especially in view of the mentioned problems and Paul's expectations, *I urge you, then, be imitators of me*, (4:16), he said. Even though Paul acknowledged himself as a sinner (Rom 7: 18), yet his moral behavior remains to be a perfect model for imitation by any Christian including those in Corinth. Otherwise, they would have dealt with Paul's rod, (1Cor 5:5).

\* After the given exposition, the Second Advent of Christ can be seen in one instance with Paul's advent to Corinth. Apparently, Paul didn't want to come with a rod, so far Jesus doesn't want to come to us with an iron rod, (Rev 19:15) rather with love in a spirit of gentleness expressed by the symbolic act of Jesus riding on a donkey, (Mar 11:7). Knowing this truth, Isaiah appealed to God with a plea, *But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity for ever. Behold, please look, we are all your people,* (Isa 64:8-9). Here is Isaiah's hope to receive the forgiveness of what was sorrowfully acknowledged. The answer to the burning questions, *Shall we be saved?* (v. 5b), *Shall the King come with a rod of iron, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?* is found in the following chapter 65. Now God is speaking, Isaiah and all the earth are silent.

\* Thus says the Lord: *"As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,' so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all,* (v. 8). They are *people who have sought me,* (v.11b) said God. That is *those who remember God in their ways,* (64:5) said Isaiah. That is *those who pursue the divine likeness,* said a commentator, ( Comm. on Isaiah, J. A. Motyer, p. 519).

\* *But as for you who abandon the LORD and forget about worshiping at my holy mountain, who prepare a feast for the god called 'Fortune,' and fill up wine jugs for the god called 'Destiny' — I predestine you to die by the sword, all of you will kneel down at the slaughtering block, because I called to you, and you did not respond, I spoke and you did not listen. You did evil before me; you chose to do what displeases me."* *So this is what the sovereign LORD says,* (vv. 11 -13).

\* Here we discovered a coin with two sides - the truth about the Second Advent of Christ. One side shows God's anger and judgment against sin and people who permanently reject God's will of His Son. The other side of coin says about God's infinite love and kindness to those who look for Him and who love His Son.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth let him be taught.

Amen